The Puerto Rican Identity:
Reconstructing Ownership in the Face of Change

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Thank you all very much,

Ivis
Dedication

For my parents, Carlos and Nancy.
Abstract

This dissertation seeks to elucidate currently existing as well as historic relationships between market typologies, the structured dynamics of housing stratification and distribution, and community development strategies in a primarily Puerto Rican community. In particular this research constructs a model framework from which to interpret Puerto Rican discourses surrounding ownership in Humboldt Park, Chicago. In this work, I contend that Puerto Ricans have attempted, with some degree of success, to construct narrativized and symbolic forms of ownership in lieu of the individualized and commodified ideals held as common-sense within the broader American community.

To ground the theoretical propositions espoused within the dissertation, I spent more than four and a half years conducting participatory action research alongside the Puerto Rican Agenda—an activist organization on Chicago’s West Side composed of community leaders, academics, and executive directors representing various non-profit organizations (known colloquially as the “Agenda”)—and implemented a cross section of qualitative case-study methods regarding focus group facilitation, interviews, and document mining. Quantitatively, my study was largely informed through surveys, demographic techniques and analyses which are represented with geospatial statistical analyses.

Where successful, the community’s attempts at constructing systems of ownership outside of the mainstream financial and market-dependent modalities have tended to present a legitimate challenge to marketized housing schemes and, if pursued and developed more fully, may offer collectivized solutions to the structurally problematic ideals of privatized and highly individuated modes of economy. While this sort of community-driven ownership has obvious implications
for disenfranchised groups (racialized, ethnic, non-traditional), there is also potential for far deeper implications pertaining to the problems of uneven development, the role of the state in the formation and maintenance of market-economies, grassroots organizing, and housing policy more generally.
Preface

“… he intends only his own gain and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”

“The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’”
Karl Marx, Capital vol 1 (1990)

The dominant and long-standing tradition among orthodox economists, beginning perhaps with Adam Smith and running through to the works of Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, frame market economics as being undergirded by natural systems of private property rights, the ubiquity of market exchange and the invisible balancing act of individualized competitive motivations. The following essay seeks instead to understand cultural groups’ diverse perspectives surrounding conceptions of ownership and exchange while simultaneously interrogating the means by which these groups come to terms with and contest, the impositions of dominant social groups on their communities. Despite the claims of economists of the potentiality of homogenous development, it is of utmost importance that planners begin to come to terms with the empirical fact that communities’ economies are built around historically contingent and path-dependent traditions and evolving cultures of their own (Hodgson and Knudsen 2013; Veblen 2009). Their economies vary from the economistic depictions of sameness to nearly the same degree as their rich array of shared traditions, histories and modes of expression in general vary from the imagined homogeneity imposed by popular forms of media like television programming and news reports or by social classifications (Bourdieu 1984). Wryly speaking, we might say that this dissertation seeks to
problematize the imposed narratives of sameness by positivist commentators vis-à-vis the empirical truth of *difference* between communities, cultures and, indeed, economies.

As will be demonstrated throughout this paper, the so-called free-market, far from constituting a natural force in human interaction, is thrust onto communities through the invention and enforcement of private property rights by national states. Put simply, where orthodoxy depicts market exchange as natural and inevitable, this analysis maintains that market economics relies on systems of private property legitimated by broader social systems (especially the narratives and discourses surrounding conceptions of “rights” of ownership) and the various enforcement arms of the national state. These systems, furthermore, are far from being in the assumed state of resolution from which positive economists construct their developmental theories. On the contrary, economic systems should be seen as vague and ambiguous complexes, ever to remain in a constant state of flux and contestation. The supposedly natural and all-encompassing internal laws of market economy should therefore be seen as misinterpretations or fixes of the temporary and instable processes of structuration (see Chapter 5 for an elaboration of this subject) that are largely based on the decisions of the national state and are contestable and therefore malleable and re-definable, at the ground-level.

Unorthodox economics, on the other hand, are often dominated by Marxist or Post-Keynesian discussions of the commodity form, on its material and abstract qualities. Unfortunately these discussions fall, of their own volition, almost as immediately as their first utterances, into the realm of phrase-mongering, semantic debate and banal obscurification. For these reasons, the present work will ignore designations of use-value and exchange-value, will ignore the dialectical conceptions
of processes and instead begin by focusing solely on the central component of
capitalism, the commodity, in the simplest articulation of the concept I am capable of
offering: Commodities are things being exchanged in the marketplace either for other
commodities or for currency. If at any point a given commodity is purchased, taken
home, used, or discarded, it ceases to be a commodity but, if at any point the same
good is reintroduced, reinvented, or recycled back into the marketplace it again
becomes a commodity. Put simply, for our purposes, a commodity is such only when
it enters and circulates within the marketplace for exchange. It should be further
understood that the existence of a commodity is not dependent solely on the
productive process but also upon the continual processes of pulling goods back into
the realm of exchange—a process which I will refer to throughout this work as
recommodification.

As will be discussed in this dissertation and against the claims of economists,
market economies, those types of economies characterized by the circulation of
commodities, are not features of nature. They are neither eternal nor inevitable
qualities of daily lives but are instead the products of historical changes over long
periods of time; they are an invention corresponding to the rise of national states, to
the emerging belief in market economics and to the industrial revolution. The
following pages take issue with modern community development strategies
predicated on the belief that the only path toward improving communities is through
the expansion of jobs and training for jobs. In other words, modern ideas of
community development are oriented around the principle of expanding the numbers
of commodities in circulation and of access to those commodities. Community and
economic development efforts in this way seek to expand capitalism and will
therefore represent a continual point of contention within this analysis. My interests,
in contrast to the dominant strains of economism, are on the decommodification of
communal activities; as a result, I would therefore urge for a decrease in job
accessibility, job training and the intentional curtailing of market expansion by
community groups.

. . .

My initial interest in this topic began more than six years ago with my research for
my master's degree at the University of New Mexico on the housing speculation
boom of 2000-2008; in this event, the small island of Vieques, a municipality of
Puerto Rico, experienced an unprecedented and precipitous increase in the prices of
the housing stock. In some cases, housing prices shot from a few tens of thousands of
dollars to as much as a half a million dollars in only a few months. The income for
those living on the island, meanwhile, remained at a consistent average of just over
$7,000 per year. While I was only partially able to explain this phenomenon at the
time I completed my master’s thesis, I have since developed a more nuanced and
intricate understanding of the relationships between markets and the communities
they serve. In the case of the Viequense housing market, homes were traditionally
built, owned and maintained by their owners whereas commodity populations—
vacationers, real estate agents and speculators, hailing mostly from New York City
and Boston—sought to capitalize on the undervalued housing market and perceived
homes more like chits serving for no other purpose than to be traded and cashed in. At
the time of my research, I felt and still feel, that the differences between American
and Puerto Rican housing markets were not merely the cause of differences in the
levels of development between two otherwise similar geographies but, instead,
represented two entirely different forms of economic organizational models clashing
with one another. As the legal apparatuses of the American model guarantee
privileged access to those with the most money and credit, and as the legal system in
the U.S. further define and enforce legal structures which they believe to constitute
the only viable legal frameworks that can exist, Viequenses were quickly being
displaced from the island. The only recourse Viequenses felt they had in this situation
was to organize against the expansion of jobs and the rhetoric of economic
development and forcibly take back property which had formerly been usurped by the
American judicial system.

In the same vein as my research in Vieques, this dissertation’s case study on the
Chicago community of Humboldt Park focuses on the disparities existing between
types of markets and between groups’ mental conceptions surrounding economy,
commodification and ownership. I contend that within these communities lie
economies built around historically contingent and path-dependent traditions and
cultures as opposed to being governed by the deterministic natural or eternal laws
assumed by economism. Every discernable social group operates within economies as
variegated and divergent as the identities they embody and the geographies they
inhabit. Put simply, where economists and other commentators see certain formations
of economy as being undergirded by natural and eternal modes of existence, my
research problematizes this reified sensibility and seeks instead to understand
differences within and between cultural groups and to question beliefs in the “correct”
forms of market organization that are assumed to exist by those subscribing to the
ideology of economism.

Since completing my field research in Vieques, Puerto Rico, I have been
interested in non-commodified housing markets and their internal dynamics. Vieques
is, of course, a special case as much of the island’s income derives directly from the
U.S. government in the form of infrastructural projects, federal employment, or
welfare payments. Nevertheless, my study of Vieques’ housing market has fundamentally changed my understanding of the social process of housing and of the communal and cultural properties of the economy more generally.

A number of tracts can be used to understand the differences between Vieques’ housing market, that of the Puerto Rican mainland and the U.S. market more broadly. However, the distinction between commodified and non-commodified markets derives primarily from the works of Marx and Engels and their contemporaries. To understand this line of reasoning, one needs only contrast the structural nature of social systems dominated by commodity production with social systems dominated by the dynamics of subsistence—subsistence, from this viewpoint, is generally taken to be the dominant mode of production before and/or outside of the capitalist one.

As will be demonstrated in the following essay, it is with the national state that the juridical apparatuses necessary for the creation of capitalist societies begin. And it is in capitalist society and “[f]or the first time in history,” as Anthony Giddens (1987) writes, that “large segments of the working population do not directly produce the means of their own subsistence, but contract out their labour to others who, in the form of money wages, provide the wherewithal for them to survive” (133). Capitalist societies are neither natural nor inevitable, they are the creations of national states which legitimize the unnatural through ubiquitous rights of private property which invariably benefit certain groups and cultures at the expense of others. To put it in another way, it is through the national state that communities, families and individuals are deprived of the right to live for free. The state plays its role by guaranteeing that all participants have to enter the market in order to reproduce themselves and those subscribing to economism find reasons why such a society is natural, inevitable and virtuous. The intention of the following paper is to begin a dialogue that might be
useful in helping communities to find pathways for development completely outside of the expansion of capitalism and to do so by themselves capitalizing on the contradictive beliefs and ideologies that sustain the common-sense logics of capitalist society.

To illustrate and expand upon these premises, this dissertation focuses on Chicago’s Puerto Rican community in Humboldt Park and seeks to illuminate the disparities between market-types and the opposing views of economy, private property and ownership. In the case of Puerto Ricans in Humboldt Park, this work seeks to develop on behalf of the community a framework from which to further leverage identity politics into creating symbolic forms of ownership that transcend the state’s enforcement of private property rights. In the end, my goal is to lay out a framework for Puerto Ricans to use in order to begin the process of decommodification of the geographies they inhabit and a withdrawal from the logic of capitalist expansion and economism.

My doctoral research at UIC has closely intersected with a Chicago-based study documenting the Puerto Rican diaspora and their socio-economic conditions as part of a partnership with the Puerto Rican Agenda, an activist organization on Chicago’s West Side. Working as the project manager of this study has allowed me to integrate portions of this research into my dissertation. Using a mixed methods approach—including more than 250 surveys, geospatial analysis of census/property data, four focus groups and over thirty interviews with community leaders, politicians, realtors, housing developers, residents and others—I explore the following question: How do narratives of collective-identity-claims impact conceptions of private property?
Put simply, I seek to understand how Puerto Ricans have come to relate to and build on their community’s specific economic traditions. Furthermore, I will show how Puerto Ricans interact with and contest the impositions—real or perceived—of other groups’ economic ideals into the spaces to which they are attached as homeowners, tenants, business owners and community members. I maintain that the narratives used by community stakeholders are the primary way in which they attempt to reconcile themselves in the spaces and times they inhabit. Ultimately, I seek to understand how these narratives are transformed into political objectives and institutions such as land trusts, cooperatives and community banking services which are capable of materializing changes in urban spaces. While a full exploration of any of these topics is impossible within the confines of this work, this dissertation seeks to start a dialogue from which we may begin to seek out alternatives to economism and private property.

The intention of this dissertation is to contribute to the construction of a philosophy of praxis which might be useful to the Humboldt Park community and other communities struggling with similar issues. Trapped in ethnic/racial enclaves, with little chance of achieving the economic status of whites and after suffering the detrimental effects of the subprime mortgage and housing crisis, minorities throughout the country are under the increasing pressures of gentrification. Humboldt Park specifically was ranked by Redfin as among the “Top Ten 2014 U.S. Hottest Neighborhoods” (Unger 2014). It is becoming increasingly important for minorities to develop innovative ways of maintaining the urban spaces they inhabit. This case study aims to shed light on social experimentation undertaken by community activists while theorizing potential pathways to strengthen their endeavors.
SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 “The Myth of Natural Market Economy” argues that since at least the times of Adam Smith, economists have followed in his path toward creating and rationalizing a naturally existing marketplace which is in constant need of protection against those who seek to create fairness but, in so doing, disrupt the natural order which would otherwise, they presume, self-correct and create opportunities for everyone—propelling the weak and lazy into action, on the one hand, while incentivizing hard work and innovation on the other. This chapter seeks to problematize the orthodox economic position of naturally existing market economy while laying a groundwork for understanding non-orthodox economic perspectives which place private property and therefore the protections and legitimations of national states, as the starting point for market economy as opposed to human nature.

