

What Price Progress?

The report just issued by the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association for the future of the city below Canal Street includes at least eight major large-scale building schemes, the complete re-vamping of both East and West Side waterfronts, an outline of \$2 billion worth of public and private construction for the next 25 years and a prediction of economic health and of vastly increased real estate revenues and property values.

The association has done a splendid job; and one can only hope that its recommendations will be carried out on the level that its chairman, David Rockefeller, has established with the new Chase Manhattan Bank and plaza, one of the area's chief ornaments and a beautiful job of building and environmental design. But in the field of planning, first-rate visions are always in danger of turning into second-rate realities. In the rebuilding of a city, or part of one, there are factors which have no monetary equivalent, but are of essential value in terms of preserving historic character and neighborhood individuality.

Lower Manhattan is more than real estate. It is the drama of Wall Street's close-packed towers a stone's throw away from the remains of the 18th century. It is the contrast of a ship chandler in a five-story, 150-year-old granite Greek Revival building with the sleek 60-story glass and steel Chase Manhattan. It is a row of Georgian structures surviving amid the otherwise deadly monotony of routine new "improvements" on Maiden Lane. It is the smell of fresh-roasting coffee in small stores, and a street of importers in low, red-brick buildings that have housed similar enterprises since the eighteenth-thirties. It is an intimate waterfront with the quality of ships and sea, not a uniform strip of parkway for future "optimum use," increasingly off-limits to the pedestrian. Any renewal proposal should recognize the city's roots and variety as well as its physical progress.

This is no plea for the *status quo*, nor is it condemnation of the association's highly commendable general objectives. It is a plea for consideration of human and historical as well as economic values in the redevelopment of the city's oldest area. Is there no way to keep the best of both worlds, the enriching evidence of change and continuity, the variety of style and purpose, within the framework of a profitable plan? It may be asking to have our cake and eat it, too, but surely this should be at least a working objective.

Build we must, for a better New York, but not for an Homogenized America—or Anywhere, U.S.A.