

The Power of Protest

In New York City, the weeks following the death of George Floyd in May 2020, masses of people took to the streets of Manhattan in a unified movement, exchanging support, ideas, presence, passion, value, and awareness in a *dérive*-like manner that disoriented and consumed the individual participant (Debord, 1956). The four experimental methodologies described below endeavor to measure the psychogeography of urban citizenry in times of extreme stress, outrage, and mourning that characterized the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement protests in Manhattan. Through these four methods, we aimed to understand and identify movement, direction, magnitude, and intent: patterns of power reclamation. The method processes shown below are illustrated for the June 2nd, 2020 Protest Path.



DATA COLLECTION

This research reviewed videos of protests recorded by private individuals or media outlets and made publicly available online. These paths were then geolocated on corresponding New York City streets. Due to limitations of the data, the protest paths above do not represent all protests from May 30 - June 8, 2020, but rather a selection of those few that were video documented in Manhattan during that time period.

CONCLUSION

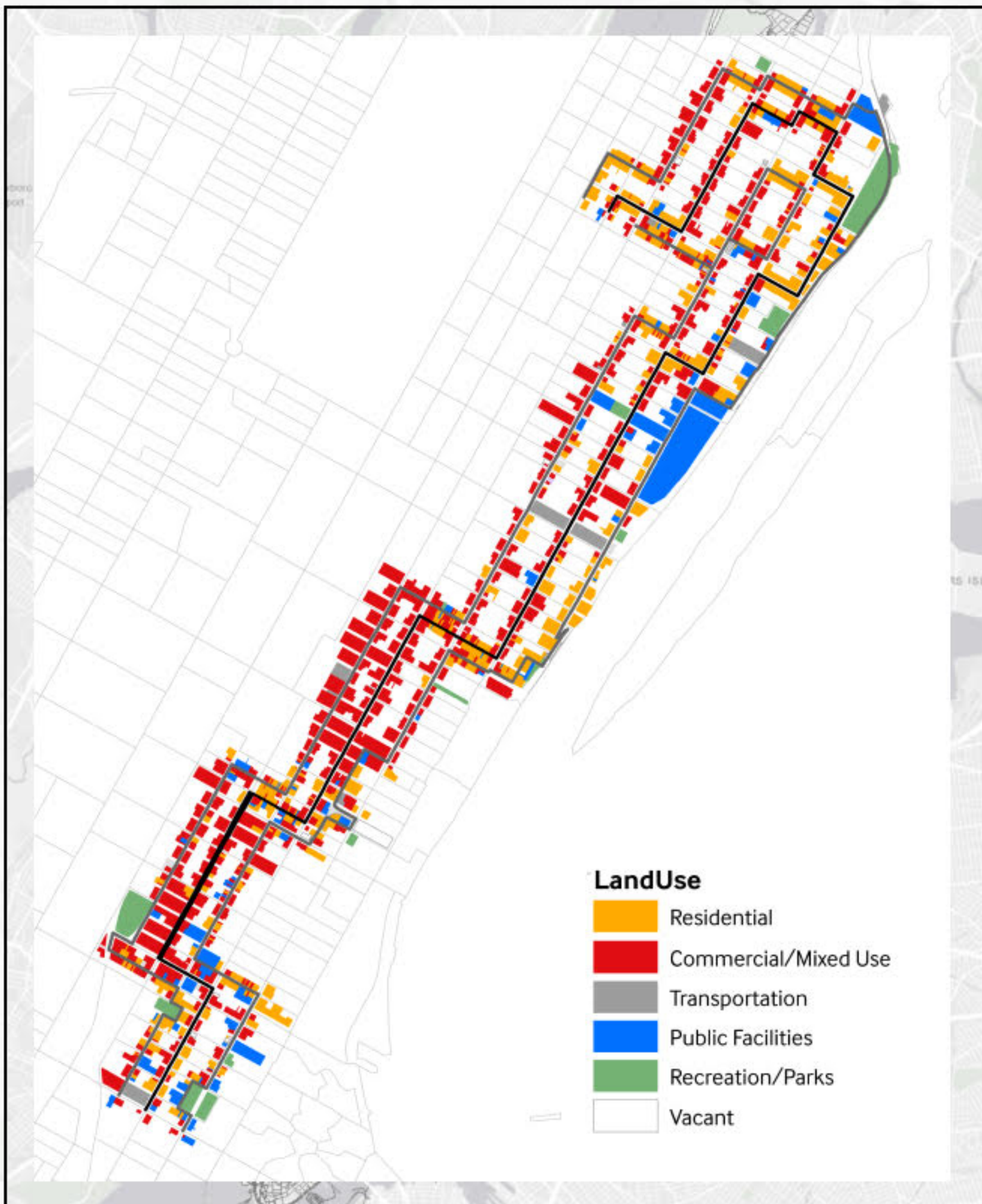
For the protest that occurred on June 2nd, 2020, the route began with no intended direction, winding northward before briefly turning back south at the route's end. Compared to adjacent streets, the path selected by protestors had somewhat varying physical characteristics, meandered in an unpredictable pattern, claimed space in areas where conflict was anticipated, and inspired rallies that extended virtually.