Having established a basic framework from which to understand the origins of market economy as being, not a natural affair, but the result of legal frameworks regarding private property rights and the enforcement therein by a national state, Chapter 2 “The New Enclosure” seeks to demonstrate the state’s continuing role in expanding the enclosures to encompass goods that are difficult to see as tangible. Here, I introduce the reader to the concept of the “New Enclosures” while expanding upon the theoretical space utilized in this essay to understand the ways in which the market economy expands through the continuously evolving legal fiction of private property.

In Chapter 3 “Contextualizing a Changing City” I turns to planning-specific analyses and seek to interrogate the relationships between structural and ecological interpretations of urban change within early planning theory. This chapter ties
ecological ideas of spontaneous order to economistic claims of naturally balancing economic systems and western conceptions of personal responsibility and choice.

Chapter 4 seeks to understand how symbols and collective identity works in community development practice. First, the concept of symbols is discussed, while providing examples that aid our understanding of both the signs of gentrification as well as how community groups contest them. As the process of gentrification tries to erase the identity of places by giving landscapes another identity, we turn to the signs of appropriation. In addition, this chapter describes how collective identity is formed and ultimately, deployed to organize community development projects that result in development without displacement and cultural ownership.

For this dissertation along with Chapter 5 “Analytical Framework,” seeks to expand upon, solidify and synthesize the analytical framework that will be used to interpret the case study presented in Part II. Most importantly, this chapter seeks to clarify the non-orthodox and non-Marxist positionality that will serve as the basis for studying Humboldt Park’s Puerto Rican community by detailing and distancing this work from Marxist works and aligning it with Institutionalist and Post-Keynesian frameworks. Further, the following chapter will also seek to distance itself from positivistic interpretational methodologies by advancing Giddens’ concept of “structuration” and Geertz’s belief that communities should be treated, not as things with internal truths, but instead, to be read “as texts.”

Chapter 6, “Research Strategy,” outlines some of the empirical tools and instruments employed in the gathering of information for the case study including U.S. Census and other publicly available data, as well as interviews, focus groups and participant observations.
Chapter 7 “Puerto Ricans, Work and Migration” lays out a brief historical review of the Puerto Rican diaspora and how their work and migration patterns have been deeply impacted by the colonial relations between first Spain and then the United States. Although Puerto Ricans have migrated to the U.S. since the early 1900s, their mass migration started in the late 1940s as a result of the Operation Bootstrap—Puerto Rico’s industrialization project, sponsored by Puerto Rico’s Department of Economic Development and the U.S. Federal Government.

The factors that gave the impetus to construct massive Puerto Rican flags at each end of Paseo Boricua—a strip of Division Street running through the neighborhood’s Puerto Rican community—are investigated in Chapter 8 “Paseo Boricua”. The flags, as well as the meaning they symbolically convey to Puerto Ricans and outside communities, provide a conduit for a form of ownership which challenges private property rights as recognized by the U.S. legal and economic system; rights which would have been unattainable through normal market interactions.

Chapter 9 “The Park” shows how the Puerto Rican identity in Chicago is closely tied to “Humboldt Park” the park itself, almost to the point of being identified with the general community area that the Puerto Rican community occupies. Nonetheless, historically, parks has been considered public sites for everyone to enjoy, necessary for democracy. In the face of neighborhood change, however, Puerto Ricans have developed language to communicate that “Humboldt Park belongs to us.” In other words, activists claim that space, based on a history of belonging and physical occupation; they are saying, this is our “property” even though, legally, it might belong to the state.

Chapter 10 No Se Vende (Not for Sale) is titled after a grassroots campaign that claims that Puerto Ricans, even those who are renters, are the legitimate owners of
Humboldt Park. In this assertion, legitimacy and ownership are one and the same, regardless of the legal status of “homeowner." No Se Vende then contradicts the original meaning that inspired the legal code, property that can be bought and sold which is not based on “use” values. Legality, to some extent, has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of these activists and, therefore, they have decided to claim their rights thought the symbology of language. In this sense, the idea of Puerto Ricans renting in Humboldt Park or simply deciding to stay has become an instrumental right of resistance to the perceived oppression. The campaign has played a key role in the construction of a new sense of legitimacy in the recent housing struggles.

Entertainment for exchange-values has been the crux of urban neoliberalism—a strategy that is often not questioned in our society by those who favor the status quo. Chapter 11 “Riot Fest” explores the tensions between the community and outsiders. The Riot Fest, would be guiding my analysis because it questions the state’s legitimacy of allowing access to others—while denying recognition to long-term residents.

The concluding chapter discusses the term modernity, which refers to the process of leaving behind traditional communities in order to embrace a more dominant way of life. In capitalist society wanting development or concerning oneself with exchange-values is then seen as superior to other forms of being to the extend that the latter do not seem even worth preserving. But groups differ on what they considered legitimate claims of property. Those who can afford to buy property are legitimated by the capitalist state, whereas those who are poor derive the meaning of property from symbols, whether they are material or immaterial. This concluding chapter uses the concept of modernity to understand the concepts of development and change in greater depth than discussed in previous chapters.
Part I

A Framework for Analysis

The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life.

~ GEORG SIMMEL — The Metropolis and Mental Life
Since at least the times of Adam Smith, economists have followed in his path toward creating and rationalizing the existence of a naturally existing marketplace which is in constant need of protection against those who seek to create fairness but, in so doing, disrupt the natural order which would otherwise, they presume, self correct and create opportunities for everyone—propelling the weak and lazy into action, on the one hand, while incentivizing hard work and innovation on the other. The following chapter seeks to problematize the orthodox economic position of naturally existing market economy while laying a groundwork for understanding non-orthodox economic perspectives which place private property and therefore the protections and legitimations of national states, as the starting point for market economy as opposed to human nature.
Chapter 1

The Myth of Natural Market Economy

“The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say this is mine and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors Mankind would have been spared by him who, pulling up the stakes of filling in the ditch, had cried out to his kind: Beware of listening to this impostor; You are lost if you forget that the fruits are everyone’s and the Earth no one’s:

But in all likelihood things had by then reached a point where they could not continue as they were, for this idea of property, depending as it does on many prior ideas which could only arise successively, did not take shape all at once in man’s mind:

Much progress had to have been made, industry and enlightenment acquired, transmitted and increased from one age to the next, before this last stage of the state of Nature was reached.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (2010)

“[T]here are several incommensurable genres of discourse in play in society, none of which can transcribe all the others; and nonetheless one of them at least—capital, bureaucracy—imposes its rules on the others. This oppression is the only radical one, the one that forbids its victims to bear witness against it. It is not to understand this oppression and to be its philosopher; one must also destroy it.”

Jean-François Lyotard, as cited in Badiou (2009)

For more than a century, anthropologists have debated over the existence of barter in primitive societies and the properties of human methods for exchange as an element of human nature. Contemporary articulations of this argument are most often based on Adam Smith’s (1986) assumption that the “propensity to truck, barter and exchange” (117) represented a basic and fundamental element of human interaction. Jean-Michel Servet (1981) satirized the reductive position of the early political economists:

In the eighteenth century, Smith, Turgot, Beccaria and so on, invented ‘barter’, an essential theoretical construct for the description of the functioning of a society in the absence of money, that instrument of princely control. A savage met by chance another savage; both carried goods capable of satisfying the needs of the other: one was hungry and held an animal skin
he didn’t know what to do with, the other was cold and held what was left
over from an abundant fishing expedition. From this first contact, this first
‘transaction’, stemmed not only ‘commerce’ but, another form and another
sense for the word: language. (423)

The logic of the political economists is quite simple: Given that the resources
available in nature are scarce and given that the amount of demand for those resources
is always certain to overwhelm those resources, communities and societies have to, by
some mechanism, allocate the products of their work among their members. Early
political economists assumed that market exchange is the natural method from which
systems of distribution arise. In primitive societies and communities, we are told,
exchange was mediated by participants’ want for each other’s wares but, prior to the
invention of money, exchange could only occur if each party had something the other
wanted. If one party sought to exchange with another but had nothing they wanted in
return, bartering became difficult if not impossible. We can thusly see the impetus for
the invention of money and, in turn, we can properly see that all social development is
tantamount to the development of markets.

While the logic of this story is both elegant and intuitively appealing,
anthropologists studying economies have long refuted this belief in a natural state of
market exchange—represented in its most primitive form, we are told, as a barter
economy. As Caroline Humphrey (1985) has written, “No example of a barter
economy, pure and simple, has ever been described, let alone the emergence from it
of money; all available ethnography suggests that there never has been such a thing”
(48). While the question of naturally existing exchange is an interesting one,
arguments surrounding the origins of trade often degrade into little more than
semantic debates. Meanwhile, orthodox economists have not seemed to be interested
in defending their position on the existence of markets and exchange—they simply
ignore the counter-arguments altogether. The idea of the naturalness of exchange
appears to be so deeply embedded in the modern imaginary that no amount of refutation will dislodge it. Indeed, the entire field of orthodox economics leans on unproven assumptions (Harvey 2011).

While acknowledging the existence of these debates, I do not see the need not engage in them any further. Whether exchange was constituted by reciprocity or gift-giving and therefore whether or not the idea of naturally existing barter ever existed, buries the lead. The important question is not the existence of exchange as a natural human function, the question is: When did markets become central to the reproduction of whole societies? The important difference between older systems of economy and modern ones does not lie in the existence or depth of exchange; rather, it lies in the degree of reliance by members of a society on the marketplace for securing the goods needed for their everyday reproduction.

Contrary to popular depictions, this analysis operates on the basic assumption that, although populations subsisted in the forms of households and communities up to a short time ago, members of societies have, of late, become increasingly dependent on market interactions for even the most basic acts of reproduction. Though families and communities likely exchanged the products of their labor—perhaps even in great numbers and across great distances—their exchange was always constituted by the surpluses of their product and not by the goods necessitated for their daily reproduction. It is the degree of reliance on market economy for reproduction that has piqued my interest here as well as the origin of such reliance. To elaborate on this distinction, as Karl Polanyi (2001) wrote:

No society could, naturally, live for any length of time unless it possessed an economy of some sort; but previously to our time no economy has ever existed that, even in principle, was controlled by markets. In spite of the chorus of academic incantations so persistent in the nineteenth century, gain and profit made on exchange never before played an important part in human economy. Though the institution of the market was fairly common since the later Stone Age, its role was no more than incidental to economic
life…While history and ethnography know of various kinds of economies, most of them comprising the institution of markets, they know of no economy prior to our own, even approximately controlled and regulated by markets. (45–46)

Adam Smith and his cohorts falsely concluded that since exchange in some form appears to be natural and since the need to economize one’s time is tautologically true, that the reliance on the market for subsistence was similarly natural. But market economies were never the result of spontaneous outcroppings of human nature. The works of 19th century anthropologists like Lewis Henry Morgan, 20th century anthropologists like Karl Polanyi and Fernand Braudel, and 21st century anthropologists like David Graeber have, to my mind, effectively documented a concise and systemic refutation to the economist’s claims of naturally existing market economy. This dissertation operates on the basic premise that this issue has been effectively addressed, even if economists remain ignorant of or adamant about such a resolution. I will not be seeking here to rehash the problems of economic analysis built around these flawed premises, but to reconstruct the history of Puerto Ricans living in Chicago while dislodging the economisms which plague modern developmental strategies.

**Definitions and Basic Overview**

To re-iterate the points made above: while exchange in some form has been an element of human interaction for all discernible history, economic anthropologists have been engaged in a debate only in what constitutes the definition of exchange and not on the political economy that results from exchange regimes. While economic anthropologists, therefore, get locked-in semantic debates, this analysis diverges from such a path seeking instead to understand how, why, or when reliance on markets for everyday reproduction became naturalized. I will be referring to this reliance on markets for reproduction, as opposed to self-sufficiency or subsistence production, as
“market economy” or “market society.” These terms were used heavily by Karl Polanyi to describe such social formations and the language will be maintained here.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I refer to capitalism as a system and continuing changes which compounds the growth and exchange of commodities. Put simply: As commodities are produced, some commodities (or the monies garnered from their sale) are reallocated to the production (or purchase) of capital which can then be used to create even more commodities. Capital (i.e. land, labor and machinery) is used to create commodities which can, in turn, be used to create new capital, which can be used to create new commodities and so forth. Once the logic of capitalism becomes the basis for the expansion of market economy, the compulsion for participation in the market shifts to a compulsion to compete with those who control access to ever increasing levels of capital. This process continually dislodges participants who do not have access to any other capital than their labor in order to secure the money they need to reproduce themselves through goods purchased in the market.

