White brick apartment buildings proliferated in New York City between the years of 1950 and 1966 at a time in which architectural ideas, the draw of a single-family home, and advances in construction converged to create a post World War II building boom. Now that these buildings are 50 years old, many face deterioration problems and a certain stigma that discourages serious examination. The purpose of this thesis is to answer the question: Are white brick apartment buildings built in Manhattan from 1950-1966 significant? And if so, why?

White brick apartment buildings are significant for what they are and what they represent: The buildings reflect the ideas of modern design, city planning, and urban renewal, and they utilize technological advances widely available post-World War II. Although one tends to think of white brick apartment buildings as one single typology, two distinct types emerged over roughly a ten year period: one which followed the model of large-scale slab block development influenced by European Modernism and by Le Corbusier, while the other followed forms based on Art Deco and International Style apartment house design. No matter the type, these buildings incorporated design features that spoke of the era in which the idea of luxury was evolving to new living standards for the middle class. Critics of white brick apartment buildings see crumbling, soiled facades. What is overlooked is the architectural and cultural significance of these buildings. The façades of these structures, white cliffs in a city built of red brick and brownstone are slowly beginning to be replaced, some with colored brick thought to be more harmonious with other buildings in the area. What is overlooked is the importance of these white facades and the buildings that they sheath. This thesis will examine how these buildings fit into the history of New York City’s architecture and make an argument for their significance and their preservation. White brick apartment buildings should be appreciated for what they are and what they represent.