METHOD 1 : AREA ATTRIBUTES REGRESSION

This method was designed to understand trends in the changing physical and demographic characteristics of neighborhood blocks protesters passed on their paths. Analysis included measuring land use composition and block group-level demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods walked. In an effort to distill the characteristics unique to the chosen path (and presumably why it was chosen), the characteristics of the street taken was compared to adjacent streets on either side.

FINDINGS:

Results of a preliminary logistic regression modeling the relationship between land use passed on the protest path and that on adjacent streets suggested that protests were less likely to pass by land designated for open space and outdoor recreation, parking facilities, or vacant land.



METHOD 3 : TURNS

To understand whether the turns throughout each protest route were attributed to randomness or were in response to the surrounding context. Every intersection node from the protest on June 2nd, 2020 was analyzed based on its distance to nearby parks and police precincts, two factors that were assumed to have played a significant role in influencing protest routes.

FINDINGS:

On average, protests were more likely to turn as they got further away from both police stations and parks and more likely to continue along a straight path the closer they were to police stations and parks.

	TURN (FT)	CONTINUATION (FT)
PRECINCTS	3,950.95	3,397.61
PARKS	1,006.85	982.13



METHOD 2 : FASTEST ROUTE

Using a network analysis, we examined the extent to which protest paths deviated from what was determined to be the fastest route from the protest's starting point to the ending point. Spatial and temporal deviation was calculated as a measure of power, comparing the fastest path with the actual protest path and the length of the video recording. Periodic pauses at intersections and points of interest included speeches, signifying moments of united attention and claimed space.

FINDINGS:

Results showed that the actual protest path traversed on June 2nd, 2020 was almost 17,000 feet (3.2 miles) and 2.5 hours longer than the fastest route from the start and end of the protest path.



METHOD 4 : VIRTUAL CONVERSATIONS

Virtual space was instrumental in organizing protests during the summer of 2020. To understand how the presense of the protests resonated on social media, we analyzed all geolocated Tweets with selected hashtags related to the BLM protests in Manhattan on June 2nd, 2020. We ran a hotspot analysis to derive a Getis Ord Gi* statistic to determine concentrations of Tweets aggregated to census blocks.

FINDINGS:

The hotspot analysis shows five main clusters of Tweets throughout Manhattan on June 2nd. The largest cluster by far occurs in the area around City Hall. The other hot spots all occur in a line along the central spine of Manhattan suggesting that much of the social media conversations referencing protests were coming from areas witnessing the protest firsthand.



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WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK

CITY HALL

- MAY 30TH
- MAY 31ST
- JUNE 1ST
- JUNE 2ND
- JUNE 3RD
- JUNE 8TH
- JUNE 15TH

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BLM Protest Tweets (2020) (Twitter)
NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) (2020a). Borough Boundaries.
NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) (2020b). City Council Districts.
NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) (2020c). NYPD - Police Precincts.
NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) (2020d). Primary Land Use Tax Lot Output.
NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) (2021). 2021 NYC Street Centerlines (2021).
U.S. Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2015-2019.
U.S. Census Bureau, Geography Division. (2019a). 2019 TIGER/Line Shapefiles: Blocks.
U.S. Census Bureau, Geography Division. (2019b). 2019 TIGER/Line Shapefiles: Block Groups.