As an illustration of this process, we might imagine a small farmer who produces carrots in his own small garden and exchanges them in the market for the money he needs to buy the goods he uses to reproduce himself. If another farmer nearby begins to produce carrots at, say, 3 or 4 times the scale by utilizing a horse and plow, a tractor, or even migrant labor, the new farmer’s carrots can be sold for less in the market than our farmer’s carrots. Unless our carrot farmer can employ the same level of capital, unless he can increase the size of his production by securing and utilizing the same capital as—or, perhaps, even more capital than—his new competitor, he will be forced to sell his product at the same price level as the more capitalized farmer or risk being unable to sell his goods altogether. If the farmer is reliant on the market
for his survival and if the product he derives from the sale of his carrots is how he secures the money he needs in order to reproduce himself, then we can assume that there is a certain price level at which he will no longer be able to reproduce himself being forced out of business. To continue his reproduction, our farmer will either have to find a new product to sell in the market or, perhaps more likely, he will have to sell his labor for a wage to a capitalist. In the 1970s, Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz famously told these small farmers to “adapt or die”—and this they did and still do around the world today.

As a precondition for its existence, capitalism requires a population dependent on the market economy for their daily reproduction. The dependence on the market economy does not begin in nature but derives from the legal structure of the modern nation state in which everything that can be owned is formalized and protected by national and local bodies (the courts, the military, police forces, etc.). The state continually defines and redefines systems of ownership which compel members of societies into the market. I take it to be axiomatic that this is not a natural state of affairs but a path-dependent and historically contingent phenomena—this will be elaborated in the pages that follow. I also take it to be axiomatic that, in a state of nature, a household would be able to reproduce itself solely through the efforts of its members. This was clear in early U.S. history as settlers spread across the country; homesteaders constructed their own homes, grew their own crops, sewed and mended their own clothes and so forth. The hardships encountered by these households are undeniable, but this sort of hardship did not imply that the end-state of complete subordination to market forces was inevitable.

As a primer for the arguments presented below, we can understand the state’s continued role in forcing its participants into the market in order to secure their basic
reproduction simply by positing an example of someone trying to find a way to reproduce him/herself outside the market. Say, for example, someone bought a piece of property, built a house and grew her own crops and cultivated all she needed for her reproduction without needing to enter the market for any reason. This individual, regardless of her success at self-reproduction, will still have to exchange some portion of her product in the market to pay government mandated property taxes—and this income is itself, in turn, taxable. As Marx (1978) noted in his Critique of the Gotha Program, “Income tax presupposes various sources of income of the various social classes and hence capitalist society” (529). While property taxes may constitute only a trivial sum, its measure is derived from the surrounding market so that, while one may separate oneself from the market for some time, prices will inevitably become so high as to force a land’s occupant into the market in search of ever more money to pay for the increased taxes. In a market-based society, members cannot live for free and this is guaranteed if by no other means than through the state’s tax policies.

HOUSING AND CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

All commodities are both useful and exchangeable, but whereas other commodities serve mostly their own purpose—some goods are a necessary precondition for the consumption of other goods. To use a desk or a chair, a refrigerator or a microwave, a bookshelf or a throw rug, requires the use of space and, under the auspices of capital, space is owned; some private, some public, some a mixture of the two—but owned nonetheless. The reproduction of a business requires space in the form of a building, a lot, or a storage hanger. The reproduction of a household necessitates the use of shelter and, in modern societies, this shelter comes in the form of a house, an apartment, or a condo and the associated utilities or other inputs required to inhabit it. In the case of a business, all of these consumables might be seen as little bits of
capital used to aid in the production of commodities. In the home, on the other hand, there are multitudes of commodities used for the reproduction of the household. Homes in capitalist societies act as bases for the consumption of nearly all commodities and in this role they serve as a major part of the so-called “consumption fund.” If the office building, the construction site, the warehouse, etc. can be seen as the spaces most closely tied to the act of producing commodities, the home can be seen as the space most closely tied to the consumption of those commodities.

Throughout human history, people have relied on some form of shelter to protect themselves from the elements. But where a teepee, a wigwam, or a cave were not products of the market, the modern American house, apartment and condo are all indelibly commodified. Being that homes are both a centerpiece to commodity consumption and simultaneously themselves commodities, it is safe to say that there is no more important consumer good in a capitalist society than the home. To begin with, human beings need shelter where they can protect themselves from nature and the elements. A home is a safe space where one can sleep and restore one’s energy. Homes are spaces that allow us to store and prepare the food needed for our daily sustenance, along with the storage of other necessary tools like knives, pots and pans. In an increasingly atomized and privatized world, the home is a domestic space where families can share time together. Homes, furthermore, are gathering places for friends and relatives and therefore hold a privileged role in the reproduction of societies and communities in general.

Homes as commodities are quite an oddity. They are, for example, one of the few commodities that can gain value even as their quality deteriorates. To buy a house in the market and to sell it at a later date for a higher price is considered in our society to be normal and natural. Prices can go up and up during a boom and they can drop
precipitously during a bust. Homes are tied to neighborhoods and prices can rise or fall based on factor such as the changing racial composition of a neighborhood. This factor can transcends the outright will of individuals to the degree that we live in a post-racist society; that, it is the structure of the housing market and not the people themselves who are racist. As a result, white flight, tipping point, filtering, etc. become naturalized market mechanisms; whites feel that they need to protect their biggest investment from the potential devaluation of diversification—for them, racism may be an economic rationale, not a social ill. The same can be said for processes like segregation, gentrification and uneven development of cities more generally.

The class divisions of capitalism can be felt most heavily in neighborhoods. Because of segregated housing and segregated schools, capital can reproduce a housing market segmented by class and ensure a desperate and docile workforce. For workers, homes and other staples are so expensive that nearly their entire income is immediately doled out to other capitalists in order to maintain little more than subsistence levels. To a significant degree, mortgage and rent payments, for this reason, act as mere transfer payments from capitalists to workers and from workers to rentier capitalists. *The Housing Landscape 2012*, an annual report from the Center for Housing Policy, reported recently that nearly one in four working households spends more than half of their income on housing. Even in the most affluent of societies, the working class is reduced to wages hovering at levels near simple reproduction and little else and it is the cost of shelter that makes this so.

The home is the space where the worker reproduces herself and recharges herself for the next day’s production. Workers work in order to secure the wages needed to pay the landlord, the grocer, the retailer, the state, so that they might sleep, eat and start this process anew the next morning. Even if there are surpluses of products
sitting idle in a capitalist society, the worker has to receive a wage to purchase the products because these products are only available as commodities.

Segregated by class, ethnicity and race, the neighborhood is the level where the households of the working and productive classes go to school—being trained at their own expense for the benefit of a future employer; it is where they interact with one another and assimilate their local culture and social position; it is where they develop an understanding of the rules and norms that will govern and legitimize all of their future relationships. In communities where the ethos of hard work dominates, where toil, tradition and the voluntary subordination to market relations are cherished characteristics, the capitalist can dominate and subordinate workers with ease while securing a continual flow of individuals grateful for the chance to sell their only commodity to the capitalist—their labor power. In the following pages, I will show that, today, it is in the neighborhood and not on the shop floor where class relations are rationalized and reproduced. Before this can be discussed further, however, some of the assertions laid out above should be unpacked and will be discussed in more detail below.

**ECONOMISM**

We should note that, though they would likely disagree, it is nonetheless important to understand that economists do not study exchange in markets. They create models which generalize about patterns they perceive to exist in markets and then proceed to study those models. Simply stated: *Economists study models of markets and not markets themselves*. The false equivocation between the models they have created and the market as it actually exists represents a profound problem in the discipline of economics. To take in and tacitly accept the models of markets proposed by economists, or the presumptions that created the basis for the models in the first place,
for those of us who are dealing with real people, in real communities, without
question, often leads to disastrous and deleterious consequences for those we are
seeking to assist.

While the models themselves present a problem in themselves, at an even deeper
level, there are a number of premises which undergird the whole of economic
thinking and create the impetus for their models in the first place. Several such
premises can be dissected out of the Nobel Prize winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz’s
(2006), highly polished definition of economics from his introductory textbook on the
subject:

*Economics* studies how individuals, firms, government and other
organizations within our society make *choices* and how these choices
determine society’s use of its resources. (6)

It is clear that Stiglitz has put a tremendous amount of thought into refining this
definition of economics so that all of the premises of mainstream economics can
easily flow from it. Whether stated explicitly or left to be inferred, Stiglitz has painted
for us a beautiful picture of the story of economics, one in which a number of ideas
are likely to follow and I think the definition is one that serves the field quite well—
though it certainly needs some unpacking if we are to understand its meaning and
intent.

First of all, if we are to agree with this short definition, societies are nothing more
than agglomerations of individuals—in the form of firms, governments, etc.
Decisions made by each person in a society are reduced to number of occurrences
(100 cans of soda purchased at such and such location; 25 cars sold this year, etc.).
Once this reduction to quantities takes place, the digits can be collated and processed
and patterns can begin to present themselves to the trained eye. From these perceived
patterns, economists generalize about the functioning of individuals and groups and,
ultimately, society. These models are refined and re-articulated throughout the field to make all sorts of claims and can be incorporated into the body of economic “theory”, or, perhaps ignored entirely. It is important to note here that the agglomerated unit, i.e. the society, is nothing more than an abstraction as it, in and of itself, is merely constituted by a number of actors within an artificially set boundary (a city, a county, a family, a nation, etc.) dubbed here to be a “society”. The models constructed at this level of abstraction are the most generalizable. But firms and governments have boundaries drawn around them and a similar concept to that of society is applied to them too, if only at a smaller scale and, thus, are less generalizable. The responses of individual actors within such a society are treated as being almost un-generalizable and so the field often waves their analyses off and directs them instead to professional fields such as psychology, anthropology and so forth. Although they are the point of departure for the establishment of patterns, in and of themselves, they are discarded as individuals due to their un-generalizability.

Second, the concept of choices, as presented in orthodox economic analysis, is erroneous. It is, in fact, nothing more than a rhetorical ploy being used to appeal to the western belief in the rights of the individual—whether the aggrandizement of the individual is a good thing or a bad thing needs not be discussed further. What is important, however, is that the economist does not study the choices of individuals but, as noted above, generalizes about the choices of abstract groups reduced to quantifiable characteristics. If we were to take the usage of this term—“choices”—literally, a simple study of their models would likely lead one to come to the conclusion that people choose to be evicted from their homes or to pay parking fines. While Stiglitz evokes for us in his definition an idea that the economist cares for the individual and is only interested in studying what the individual wants most, this is, in
reality, a depiction of the field that pretty much exposes its own fallacies. Economists study the things that discernible groups pay for and the patterns that present themselves therein, not the choices people make. They do not study people or individuals but abstract units of generalizable characteristics; data points are being collated and nothing more. The economist, in fact, reduces the individual to her most mundane characteristics destroying him/her for the sake of constructing models that stand for the ways in which groups behave.

A third point which emerges from Stiglitz’s definition of the subject is predicated on the basis that a society allocates its supply of resources by some means. We can deduce that goods in any given society are finite and need to be allocated within the society. Again, we see from this phraseology that societies are simply agglomerations of individuals and that, when reduced to statistical quantities, can be seen as operating in discernible patterns. The economist imagines a world in which a container full of things has other things dumped into it and these things are gobbled up by the original things. A society is a consumption and production machine and the study of economics is the study of the distribution of goods by some mechanism—the economy. While I would agree that this is a helpful model for simplifying complex problems, it does not have anything to do with reality and is no better than the use of a caricature to define a person’s very soul. Nonetheless, these over-simplifications operate as the ideological device from which economists construct their conclusions.

As the famed historian, Fernand Braudel (1985), has noted, it is the economists themselves, who tend to see the economy as a homogenous reality which can legitimately be taken out of context and which can, indeed must, be measured on its own, since nothing is intelligible until it has been put into statistics. According to the textbooks, the development of pre-industrial Europe (which was studied quite exclusively of the rest of the world, as if that did not exist) consisted of its gradual progress towards the rational world of the market, the firm and capitalist investment, until the coming of the Industrial Revolution, which neatly divides human history in two. (23)
The definition of the field of economics proffered by Stiglitz is elegant precisely because it wraps all of the concepts of economics into the presentation that follows—the premises anticipate the conclusions in a neat and tidy fashion, certainly. Economists get from reality what they put in it within a vicious circle in which what is assumed validates what is found. It is precisely these premises which, to my mind, cause the erroneous and deleterious conclusions which nearly all discourses on developmental strategies are bracketed by. As noted above, one of the most basic of these premises relies on a belief in a naturally existing market economy which has, again, been satisfactorily disproven by economic anthropologists. Thus, its use as the basis for the existence of market economy should, in the first place, be called into question. Most often, as the literature surrounding economic anthropology suggests, the basis for market economy stems from the state’s creation of private property rights. With Polanyi, as it was with Rousseau and others, the basis for private property was not to be found in nature, as John Locke had posited, but was constituted by a historical progression culminating in the enclosures of property beginning in England in the 18th century. This does not mean that the concept of private property emerged first from England, but only that it is one of the best-documented cases of how the appropriation of land through farming practices introduced the idea (if you will) of the right to own.

