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## SLOPE-GOERS TAKE THE FIFTH

ONCE CONSIDERED A FRINGE STREET, PARK SLOPE'S FIFTH AVENUE NOW MAKES SEVENTH AVENUE FEEL STALE

By ADAM BONISLAWSKI



Bobby Gagnon's Fifth Avenue bar, the Gate, is a Park Slope institution. Back when he opened it in 1999, though, it was barely considered part of the neighborhood.

"We'd be out there driving nails, and people would walk by and tell me this wasn't Park Slope," he recalls.

Seventh Avenue was the main commercial drag in those days. Closer to Prospect Park

and much of the area's prime brownstone stock, this was where Park Slope's shops and restaurants clustered.

"It was the strip," Gagnon says, "for years, for decades."

A funny thing happened, though, in the years after Gagnon moved in. Park Slope -- like much of the rest of the city -- gentrified, and as it did, the boundaries of the neighborhood expanded.

"First, people wouldn't go below Seventh, then it was Sixth, then it was Fifth," remembers broker Peggy Aguayo of Aguayo & Huebner Realty.

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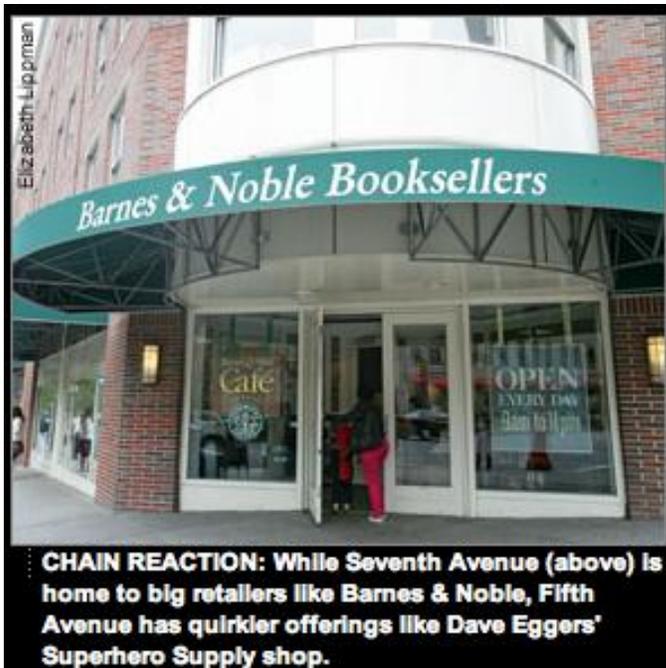
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And as the neighborhood worked its way downhill, Fifth Avenue turned into a thriving retail district all its own.

With rents running far less than on Seventh, Fifth Avenue sprouted a crop of bars, restaurants, boutiques and specialty shops.

Spots such as Blue Ribbon, Blue Ribbon Sushi, Al di la and AOC Bistro drew diners from all over the city. Musicians including Cat Power, TV on the Radio, Luna and Peter Bjorn and John came to play at the Fifth Avenue venue Southpaw and nearby Union Hall. Novelist (and now screenwriter) Dave Eggers descended to grace the avenue with an East Coast branch of his 826 Valencia writing center and the Brooklyn



Superhero Supply Co., which actually has capes for sale.

By Park Slope standards, the stretch became about as hip as it gets.

"The experience of [Fifth Avenue] is a little fresher," says Doug Bowen, vice president at Core Group Marketing.

Rents on Seventh Avenue are still more expensive (around \$110 to \$120 per square foot compared to \$60 to \$80 on Fifth, according to

broker Lynn Donawald of Donawald Realty), which is perhaps why many of the neighborhood's more interesting spots are situated on the lower avenue.

"I can't even really name one restaurant that I go to regularly on Seventh," says Dan Myers, proprietor of the neighborhood blog Here Is Park Slope ([hereisparkslope.blogspot.com](http://hereisparkslope.blogspot.com)). "On Fifth Avenue, you've still got some mom-and-pop stores. On Seventh, you've got places like Barnes & Noble."

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There's also a certain youthful energy on Fifth, Donawald suggests,

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**CHAIN REACTION:** While Seventh Avenue is home to big retailers like Barnes & Noble, Fifth Avenue has quirkier offerings like Dave Eggers' Superhero Supply shop (above).

compliments of the (relatively) affordable new housing that's risen of late around Fourth Avenue and the blocks in between. A typical young single probably doesn't have \$2 million to drop on a brownstone near the park, but a sub-\$500,000 one-bedroom in a Fourth Avenue building like the Argyle (which, naturally, set up its sales office on Fifth) might be attainable.

Economic considerations aside, Donawald insists that Seventh Avenue remains the neighborhood's premiere

thoroughfare.

"I think people still prefer to be closer to the park," she says. "The park is really what draws people to Park Slope."

Then again, maybe not. Gagnon and his family currently make their home on Fourth Street just south of Seventh Avenue, but they recently purchased a new apartment they'll be moving to soon.

The location? Down the Slope -- a block closer to Fifth Avenue.