

Where Is the New Brooklyn?



Illustration by Damien Poulain; Photographs from Corbis except couple at bottom right, by Kendrick Daye

By WM. FERGUSON

Published: March 11, 2009

Philadelphia is the new [Brooklyn](#). Oakland, too, is the new Brooklyn, as are Jersey City and Anaheim. And based on dozens of recent newspaper articles (and too many blog posts to count), please consider the following additional candidates: Montreal, [Queens](#), Nashville, Richmond, Anchorage, Buffalo, Baton Rouge, Bangalore, Warsaw and Aurora, Colo. And Doha, [Qatar](#). All potential new Brooklyns. Which is a little weird for a city that has spent most of its existence as an outer-borough punch line.

But like the new black, the new-Brooklyn meme is curiously durable. The last time this sort of trope was so popular was with Seattle in the 1990s. But then, the meaning of “the new Seattle” was clear: any city with a surplus of guitar bands or coffee bars was a new Seattle. To be a new Brooklyn means — well, it depends. It can signify a “gritty arts enclave” (Philadelphia), a “surprisingly O.K. place without all those rich people” (Oakland), a “real-estate speculator’s dream” (Queens). But for Richard Florida, author

of “The Rise of the Creative Class,” it’s all the same thing. “ ‘Brooklyn’ is a euphemism for ‘gentrification,’ ” [Florida](#) says.

Florida, director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto, is quick to distinguish between good gentrification and bad. Brooklyn accumulated its hipness, he says, by avoiding the “gauche” sort of hypergentrification that overwhelmed SoHo — perhaps because it had so much further to come. Growing up in the ’60s and ’70s, Florida developed a distinctly negative impression of Brooklyn. “Brooklyn was ugh,” he says. “It was urban blight. Now it’s somewhat affordable, it’s somewhat real, it’s somewhat authentic.”

And alas, maybe somewhat over. Once Brooklyn real estate began commanding previously unthinkable prices, Manhattanites began drolly floating the idea that maybe [Manhattan](#) was the new Brooklyn — a homey place that artists could afford. And what to make of the new single by [J. C. Brooks & the Uptown Sound](#), “Baltimore Is the New Brooklyn”? The chorus, in all its neo-soul glory, lays it bare: “Baltimore is the new Brooklyn — it’s just a short train ride away from where you really want to be.” Of course, the Uptown Sound is from Chicago, so there may be a little metro anxiety at work there. After all, Chicago has been the second city to New York for ages, and if Manhattan is now the new Brooklyn, what does that make Chicago — the new [Staten Island](#)?