**Private property**

Like all physiocrats, John Locke believed that economic wealth stemmed from the productivity of land. Locke was interested in distinguishing between productive and unproductive land and, for him, unproduced land (not farmed) belonged to the commons. This is land in its natural state—it is an unvalued landscape. Anyone could enjoy the fish and fruit from these lands, but if a man worked to produce the land—
that is, the land had improvements made to it—then that man should have a right over that particular plot of land. For Locke, the distinction between private property rights and the commons consists of just one thing: Labor put into it. Labor, for Locke, was like paying ground rents to God (the Sovereign). Locke proclaimed that each man owns himself and that the products of his labor are his property. By toiling on the land, a farmer would make a private investment in the land and should, therefore, have a moral and legal right to extract and own the proceeds extracted from that land. According to Locke this created a property claim as long as the farming household used the land.

Locke suggested that there is a natural feedback loop in which, while if some of your products go unused, then you took more land than you should have been allowed to have. This feedback loop regulates a farmer’s ability to accumulate surplus value. There is an ethical theory embedded into Locke’s ideas—a man has an incentive to labor to the point that he would use or exchange the products of his labor and nothing more. This presented for Locke a natural mechanism to fight against inequality.

In summary, Locke formulated individual land rights (that is, man’s ability to appropriate land from the commons) based on three basic principles; to own land, man should: (1) Leave enough land and of good enough quality for others to use in the future, (2) To mix his labor with it, (3) Not to take more than he is able to use (which can be measured by the amount of edible products that have spoiled). Under this system, rationality is measured by one’s ability to: (1) Appropriate land, (2) Overcome the problem of surplus cultivation by exchanging it for money (something that does not spoil).

Like many thinkers of his time, Locke followed an evolutionary vision of private property which went something like this: Both patriarchs, Lot and Abraham, had
numerous flocks of cattle and people living with them—but they only had one
dwelling, which made things a little crowded. Abraham kindly asked Lot: “Please part
from me; if [you go] left, I will go right and if [you go] right, I will go left” (God
2011, Genesis 13:9). By partitioning the land, each of them could have their own
dwellings. For Locke this is how enclosures and townships came into being. The idea
of property was born from the logic of scarcity (population, stock growth and
overcrowding). Little by little, people would appropriate land out of the commons
(i.e. unlabored open space) through the act of laboring and call it their individualized
private property.

Karl Marx, on the contrary, demonstrated how the idea of owning yourself or
owning anything at all, for that matter, justified someone selling their labor for
another person’s benefit. Often the buyer uses other’s work to increase their property
wealth. This cycle further widens the wealth distribution discrepancies and transforms
a person’s contribution into a commodity. Consequently, Marx argues this transaction
belittles human values to the exchange of product values. Marx critiques Hegel’s
perspective and states that the societal need to own property pressures people into
entering and operating in a standard system. Therefore, devaluing individual
personality and alienating workers.

The idea of individual property rights was considered revolutionary when it was
popularized in the 18th century as, at that point, feudal lands belonged to their lord
and not to the people. In feudal times, laws were believed to have emanated from a
higher order (God, the king, the church, etc.) and, therefore, were seen as
unquestionable and regarded as being beyond all human judgment. The principle of
the law of nature is based on the basic premise that since rights are natural, every law
that exists should stem from them. Any law that undermines natural rights is (or
should be) considered unjust and illegitimate. And legitimacy, in this sense, should act as the basis for legality.

Natural rights are based on basic rights (e.g. the right to life, liberty, well-being and so on) and this set of basic rights should be the basis of other more complex rights. For example, in the case of a homeless individual squatting, one could argue that acknowledging the property rights of the non-occupant over an occupant was a way of legalizing the violation of these individual’s basic rights (the ability for someone to reproduce themselves, having shelter and so on). That being said, in this specific situation, where an occupant needs shelter for their basic reproduction, property rights might contradict and interfere with the practice of basic rights. This is far away from the initial idea of ordinary people outside of the lord owning land.

Most enlightenment thinkers defended and advocated the right of resistance to oppression when natural rights were violated by the state and this was considered the most important of rights, as it was the right that ensured sovereignty and other basic rights.

If we wanted to problematize the notions of natural rights even further, we might also argue that natural rights do not exist; that they are customary and arise from the actions of the state. In other words, the state (or any governing body) grants property rights. Rights are something that the state secures—not God. The original enclosures started in England somewhere around the 13th century but picked up in the 18th and 19th centuries. The enclosure process consisted of gating up the commons and handing out formal titles to state sanctioned the enclosure of land for some while displacing others and the heirs from their homes and ancestral lands. For many, like Karl Polanyi (2001), the rise of capitalism was an eventual consequence of these enclosures:
Enclosures have appropriately been called a revolution of the rich against the poor. The lords and nobles were upsetting the social order, breaking down ancient law and custom, sometimes by means of violence, often by pressure and intimidation. They were literally robbing the poor of their share in the common, tearing down the houses which, by the hitherto unbreakable force of custom, the poor had long regarded as theirs and their heirs. (37)

While city-states constantly fought for communal land and new lands for emerging lords, territories remained flexible. What Karl Polanyi presents us with is a more modern concept of land ownership, wherein actual boundaries could and would exist. But who maintains the artifice of boundary? Polanyi dedicates his whole book to make the argument that the beginning of private property and the emergence of the state cannot be separated.

Karl Marx became interested in economics while working as a journalist for the *Rheinische Zeitung*. In one interesting case, he documented a group of people living for centuries in a forest, in the Rhine province, who were suddenly banned from picking fallen wood and sticks from the ground in a forest. The newly created lawful owner of the land claimed that this was his private property and that the takers were stealing from his private property. In this case, it did not matter that they were appropriating wood by mixing it with their labor because those sticks now legally belonged to someone else. From this time on, Marx became interested in the expansion of market relationships. He became fascinated by materialism—the idea that human history is driven by our need for food, for shelter and so forth. He noted that in a pre-capitalist society people would go to the forest and cut the wood they needed to build themselves a home. They would gather dry wood to burn a fire to cook with or to stay warm. But the “invention” of private property changed these relationships; now the wood belonged to someone else. Now this new class, the proletariat, needed to work for money to exchange for the wood that they needed to
live. Marx asserted that a state and not nature, determined and protected land ownership for some while stripping it from others. In other words, the state creates a just distribution only after having enforced an initial downfall against one party at the benefit of another.

Like Karl Polanyi and Karl Marx, Liam Murphy and Thomas Nagel disagree with the conception of natural property rights in the tradition of Locke and Hobbes precisely because the only way of securing one individual’s private property was with a prerequisite national state that could and would protect the rights of the individual. In their book, *The Myth of Ownership: Taxes and Justice*, Murphy and Nagel (2004) note that the concept of ownership without a state is a myth. The whole premise of this book is that, in order to protect private property, a state and tax structure must exist. To Murphy and Nagel, the premise of a pretax market-economy is incoherent:

> Tax policy analysis needs to be emancipated from everyday libertarianism; it is an unexamined and generally non-explicit assumption that does not bear examination and it should be replaced by the conception of property rights as depending on the legal system that defines them. Since that system includes taxes as an absolutely essential part, the idea of a *prima facie* property right in one’s pretax income—an income that could not exist without a tax-supported government—is meaningless. There is no reality, except as a bookkeeping figure, to the pretax income that each of us initially “has,” which the government must be equitable in taking from us. (36)

Joseph Schumpeter (1991) adds to this view of no taxes/no state in *The Economics and Sociology of Capitalism*:

> Taxes not only helped to create the state. They help to form it. The tax system was the organ the development of which entailed the other organs. Tax bill in hand, the state penetrated the private economies and won increasing dominion over them” (108).

The state, like any other agency, has basic needs that must be fulfilled or it could not function: Workers, buildings, a police force, an army, a bureaucracy, etc. Taxes are the means from which such necessities are organized and maintained. Most libertarians today would agree with the basic premises of the rationale laid out here;
the role of the state, first and foremost, to secure the legitimacy of private property. The existence of a military is also part of that “limited” goal (protecting private property). Other libertarians might add to the list things like public education, roads and a balanced monetary policy.

Libertarian-minded economists like Milton Friedman have recognized the necessity of the state if for no other reason than the maintenance of roads and defense. Yet Friedman supposed that these two services could be provided in a purely technocratic manner without creating a “big government.” Ideally, the state would take some taxes and would create defense and transportation networks without creating vast bureaucracies. I find this to be unlikely not because the state would use these bastions as foot-holds from which they could wriggle their way into all affairs, as Friedman believed it would, but because of the very real and practical necessity for more than a small technocratic state overseeing with all of the delicacy they could possibly muster some little projects here and there.

The fact that Friedman acknowledges the importance for the functioning of the market that the state creates and maintains transit and defense is unresolved within the libertarian literature. The simple existence of private property, for example, necessitates an entity capable of protecting property while simultaneously having the right to exercise acts of violence in protecting it. Whether the protection of this property comes in the form of a formalized national-state or a localized militia will certainly affect the lives of those living under such systems. But it remains a matter of fact that to protect private property a formalized apparatus is needed (which could both use sheet force of tradition to do it) and this is not due to either a luxury or an accident.
Even if we were to assume that the existence of a piece of land with an arbitrary line drawn around it was legitimate, we must know that the line was neither created by nature nor maintained solely by the owner once created. To the first point, while some natural boundaries perceivably exist, their character is rarely definitive enough to constitute boundaries which would be automatically recognizable to a foreigner, much less be absolutely respected by every passerby—the dark ages of western European history were, in fact, dominated by roaming hoards continually sacking and pillaging one another’s villages. To the second point, the maintenance of a piece of land, were it not for the management of title, deed, survey cartography, etc., would either be wholly unrecognizable to everyone but the owner—and perhaps even to the owner—and contestable in a way that would inevitably result in disputes with neighbors.

The point here is that, without the state, the notion and practice of private ownership over land would be impossible to maintain—regardless of natural rights. And beyond land, by extension, this concept applies to all owned goods; all property. Herein lies an intrinsic connection between property, the very basis for commercial exchange and the state. The state creates, defines and maintains the legitimacy of the exchangeable commodity. This is why, as Anthony Giddens (1987) writes, “there has been no capitalist society which has not also been industrialized and which has not been a nation-state” (135). Giddens goes on to further attack the state/market distinction:

The existence of a distinct sphere of ‘the economy’ involves the insulation of the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’ from one another. Such insulation may take various concrete forms and mistakes that are often made in characterizing it must be avoided. (ibid.)
As such, Giddens continues, “it is misleading to speak too readily of the ‘separation’ of the economy and polity since, compared with class-divided societies, these are more closely connected than ever before” (ibid.).

It should be further noted that the state does not play an impartial role in maintaining or upholding the rights to private property, either. There is nothing in nature that would say that if someone builds something with their hands, that it shouldn’t belong to them, for example (Locke 2003). But our legal system assumes this alienation to be perfectly reasonable. In the first analysis, workers build commodities for their employers, but they do so in exchange for a wage and, in the end, the capitalist who arranged this chain of events gets to keep the surplus product generated from the laborers’ work. This isn’t a natural relationship between laborer and capitalist, it is a relationship between one who owns only his labor and can only exchange that labor for a wage in a capitalist market economy and a capitalist who owns the means of production. While the laws of nation-states are built around the naturalness of this concept, around a laborers “right to work,” in historical reality, the concept cannot be conceived of as being “natural” by any extent of the imagination. As Antonio Gramsci (2010) reminds us,

> it is asserted that economic activity belongs to civil society and that the State must not intervene to regulate it. But since in actual reality civil society and State are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez-faire too is a form of State “regulation,” introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means. It is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts. (160)

> ... 

From what has been said thus far, it should be clear that the idea that there is a separation between the state and the market is a little fuzzy. Without a state to define and protect private property there would be—as there never has been, as Polanyi
reminds us—a society dependent on market economy. The state makes and controls distribution in the market at the most basic level, i.e. ownership rights.

Yet, the state within a democratic society is also susceptible to some extent to the will of its voting public. There is also room for outsiders to join or otherwise affect the body of policies which determine and protect private property. This is where Poulantzas (1973) conceded a “relative autonomy” existing between states and markets—between agents and structure in the realm of politics (337). I agree with this point, but it shouldn’t be overstated. First of all, a relative autonomy might be seen as existing between any two interactive forces—between a parent and child, for example; between an employee and a corporation; we might even see a relative autonomy as existing within the logic of the market itself—cooperatives and fair trade organizations might be good examples of this. We might recognize, rather blithely, but nonetheless, that all relationships are relationships with relatively autonomous objects. Second, as noted above, the distinction between the two (the state on the one hand, the market on the other) is ambiguous; how might we see an autonomy as existing between one and the same thing?

In the end, we must, I feel, recognize that the state and the market are two elements of the same thing. Any distinction, as noted above, should be seen as similar to a distinction of variegation between colors running across the entire spectrum—the difference between the state and the market is as subtle as the difference between royal blue, federal blue and oxford blue. The autonomy of the state actor is superfluous for the analysis of capitalist marketplaces.

Though there are people within the population working outside of the direct dominion of the state, there is nobody in our country who isn’t reliant on it for its infrastructure—defense, policing, roads, schools, and so on. But because the majority
in capitalist society have only their labor to sell, they have little time or money to dedicate to their own interests. The wealthy, who create their wealth by managing and orchestrating production or consumption or some function between the two, who buy the labor power of a worker who has no other commodity to sell, often has plenty of disposable income or credit and certainly more disposable time to dedicate to securing himself and his goods through the state apparatus. This manifests itself most obviously when the two meet in the courtroom—i.e. while one party might arrive with a team of lawyers, the other, perhaps, is left seeking her rights pro se. This constitutes an obvious point of bias, as legal critics noticed a long time ago (Uslaner 2010), because maintaining ownership over a property or a right is not as easy or clear cut as it first seems. Titles—and every owned good maintains its paperwork in some way, which is even true for the humblest of laborers who has to provide a social security number, perhaps a birth certificate, a passport and so forth, often for the simplest of matters—are almost never entirely clear, nor deeds or contracts, or any other legal form. So the paperwork is all subject to interpretation and, as such, the one who can afford to dedicate himself, or better yet, to dedicate an entire staff to the study of law and to the study of the language of law, or to rent their work by contract, is in a better position when they step into a courtroom.

If we return now to the ideas presumed by economism, we can see that, without engaging in the debate, or even acknowledging that one exists, Stiglitz’s definition of economics operates on the pretense that ownership is natural and that people make choices as to how they are going to allocate their time and resources into securing the goods that they want from the market—or have the actual ability to make choices at all. But, as we have seen, the market economy is an historical phenomena; it is a
historical contingency—one original to our time; it does not and cannot, exist as a
natural state of affairs. The spread of the market economy around the world as it
happens today is proof enough of this. The market economy is the product of the rise
of national states and the creation of private property and the protection of such
property thereafter.

Stiglitz’s definition buries a number of philosophical assumptions leap-frogging
the reader into his foregone conclusions. A society, in the sense presented in his
definition above, is merely data points within a set boundary and we are to believe
that the act of production is an inevitable activity. What is left to be studied is merely
the distribution of the products of a society’s labor which is determined by the choices
being made by the individuals, firms, etc. making up its population. It follows, too,
that the total social product of a society can be understood as supply and the choices
being made by its members can be understood as demand. If we can accept these
economistic pretenses, we can also understand that the supply of goods available is
not capable and may never be capable, of fully satiating the demands of the
population—a economistic idea of scarcity is embedded in this definition and is
evoked shortly hereafter:

Scarcity figures prominently in economics; choices matter because resources
are scarce. For most of us, our limited income forces us to make choices. We
cannot afford everything we might want. Spending more on rent leaves less
available for clothes and entertainment. Getting a sunroof on a new car may
mean forgoing leather seats to stay within a fixed budget. Limited income is
not the only reason we are forced to make trade-offs. Time is also a scarce
resource and even the wealthiest individual must decide what expensive toy
to play with each day. When we take time into account, we realize scarcity is
a fact of life for everyone. (Stiglitz and Walsh 2006, 7)

In his introductory textbook on macroeconomics, N. Gregory Mankiw (2011) iterates
a similar approach to the conception of scarcity:

The management of society’s resources is important because resources are
scarce. Scarcity means that society has limited resources and therefore
cannot produce all the goods and services people wish to have. Just as a
household cannot give every member everything he or she wants, a society cannot give every individual the highest standard of living to which he or she might aspire. … **Economics** is the study of how society manages its scarce resources. In most societies, resources are allocated not by a single central planner but through the combined actions of millions of households and firms. (4)

It should be of spectacular interest to modern onlookers to the field that scarcity still makes up the basis of modern economic studies. While this logic made sense in the 19th century and perhaps even in the first half of the 20th century, the modern American household would be difficult to describe as wanting. In fact, resources are not just abundant in our society, we are overflowing with stuff. The irony of this proposition was not lost on Marshall Sahlins (2003):

> Modern capitalist societies, however richly endowed, dedicate themselves to the proposition of scarcity. Inadequacy of economic means is the first principle of the world’s wealthiest peoples…. The market-industrial system institutes scarcity, in a manner completely unparalleled and to a degree nowhere else approximated. Where production and distribution are arranged through the behavior of prices and all livelihoods depend on getting and spending, insufficiency of material means becomes the explicit, calculable starting point of all economic activity. (3–4)

Scarcity in modern American society cannot be attributed to nature; but it can be attributed to capitalism and market economy. This paper will operate on the premise that it is precisely the market economy created by the national state’s protection of private property in the first place that creates the environment in which economists like Stiglitz can conjecture their systems of analyses into existence. Given what has already been said here, it should be clear that the premises taken as a given under the auspices of economism—choice, scarcity, market exchange, etc.—are highly suspect from even the most modest of critical perspectives. Where economism dictates that the structural underpinning of market economy is the natural “propensity to truck, barter and exchange,” and this natural occurrence is taken as a structured framework from which to derive the field of economics, this dissertation operates on the claim
that the basis for the market economy is not to be found in nature; it stems from the modern national state’s policies regarding property rights.

CONCLUSION

While many economists have contented themselves with squabbling over the semantic definitions of their field’s discursive terminologies, this chapter has laid out a basic framework from which we might, instead, begin a discussion of market economy as rising with private property rights being legitimized by—and simultaneously secured by—the national state apparatus. While we are constrained here to include only a simplified and superficial account of the rise of capitalist society, of national states, of market economy and the like, suffice it to say and to reiterate Giddens’ point, “there has been no capitalist society which has not also been industrialized and which has not been a nation-state” (op cit).

This claim is an important one, no matter how unfamiliar it may be to the dominant and popular discourses of today. The following pages take the premise as axiomatic that market economy, an economy where even the most basic forms of reproduction have to be approached through the marketplace, to be bought and sold as commodities, is, first of all, a relatively new phenomenon and, second, its origins are not to be found in human nature or natural laws, but the invention of the national state apparatus and its continually evolving designations of private property rights.

The following chapter seeks to elaborate on this topic by demonstrating the continued expansion of the enclosures and therefore the expansion of market economy, by way of intellectual property rights.
Having established in the previous chapter a basic framework from which to understand the origins of market economy as being, not a natural affair, but the result of legal frameworks regarding private property rights and the enforcement therein by a national state, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the state’s continuing role in expanding the enclosures to encompass goods that are difficult to see as tangible. Here, we introduce the reader to the concept of the “New Enclosures” while expanding upon the theoretical space utilized in this dissertation to understand the ways in which the market economy expands through the continuously evolving legal fiction of private property.
Chapter 2
The New Enclosures

“… today as in the past, it is multinational, a close relation of the capitalism operated by the great Indies Companies and the monopolies of all sizes, official or unofficial, which existed then and which were exactly analogous in principle to the monopolies of today.”

Fernand Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century (1985)

“… ‘juridical individuals’ (persons, corporations, etc.) must be able to approach each other on an equal footing in exchange, as sole and exclusive owners of commodities with the freedom to buy from and sell to whomsoever they please. For such a condition to exist supposes not only a solid legal foundation to exchange but also the power to sustain private property rights and enforce contracts. This power, of course, resides in ‘the state’.”

David Harvey, The Limits to Capital (2006)

In 1996, just outside of Oakland, California, 214 Girl Scouts gathered at the Diablo Day Camp to enjoy their summer together. Being a non-profit organization, however, the Girl Scouts had little money to spend on frivolities like royalty payments to multi-nation corporations. So our young scouts were reduced to learning the Macarena—a dance craze which had inexplicably swept the nation that summer—in silence. What a sight this must have been! Hundreds of little girls swinging their hips, crossing their arms and spinning in unison to the sound of nothing more than their own shuffling feet for fear of being sued by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (or, ASCAP).

Around the same time, Polo, either an association which organizes a sport or a fragrance and clothing line by Ralph Lauren, battled one another in a series of infamous legal exchanges when the U.S. Polo Association updated their magazine to reflect the elitist and pompous air that had always been a part of their sport; and which had become a key ingredient of Ralph Lauren’s logo image. Lauren sued the
U.S. Polo Association’s official magazine and, in 1999, won the shuttering of the publication—though it was brought back to life in 2001, with the caveat of having to print a tagline under the title asserting its lack of affiliation with Lauren’s brand.

Odd as they may seem, these types of “property” issues have been a major aspect of western life since the very beginnings of the industrial revolution. The steam engine, for example, was originally invented by a man named Thomas Savery in 1698 (though, variations of Savery’s “invention” had been around since the beginning of the 17th century), but was improved to the point of usefulness by Thomas Newcomen in 1711. Half a century after Newcomen’s contributions to the steam engine, however, James Watt, an instrument maker for the University of Glasgow, while borrowing heavily from the ideas of others, improved the Newcomen steam engine by adding a separate condenser canister filled with water that helped cool the engine’s piston housing. While Watt is usually credited with the invention of the steam engine, the truth is that he only improved it. Nonetheless, Watt was able to secure a patent but made little attempt to produce the engine on a scale necessary for the industrialization of western living. Watt, instead, sat on the patent for decades; suing anyone who used anything even similar (and some whose inventions were far superior) to his engine. It was only when Watt’s patent expired that the industrial revolution gathered steam.

There are a host of interesting things to study within these three brief cases—not the least of which are political and economic, social and psychological and certainly much could be gained by analyzing them from the geographer’s or anthropologist’s lens. Our interest here, however, is in that process of extracting rents on nothing more than thoughts.

In regards to intellectual property, the issue of ownership and copyright is controversial. To see why here’s an example, in the case of patents, if one person
discovers a new use for some chemical agent and patents that invention, then anyone else who, independently, discovers the same thing is prohibited from using that discovery, even though the discovery was wrought through that individual's own effort and resources. It is clear to see why someone can't simply yell “theft!” at every copyright dilemma. Economists call the act of sitting on a patent or copyright so as to gain profit instead of producing and competing within an open market “rent-seeking” and it has interesting manifestations for modern discourse on ownership, exchange and economy.

The notion of rent, as defined by most economists, is often used to demonstrate a quality of nature; that some resource is scarce and that, as such, the owner can draw a fee from a non-owner for its use. There are a number of problems with this depiction of rents, not the least of which is the concept of scarcity acting as a catalyst for the extraction of rents. A car or an apartment are not rentable because they are in scarce quantities. Many times, whole neighborhoods of houses might lie dormant, cars might sit abandoned, etc., without ever being sold or rented. Conversely, others may draw terminal payments or even rents. Furthermore, one might also rent a movie over the internet for only a short length of time which could be lent in perpetuity, or simply given out for no cost, without ever depleting it as a resource. We might note, then, that rents are extracted, not based on the quantity of some good that is available and therefore not on the basis of scarcity, but on a legally recognized arrangement between two parties stipulating the usage of some good for a given period of time at which point the good is expected to be ceded, returned, or renewed for another cycle. But the quantity need not be scarce. In fact it can exist in number anywhere between zero and infinity. Rent, then, represents a form of payment in which a commodity is
being sold while the seller retains ownership and the renter has some partial right to the commodity’s use without the right to retain ownership or transfer it as she sees fit.

While we are familiar on at least some level with the concept of rent as it pertains to an apartment we let from a landlord or a car we borrow from a rental agency, there are a number of ways in which rent presents itself in a rather unobvious fashion: As when, for example, it is seen as a less substantial form of ownership than ownership proper. That is, oftentimes, renting, as opposed to owning—and this can most easily been seen in the case of housing—is often seen to be socially less distinguished than outright ownership. For one to “own” their home (psychologically speaking) is far more significant (socially speaking) than one who merely “rents”.

We might further problematize the concept of rent by illustrating the existence of non-corporeal, intangible objects. This might be most easily seen in the fairly recent development of digital media and the extension of “property rights” to protect it. A person may, in virtually every way, own some good indefinitely, but might not be allowed to sell or trade or reproduce that good as s/he sees fit. In this way, the person only partially owns a good while some other party has definite ownership. This, according to the aforementioned definition, constitutes rent; however, when applied to real cases, this conception will most likely seem foreign. When purchasing an MP3 on iTunes, for example, without the ability to transfer, trade, sell, or duplicate the MP3, there is no actual ownership and thus the purchase of an MP3 constitutes a mere rent payment. By understanding rents in this light, we fundamentally change the concept of rent; and I find this frame of reference to be far more enlightening than simply attaching the term “rent” arbitrarily and (often) pejoratively to certain, but not all, commodities.
We might further note that it is in the best interest of capitalists to seek to valorize capital without paying the costs for its production or reproduction. Put another way: It is in the best interest of capitalists to capture payments and rents and to leave the costs of production to others. This most often manifests itself in the case of externalities—where the costs of production, be they environmental or in the physical necessity for fixed capital or otherwise, are absorbed by someone other than the capitalist that captures profit while making the costs someone else’s problem. But by being able to capture rents as opposed to receiving terminal payments for the transfer of goods, the rentier class as a whole has the capacity to determine prices outside of the realm of the market economy; and, thus, behaves in a strikingly similar manner to that of the mercantilist who cashes in on the (governmentally secured) disparities between markets.

In their 2009 paper, titled Modern Rent-Bearing Capital: New Enclosures, Knowledge-Rent and the Reproduction of Valueless Commodities, Teixeira and Rotta argued quite succinctly that the laws which protect these “knowledge-commodities,” commodities which cannot be sold but only rented (e.g., iTunes’ MP3s), constitute a new form of the types of enclosures discussed in Chapter 1. Teixeira and Rotta go on to say that “knowledge-commodities require huge amounts of highly skilled labor-time, steeply increasing their cost. However, most of these special commodities—such as computer software, chemical formulae and engineering secrets—can easily be copied, despite the fact that their first-time production presupposes the investment of large sums of money” (Teixeira and Rotta 2009, 6). In that these commodities require no labor for their reproduction, they are, definitively immaterial and therefore not scarce in supply. It follows that the price of these immaterial commodities can only be maintained by juridical means.
Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a shift in conceptions of productivity and accumulation. Krippner (2011) and others have come to see finance as the emergent driver of accumulation while Arrighi (2010) and others have adopted the Braudelian conception of the *longue durée* in noting that the growth of finance has acted as a historical marker for hegemonic decline.

While the role of finance in capitalist society is certainly interesting and deserving of study, the financial determinism that has arisen from these lines of study is unfortunate (though this determinism is not always embedded in works by the previously mentioned authors, it has certainly become a major component of the popular narrative). It has entered into the popular imagination that (somehow) finance has displaced production. But this is obfuscation; and it is no less problematic than the notion that robots have displaced labor in the production process. Both notions trivialize work—in fact both make it seem as if capitalism isn’t a mode of production at all—and make it appear as if the problems being experienced by the so-called “third-world” are the result of a lack of knowledge or skill. The US’s comparative wealth in this line of reasoning rationalizes the massive income disparities as being the result of the US’s superior skills or thoughts; all attributes which serve as indicators of a higher level of development, we are told.

For nearly two decades, Kevin Phillips has argued that we should perceive the changes in the US economy since around the election of Reagan as a renewal of “mercantilism.” Phillips (2009) notes that while “Adam Smith would have been amazed at the new financial services sector and its close interconnection with government, politics and power; Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the French architect of seventeenth-century mercantilism, would simply have smiled” (61). Phillips also
draws allusions between mercantilists of old and modern US capitalism: “The Dutch
of the eighteenth century polarized into a nation of rentiers in which the wealthy lived
off interest while industry, fishing and shipping declined” (ibid., 24-25). Michael
Perelman (2003) has echoed something similar: “Corporations attempt to extend the
boundaries of their intellectual property rights in much the way imperialist nations
wage war in an effort to increase their territory” (310).

While the study of finance and the financialization of the US economy are
important topics, the notion of a “financialization” of US economy buries the lead, as
it were. Finance cannot produce anything in and of itself. Money has no natural
property within it that causes the existence of an iPad. If this were the case, all we
would need to produce more of the things we wanted was more finance. And if this
was the case, why would anyone in the world produce anything at all? Clearly the rise
of finance has had tremendous implications for the organization of production, but it
is this production that should concern us.

There are no shortages of examples of the mercantilist bent within the current of
US-led production and exchange. Take, just for one, Apple’s production of
technology—raking in over $400,000 per employee (Silverman 2012) (more than
Goldman Sachs, Exxon Mobile or Google, according to the New York Times [Duhigg
and Bradsher 2012]). While employing only a third of the amount of people as that of
GM, Apple is one of the most unproductive (in terms of physical products they as an
organization have physically constructed: the have farmed out the vast majority of
physical labor required to produce their branded goods) and, yet, it is one of the most
profitable companies in the world. Though Apple’s success is driven by their control
over patents, copyrights, trademarks, etc., other companies have managed to obtain
this type of market privilege even without intellectual property rights: It has become
almost a cliché by now to mention the mercantilistic tendencies of Wal-Mart. As interesting as these cases are, I would like to instead focus on the much less apparent domestic issues regarding housing which have many of the same idiosyncratic characteristics as the international markets, but are (perhaps) more approachable given all of the recent attention given to the housing market.

Lennar Homes might stand as a good example. A Fortune 500 company and the nation’s second largest builder (constructing homes in 17 states, according to their website), Lennar also owns its own financing branch, the Universal American Mortgage Company—in fact, Lennar performs all of the activities involve in the production and exchange of their housing: financing of development; construction of housing; real estate brokering; and financing of sales. Lennar has armies of employees arranging permits, creating master plans and architectural schemas, suing competitors, lobbying government for billions in taxpayer money, obtaining privileged access to resources like lumber, and so on.

But Lennar is no anomaly. As David Harvey frequently notes, finance often funds both the developer and the homebuyer. We might extend Harvey’s insight to see banks acting as arbitrageurs, shifting funds from space to space to artificially exacerbate, or even create, disparities between markets and regional incomes. In this way, financiers operate as something like “super-merchants,” able to capture profits from disparities they have created between markets without taking on any of the risk endemic to the sale of tangible, real goods. In this way, the financier can drive price increases in the market while simultaneously capturing the inflation they themselves

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1 See also, “In truth, however, value is here the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value and thus valorizes itself independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorization is therefore self-valorization . . . By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or at least lays golden eggs” (Marx 1990, 1:255).
have generated; they further legitimize the new (inflated) prices by providing the means for a potential consumer to effectively realize their demand.

We should note, however, that our super-merchants have not bypassed the process of production in any way: They have organized it and they have reaped the benefits. The fact that they are organizing those who do the work without doing the work themselves isn’t any more or less surprising under U.S. mercantilism than what Apple does; and does largely without the financing mechanisms. Focusing on the moving of money—looking at the smoke and mirrors while ignoring the magician himself—might daze and confuse us but it doesn’t substantively change the end-product: the house, the iPad, and so on.

We can extend this analysis even further if we add on the rentier component. While it is true that many households own homes, the fact is that they no longer represent the majority. For those of us who are familiar with studies on housing (and, perhaps, even for those who aren’t), it is taken as axiomatic that more housing is owned now than was at the turn of the 20th century. But we have to remember that at the turn of the 20th century, there were no mortgages or, at least, they weren’t as substantial as to interminably affect ownership, proper.

In 1902, a mortgage may have lasted as long as five years, while the majority of mortgages were actually for long periods of time. But with New Deal restructuring after the Great Depression, mortgage terms jumped to 10, 15, 25 and now even as long as 30 years. As Michael Stone (2006) noted, this shift “created the illusion of ownership through the reality of debt” (83). While it is often said that home ownership peaked at around the 70 percent range in the past decade, the truth is that less than 30 percent owned their homes without an attached mortgage—at the turn of the 20th century, on the other hand, at least 50 percent owned their homes free-and-
clear. While there are certainly differences between renting and mortgaging (while a mortgagee might be able to cash in on “equity” at the top of the market and may lose everything at the bottom, a renter remains relatively unaffected, for example), there are also a number of similarities. Nonetheless, though it is tempting, using the terms as synonyms would be highly problematic.

Figure 1 — Homes Owned Free & Clear in the US. Source: U.S. Census.

CONCLUSIONS

Elaborating on the conclusions of the previous chapter—most importantly on the concept that the state itself and not natural laws of human interaction are the starting-point for the market economy—this chapter has sought to expand the argument to demonstrate the state’s continued role in expanding conceptions of private property rights far beyond those that might be considered justifiable by classical economistic notions like scarcity and the pre-theoretical concept of supply and demand interactions as constituting the prevailing causal actor in market pricing mechanics.

Having thus far proposed arguments against the fundamental components of economistic ideology, we will now turn to historicize the depictions used by planners
beginning in the 20th century in order to understand how economism came to be fundamentally embedded in the discipline. This will be useful later as we begin to delve into a complete framework for analysis used to study the Puerto Rican community in Humboldt Park, Chicago.
CHAPTER 3 SUMMARY

The essay now turns to planning-specific analyses and seeks to interrogate the relationships between structural and ecological interpretations of urban change within early planning theory. This chapter ties ecological ideas of spontaneous order to economistic claims of naturally balancing economic systems and western conceptions of personal responsibility and choice.
Chapter 3
Contextualizing a Changing City

Although the interpretations of human ecology were highly deterministic and often predicated on dubious assumptions, this study can nonetheless benefit from their recapitulation. The apparently commonsensical qualities of their theories will prove valuable in constructing an understanding of how social and economic changes are manifested in the spatial arrangement of cities generally speaking and, more specifically, illuminate how these changes affect the metamorphoses of neighborhoods over time.

The vaunted ideas of spontaneous ecological order within cities provide key insights into modern presumptions within urban studies as their analyses delve into, for example, ethnic and racial conflicts, segregation, processes of assimilation and so forth. As we will see in subsequent chapters, these issues are essential for the examination of Puerto Rican ethnic enclaves and their struggles for space. Although not clearly stated by the urban ecologists, the theories underlying their conceptions of urban development take the same assumptions proposed by economists as basic axiomatic truths. For one such example, at the forefront of their analyses lies the western conceptions of personal responsibility—a particularly problematic conception as it allows analysts and commentators to rationalize all sorts of social ills as mere manifestations of psychological problems of individualized depravity and immorality—no matter how often or how far away such problems reproduce themselves, systemic problems at the core of their assumptions are seen to be the problems of individuals.

\[\text{\footnotesize An excellent review and critique of this topic can be found in Harvey, 2007.}\]
To the degree that sociology is recognizable in the works of the ecologists, the field is taken to be little more than the study of agglomerations of individuals. And where these individuals interact (and individuals interacting constitute the only recognizable social activity), they are capable only of improving or corrupting one another toward or away from an assumed ideal type which is intimated but never fully articulated. Within this framework, it becomes commonsensical to see groups as abstaining from the deleterious consequences of these “social” interactions either by barricading themselves against the forces of corruption in (white) suburbs or fleeing from invading corruptors (any grouping of people with a complexion darker than white) and allowing their former neighborhoods to succumb to the immanent desolation and decay caused by disinvestment. In this manner, neighborhoods once thought of as prosperous are easily reducible to the rationalized imaginary of blighted inner-city slum and displacement; as a result, slum clearance becomes an inevitable, looming threat for those caught up in it.

**Structured Interpretations of Neighborhood Change**

The Chicago School of Urban Sociology interested itself in the positive prescriptions of the nature of cities. As such, the field of human ecology, in its heyday, consumed itself with studying the environment “as is” without the apparent bias that would inevitably come from critical works on social and economic relations therein. With these assumptions in hand, Ernest Burgess concluded that the further intensification of industrial growth created structural pressures that caused the city to expand in successive sequence (Park and Burgess 1984, 50–51). This formulation, known as the “concentric zone” model, posited that the city operated in a continuously blooming fashion; as newcomers came to the city, long-time residents would move outward from the core.
In this model, put simply, the least successful at any given time would live in the periphery of the core and when they would eventually find their way, socially and economically, they would move outward—this process would continually churn the poor (as they improved their economic standing) out from the center into more and more suburban areas. As a simple illustration for his model, Burgess created the (now famous) diagram pictured below.

Figure 2 — The Concentric Zone Model.

Burgess elaborated on this concept by noting that, during the continual movement outward from the core, each zone would experience a temporary period of equilibrium (succession) before being pushed into an outer ring by other newcomers (invasion):

The tendency of each inner zone to extend its area by the invasion of the next outer zone. This aspect of expansion may be called succession, a process which has been studied in detail in plant ecology. (ibid., 50)

In her dissertation Interpreting Neighborhood Change, Janet Smith (1998) gives us an excellent summation of Burgess’ conception of a city’s “natural” pattern of development,
The continual process of pushing (invasion and succession) was assumed to produce “natural areas” (neighborhoods) in the city that had “different mores, attitudes and degrees of civic interest.” (73)

In the ecological order, individuals are integrated into their social strata which they are then bound to and move outwards with. A specific social and cultural context is created by neighborhood members’ relative resemblance to one another as they are in both the same socio-economic strata and vicinity at any given time. This neighborhood, then, comes to constitute a “community” bounded by space and time.

Robert D. McKenzie (1925) conceives of these communities as homogeneous—composed of clusters of people from the same race, class, occupation, and so on. This way of seeing helped to rationalize the long standing apartheid system of residential segregation that plagues American cities today. Burgess stressed the point that, as with the Black Belt in Chicago, boundaries were “permeable”—that is, residents live where they live because they wanted to, voluntarily. According to urban ecologists from the University of Chicago, spatial segregation resulted in harmonious relationships and therefore created an orderly, spontaneous social order. The way that neighborhoods were organized was a mere representation of the optimal order of human settlement more generally. Periods of “invasion” were understood as periods of ecological crisis; as periods of instability and unbalance. Periods of “succession,” on the other hand, were constituted by the rehabilitation of social relations within a neighborhood. With these theories in hand, the authors of The City (1925) similarly defined the boundaries of neighborhoods as being natural; different kinds of people would move in and out, but, by the end of the invasion-succession process, the boundaries would eventually re-equilibrate into a stable and natural state. Smith explains how,

In the human ecologist’s framework, the social order and the physical space of the city were congruent. Even though the economic system was fluid, it was also presumed that spatial patterns were maintained over time, keeping
different groups of people naturally segregated. From their perspective social
differentiation was evidence of economic progress and spatial segregation
was necessary for social progress. (ibid., 85)

For the Chicago School, the city was conceived of as a natural space of differentiation
and competition. As cities grew and as industries competed with one another, so too
did workers. Workers would distinguish themselves from one another by acquiring
new skills and filling niches—that is, empty voids in the market that could be filled.
We can therefore see that workers and therefore the nature of the economy itself,
would provide a social good naturally and without intervention. The division of labor
in capitalist society became ever more specialized and, thus, the functional
differentiation of work became fundamental to the urbanization process itself.

From this classical perspective, workers earn wages according to their abilities
and capabilities; and this is taken to be just as natural as their organic conceptions of
city growth patterns. Importantly, and this was true both for the nature of the city and
the nature of human competition, these natural results were taken to be the best and
most equitable and should, therefore, be allowed to work their magic without
intervention.

These two conceptions of the city were taken in tandem. On the one hand, the
city’s marketplace would naturally apportion housing to groups throughout the
income strata while each individual worker would locate himself into his correct
social strata. After all, they felt, it is only natural and fair for the more intelligent or
stronger man (the best adapted from the perspective of biotic determinists) to be able
to get a higher paying job. He should, according to this classical purview, be
compensated only by his individual productivity and merit.

Through the assimilation process every minority should, by their own volition
and after only a short period of incubation (assuming they were hard working), be
able to move up the economic ladder merely through the providence of the free market. This was seen as true no matter if the worker was male or female; whether they were Black, Jewish, Irish, Mexican, Puerto Rican; or whether they were a newly arrived immigrant of any race or ethnicity—neighborhoods were available for all groups and the potentiality for niche-creation in the marketplace was, just like the city itself, capable of exponential growth. In the interim, former agricultural workers were adapting to the workings of industrial factories and city-living (Stokols 2012).

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The concept of “personal responsibility” (being applied to both the individual and his place in the market at one and the same time) is an important one here, but it certainly is not a new one. Under this rubric, each individual is free to either succeed or fail of his own volition—and the concept of consumer choice is a logical extension of the personal responsibility ideal. If the logic of choice fails, even if only for a moment, “it is not the fault of the system,” as Abraham Lincoln (1905) once put it, “but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune” (250).

Competition in the marketplace creates fairness, it is said. It creates an equality of opportunity demonstrable by outcome—whatever is, is what is supposed to be. Meanwhile, inequality is a natural part of the functional differentiation that result from this competition. For the urban ecologist, this is how the city was able to modernize. Individuals needed to compete economically with one another and, if they were self-determined, they would advance in socio-economic status. They would then have an opportunity to move to a new neighborhood with people of their new class and type of occupation. Through these entirely natural mechanisms, the city, the firm and the individual were steadily evolving and progressing.
Classical political economy helped to validate this conception with the logic of the pricing mechanism. When a certain quantity of goods meets with a certain quantity of demand in a freely functioning marketplace, the end result should be a price level in a similar state of equilibrium as that of the city itself. The convenience of the combined premises of urban equilibrium and market equilibrium did not escape the work of Robert Park (1984):

The city cannot fix land values and we leave to private enterprise, for the most part, the task of determining the city’s limits and the location of its residential and industrial districts. Personal tastes and convenience vocational and economic interests, infallibly tend to, segregate and thus to classify the populations of great cities. In this way the city acquires an organization and distribution of population which is neither designed nor controlled. (5)

While the idea of balance and equilibrium existing in nature is not new, its application as a principle for understanding the physics of a city had never been as heavily formalized as it was by the Chicago School’s human ecologists. But the self-fulfilling element of this logic (that whatever is, is supposed to be), for me, constitutes a transparent attempt at rationalizing power structures and inequality. In terms of economics, this idea went too far even for Alfred Marshall (1898), the father of neoclassical economics, who denounced those who had interpreted Adam Smith’s work in a similar way:

many of his followers with less philosophic insight and in some cases with less real knowledge of the world, argued boldly that whatever is, is right…. For a while they fascinated the world by their romantic accounts of the flawless proportions of that “natural” organization of industry which had grown from the rudimentary germ of self-interest; each man selecting his daily work with the sole view of getting for it the best pay he could, but with the inevitable result of choosing that in which he could be of most service to others. They argued for instance that, if a man had a talent for managing business, he would be surely led to use that talent for the benefit of mankind: that meanwhile a like pursuit of their own interests would lead others to provide for his use such capital as he could turn to best account; and that his own interest would lead him so to arrange those in his employment that everyone should do the highest work of which he was capable and no other…

The romantic subtility of this “natural organization of industry” had a fascination for earnest and thoughtful minds; it prevented them from seeing and removing the evil that was intertwined with the good in the changes that were going on around them; and it hindered them from inquiring whether
many even of the broader features of modern industry may not be transitional, having indeed good work to do in their time, as the caste system had in its time … . (325–326)

For those who seek to use economism to rationalize their predilection to blame systemic problems on individuals, to paraphrase the quote of Marshall used above, the self-fulfilling prophecy of spontaneous order can be used to legitimize nearly any evil. People want, the argument goes, better access to jobs, parks, houses and services and they should be willing to leave their homes and communities whenever it is convenient so that they can crawl up the housing ladder or move up through the income-strata by continually finding new and better employment. If they—through impudence or laziness or merely preference—decided to stay where they were, it was their choice and so should be respected and left alone. Similarly, if they are improving their station in life, it is said, they shouldn’t be kept from the things that they are doing (e.g. moving to suburbia, gentrifying whole neighborhoods, etc.). It is what is happening, so it must be what people want.

Robert Park, to a large degree, seemed to have shared this ideological predisposition with the economist Friedrich von Hayek. Hayek (1978), himself, refuted the idea that organizations would ever be capable of scientifically and rationally managing and designing an economy that would ever result in a “Great Society.” He thought that it was impossible for an individual or an organization to acquire full knowledge over the factors of production, consumption and distribution. For Hayek, centralized decision-making is not only pretentious, but also antithetical to progress and liberty. Institutions, if allowed to function at their liberty, where individuals each act upon their knowledge in a system of abstract relations and interactions, giving one another signals about what to produce and what not to produce, would not only function better, but would also protect individual freedoms
in the process. Great things in society, as Hayek (1967) argues, “result of human action but not of human design.”

We might now turn to Homer Hoyt who revised Burgess’ concentric zones model into one emphasizing a sectoral formulation of cities. Hoyt (1999) also introduced the idea of “filtering” which meant that as higher income class people did better they would move “outward toward the periphery of the city” (116) in order to get better and bigger houses and, as they moved to the periphery, they would free-up the older and deteriorating housing stock they left behind in the city center.

This housing would then be passed-on to poorer populations. The quality of this housing was for the newcomers marginally better than previously and so they were seen to be advancing in their progression up through the housing ladder. Under the filtering theory, homes are seen almost solely as utilities; not as the center of one’s social life, nor as a centerpiece for a community that might be integral to improving an individual or household’s social standing. Moving to the periphery was just a matter of maximizing utility and efficiency for the household. Through the addition of this lens, ecological conversations shifted from houses to housing markets and housing values. As Janet Smith (1998) notes,

A key distinction of the filtering model is the transition from neighborhood as a site for community based on common ethnicity or race, to neighborhood as a “housing market” occupied by different income groups. Overall, the boundaries that produce neighborhoods in space—census tracts—remain unchanged as the contents are recast. In part, this transition may reflect a “retooling” in order to capture the rise in home buyers as mortgages became available. Not only is the previous preference for homeownership reinforced in the filtering model, it is elevated to a new form of status and tool to construct identity based on both social distance and economic distance. (144–145)

With Hoyt’s model, as opposed to those stemming from the Chicago School, the government could now be conceived of as an agent for social change—responsible for
assisting developers with construction of new housing in the periphery, on the one hand, while providing homeowners with mortgages so they could afford these newly constructed homes on the other hand—in order to smoothen the organic and natural process of filtering.

Yet, as noted above, Hoyt’s principles necessitated the existence of a rational economic man; opting where to live based purely on his own personal utility and marginal gains. So, yet again, depictions of the city ignored fundamental questions of race and how racism, rather than rationality, was institutionalized by the capitalist state. The FHA, for example, even though it was created to provide mortgages to low-income but otherwise qualified households, refused to offer mortgages to African Americans and other minority communities. Furthermore, the Savings and Loan industry’s Federal Home Loan Bank Board required member thrifts to practice exclusionary lending practices by arbitrarily exorcising perceivably ethnic communities from their lending areas—a process known as redlining.

Redlining was justifiable, according to policy-makers’ interpretation of Morton Grodzin’s work, as neighborhoods with too large of a minority population would cause whites to flee the area. The point at which whites would allow another ethnicity to live in their neighborhood before moving out, according to Grodzins (1957), represented a racial “tipping point” which was to be avoided if one sought to maintain a stable neighborhood.

This process of “tipping” proceeds more rapidly in some neighborhoods than in others. White residents who will tolerate a few Negroes as neighbors, either willingly or unwillingly, begin to move out when the proportion of Negroes in the neighborhood or apartment building passes a certain critical point. This “tip point” varies from city to city and from neighborhood to neighborhood. But for the vast majority of white Americans a tip point exists. Once it is exceeded, they will no longer stay among Negro neighbors. (34)

Smith (1998) notes:
Tipping clearly retains the human ecologist’s point of view, which assumes that invasion always will be followed by succession because two or more distinct social groups cannot occupy the same space. However, there is a clear order to the process: blacks must invade the space of whites. White people living together in a “white neighborhood” are expected to respond as a community, acting on sentiments and interests when threatened by the movement of blacks, while blacks are expected to be acting on sentiments and interests as they collectively seek out neighborhoods to invade. (155)

Policies built from and rationalized by these ideas worked to exclude minorities from white communities and created a dual housing market in the United States. Under New Deal policy structures, segregated blacks were forced into inner-city slums while new highways and continually expanding suburban developments were facilitated through tax deductions on home mortgage interest payments for the benefit of middle- and upper-class whites. As Gail Radford (1996) writes,

Much of the new scholarship on the history of state has probed the origins and outcomes of the tiered pattern of policy development …, particularly in relation to income-support programs where social security has become highly differentiated from so-called welfare programs. State activity with regard to housing manifests a similar structure, with an upper tier composed of mortgage guarantee programs, quasi-public secondary mortgage markets, highway building and tax subsidies that support private homeowners, businesses in the real estate sector (developers, contractors, brokers, etc.) and financial institutions. (2)

The ramifications of conceptual constructs and their underlying ideologies had significant repercussions throughout the history of the U.S., as Radford goes on to write,

Given that the mechanisms to reorganize the financial system used by New Deal housing programs were largely invisible to the average person, many core Democratic constituencies came to believe that they were not receiving any public help. Meanwhile, these groups perceived themselves to be paying for programs to benefit groups they regarded as less hardworking and deserving that themselves. As it worked out, then, most Americans came to credit the market and their own efforts for the increase in living standards that occurred after the New Deal. (ibid., 3)

Throughout the New Deal era, during the explosive urban growth of the so-called long boom, whites were put in a preferred and lucrative position to accumulate wealth through homeownership credits, access to cheap and reliable credit and other public subsidies. Blacks and other minority groups were, on the other hand, excluded
entirely from any possibility of achieving the self-realization potential proffered by human ecologists. Through the self-fulfilling logic of ecological providence, combined with the near invisibility of welfare provision in the form of subsidies to whites, as noted by Radford above, the nations’ emergent leisure class was blinded from the reality of the massive inequalities that were fueling their success.

The overtly racist activities of the state were also combined to facilitate capital accumulation in general as banks, realtors and developers profited from the massive suburban boom fortified by cheap credit and tax incentives. By emphasizing the human ecological ideas of difference and competition and by insisting on the neutrality and naturalness of homogeneity in outcomes, the state was able to facilitate the massive absorption of populations into urbanity (a necessary component for the expansion of capital) while maintaining the values and ideals of the dominant classes.

Anthony Downs (1994) attributed suburban development to the deterioration of housing in the urban core; as homes degraded, he felt, over time, the homes would trickle-down into the hands of low-income households—often times racial minorities—while wealthier populations would move to newer houses in the periphery. From the ecological perspective, individuals improved their standing within the housing ladder through this hand-me-down process. This process, known as housing life-cycle theory, explained that while homes age, they are either redeveloped or fall into disrepair. Whole neighborhoods—thus constituted as an agglomeration of individual houses—can fall into disrepair in this process and become ghettos. The intuitive nature of the housing life-cycle theory helped to justify urban renewal efforts in which Public Housing Authorities tore down “blighted” buildings and, indeed, entire neighborhoods where blacks lived (Carmon 1997).
For the urban ecologist, the inner-city neighborhood was “sick”—crime-ridden, immoral and full of decadence, with obsolete land uses, inhabited by characters with dysfunctional personalities; be they promiscuous, drunk, or otherwise vice-prone, and so forth—and the illnesses were a sign of inhabitants who failed to adapt and, thus, disturbed the equilibrium of the community. Government decided to intervene to give loans and subsidies to private developers and businesses who would redevelop decaying inner-city neighborhoods, which resulted in the wholesale destruction and displacement of poor communities (mostly black, reason why the program became infamously known as “negro removal”). But it did so while expanding the capacity for capital’s continued expansion and growth.

The federal government did build public housing for some (perhaps one of every ten) residents displaced by urban renewal programs (Hilfiker 2003). Public housing largely came in the form of Le Corbusier-style towers—plopped into vast expanses of empty green space and placed into superblocks—were erected where “the blight” once thrived in large cities like Chicago and New York. These modern-styled buildings, although centrally planned, were a symbol of order and were meant to emulate and harness the ecologistic sense of balance existing in nature. Le Corbusier (1987) even went so far as to compare the home to the human cell,

> We must never, in our studies, lose sight of the purely human “cell,” the cell which responds most perfectly to our physiological and sentimental needs. We must arrive at the “house-machine,” which must be both practical and emotionally satisfying and designed for a succession of tenants. (231)

Public housing in the U.S. was viewed as temporary by planners as, after balance was reestablished by orderly physical environments, residents were expected to find jobs and find their way into the private market to become homeowners. Though this is not the place to go into more depth, there are lengthy explanations about just why, in a matter of only 10-15 years, these once majestic buildings fell into disrepair and
became, as Oscar Newman (1973) once put it, “indefensible spaces.” The point here, however, is that even while theses cities of towers were perceived to be emulating the ordered systems ecologists obsess over, the failures of central planning were attacked by those who believed that the free market knows best for not being natural enough.

HOPE VI developments later sought to create brand new communities where Le Corbusierian towers once stood in an attempt to redevise the long-sought ideal of a managed, natural balance. Tacitly, these neo-ecologists, as we might call them, sought to create balance quantitatively by composing communities with a mixture of 1/3 public, 1/3 affordable and 1/3 market-rate housing. This ideal is similar to those of Hoyt, who saw a tipping point in race as being problematic for neighborhoods—contemporary planners, conversely, feel they can achieve the original goals by disregarding race altogether and merely stabilizing a community through an admixture of different income groups. Neighborhoods, apparently, as Jane Jacobs (1992) once wrote, “need the talents and stabilizing influence of the middle class. Presumably,” she continues, “these qualities are to seep out by osmosis” (65).

**GENTRIFICATION**

Ruth Glass coined the term “gentrification” in her 1964 book *London: Aspects of Change*. She defined the process in the following way:

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes, upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages ... have been taken over ... and have become elegant, expensive residences. Large Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period ... have been upgraded once again. Nowadays, many of these houses have been subdivided into costly flats ... The current social status and value of such dwellings are ... enormously inflated by comparison with previous levels in their community areas. Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district, it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed. (xix)
Since she coined the term back in the mid-1960s, the concept of gentrification has become a central topic of urban research. While different names were used to describe it throughout the 1800s—some used the awkward term “embourgeoisement,” Friedrich Engels used the generalized term “Haussmannization,” and others still merely referred to “the improvements”—gentrification first became an urban capitalist phenomenon in the late nineteenth century; albeit a sporadic and inconsistent one (N. Smith 2010; Zukin 2010). In the U.S., gentrification became a consistent and permanent feature of cities most significantly after the second world war (N. Smith 2010).

A number of federal policy changes after the war helped to facilitate the movement of residents from urban to suburban areas—perhaps most notable among these policy changes were the Interstate Highway System of 1955 and National Housing Act of 1949, which provided funds for slum clearance (title I), FHA insured mortgage programs (title II) and the construction of public housing (title III). From the time of the passage of the act, suburbs sprawled impulsively as middle and upper-class residents left city centers in search of greener (or, perhaps more appropriately, “whiter”) pastures (Jackson 2009; Landis 2009; Myers and Pitkin 2009). The process of suburbanization was further exacerbated by racist fears among whites of blacks and other minority groups and this fear was coupled with a cultural disdain for working-class populations more generally. Again the federal government facilitated the isolation of the poor into urban slums through federally-supported programs such as redlining and public housing concentrations (Squires 1993). Coupled with federal and state expenditures on systems of highways throughout the country starting in the mid-1950s and tax incentives which most significantly privileged white, suburban homeowners, their schools, their jobs, and so forth, the United States effectively
established a two-tiered housing and economic structure which came to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor (Glaeser 2011; Radford 1996; Squires 1993).

As whites fled to the periphery, the tax bases of city centers contracted and merchant and industrial capitalists followed the moneyed classes into the suburbs. With the loss of an economic base, city centers declined precipitously (Birch 2009; Jackson 2009; Zukin 2010). Minorities suffered the most in the processes of suburbanization and decentralization (Birch 2009; Davis 2006; Wyly and Hammel 1998). As city centers declined; as buildings, streets and parks collapsed into disrepair; as urban populations struggled for survival; while city governments continually fought to reestablish their city’s cores—American suburbanites enjoyed rising wages and increasing prosperity (Birch 2009; Jackson 2009; Squires 1993).

In 1974, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program was instituted as a further attempt to revitalize the urban centers of American cities, which remained the domain of the poor and disenfranchised (Jackson 2009). While modern ideals of inclusion are currently ubiquitous in the planning community, at this time in American history, diversity was a nearly unheard of argument. Planning, up to this point, was dominated by segregation of races, by compartmentalization of uses in rationally planned cities—not by community-building, but by the perpetual clearance of so-called “blighted” communities and continual urban renewal which had devastating consequences for American cities (Jacobs 1992; Zipp 2012).

Since the metamorphosis of urban renewal as a city planning platform, cities are now—and are increasingly becoming more so—post-industrial in their orientation (Bell 1973). This has again picked the interest of those who most desire an urban lifestyle and put increasing pressures on those already inhabiting spaces with location and other qualities. Since the 1970s, American cities have become increasingly
desirable to younger generations and those seeking work in the (now dominant) service industries (Myers and Pitkin 2009). Moreover, investment inside and near the city’s central business district (CBD) provides the combined opportunity of capturing rent and living in an environment of spectacle near work and the cathedrals of consumption.

Although many American cities have been losing population (specially former industrial cities like Chicago), according to many scholars, others have grown exponentially in the face of reinvestment in urban centers over the past few decades (Birch and Wachter 2009; Jackson 2009; Myers and Pitkin 2009). From 1990 to 2007, for example, the fifty largest cities in the U.S. have increased their populations by 13.2 percent—adding over five million new urban-dwellers to their ranks (Landis 2009). It is important to note, however, that this is not necessarily the result of people moving to cities—cities in the South, for instance, have been growing steadily for a long time while cities like New York and Los Angeles may capture the bulk of this growth.

Yet, despite the myth of a “melting pot”—that is, the perception that a slow but permanent homogenization of classes and races in cities takes place—racial and ethnic marginalization remain as dominant themes in the modern American metropolis (Frey et al. 2009). Meanwhile, as Wyly and Hammel (1999) note, the reality of cities today is more like “islands of decay in seas of renewal” than they are like Brian Berry’s original dictum. This is further exacerbated by the tendencies for ethnic and racial groups to “cluster.” (Frey et al. 2009).

Furthermore, disparities in income and educational attainment still dominate and have actually grown in the urban fabric. In 2008, workers at the top of the income scale earned as much as five times those of the low-income populations and, while 36
percent of the white populous had the opportunity of obtaining a college degree, only 19 percent of blacks and 14 percent of Latinos were able to achieve a similar status (Katz 2010).

Being trapped in ethnic/racial enclaves with little chance of achieving the educational or economic status of whites and this coupled with increasing interest by younger generations for urban lifestyles and jobs returning to the core, minorities in cities are now undergoing the pressures of gentrification. Under the circumstances, it is becoming increasingly important to develop new and innovative ways of maintaining valuable urban spaces for minority populations. But this challenge is met with broader socio-economic changes; most importantly the rise of service-sector employment, of finance and of the increasing necessity to obtain a high-skill level to compete for jobs in the city. This is also a problem because many ethnic neighborhoods are simultaneously compelled to sell their culture in order to attract dollars from potential tourists. It is a balancing act to create both a unique, identifiable and attractive place for investment and tourism on the one hand and to prevent displacement by wealthier groups—particularly white, college-educated, hipster, pre-professionals—on the other hand.

Neil Smith’s rent gap theory furthers the theoretical capacity of gentrification by noting that areas tend to gentrify if a gap exists between the current and potential ground rents (rents on the piece of land only). For Smith, a rent gap is constituted by “the disparity between the potential ground rent level and the actual ground rent capitalized under the present land use” (N. Smith 1979, 545). Thus, land values are presented within relational, though highly contentious, settings. Today’s rents are continually at odds with a potential rent based on a “highest and best” use and the
disparity between the two is referred to here as the “rent gap.” As potential land rents begin to exceed their current use, capital often begins flowing into the area; properties in relatively good condition might be redeveloped while those which fell into disrepair during the period of disinvestment may be torn down and new buildings may take their place.

The result of this process might be the same regardless if redevelopment or new development takes place. The people who used to inhabit the area are less likely to be able to pay the new rents and therefore may be displaced. This theory demonstrates how investment in capitalist cities could present itself cyclically for an inner-city neighborhood could experience investment, disinvestment and reinvestment in a matter of decades. Smith’s theories, however, should not be taken in a deterministic way. The existence of a rent gap does not guarantee gentrification and, similarly, broader socio-economic conditions may interfere with these processes altogether (as with racism towards African Americans, for example).

**PROBLEMS WITH ECOLOGICAL MODELS**

One of the most basic problems with ecological models, especially as formulated by those seeking to discover “laws” pertaining to the growth of cities or of urban change more generally, is that they, echoing conceptions of personal responsibility as used by economists, rationalize power structures and make them seem to be natural and normal mechanisms of human behavior. We can easily see that from the lens of the ecologist, as well as from those of the economists, that the current state of things appears to be precisely as it should be. In fact, both of these topics are presented in such a way as to lead audiences to the conclusion that any attempt to stop these apparently natural processes would inevitably entail creating a disequilibrium in the overall structure. All interaction would, therefore (and this is as true for the urban
ecologist as it is for the economist), necessarily have deleterious and damaging consequences in the last instance—regardless of the benevolent intentions of the planner.

Smith’s depiction of a “rent gap,” on the other hand, inverts the underlying logic embedded in the ecologists’ depiction of equilibrium by infusing into it a slightly sinister character motive for those who seek to cash-in on the disparities existing between properties and neighborhoods. Smith, in this way, is able to create a reasonable depiction of the concrete interactions of players “on the ground,” and provides us with a critical theoretical model from which to counter the narratives of personal responsibility and demonstrating that the current state of things did not—and does not—comprise the only result that may have been possible. In other words, he opens a door through which planning and intervention might be legitimized in the face of laissez faire ideals. Neighborhood change is not the result of natural mechanisms which rightfully renew the city, it is a profit-motivated attempt made by capitalists to increase their wealth at the expense of those they displace.

It is important, however, to understand that Smith’s depiction of neighborhood change does not replace the ecological models advanced by early 20th century planners; it merely rearticulates their ecological argument within the modern economistic modality. For Smith, gentrification need not happen (as opposed to the ecologists who perceive the accumulation blight to be, in essence, inevitable and its clearance to be a civic necessity), but does happen when investors start gobbling up distressed or otherwise undervalued properties. As they do this, we can presume, other investors are likely to see this investment as a clue that they too should invest. Slowly or quickly, the end result is the clearance of one population (articulated here as being represented by their concentration within an income strata) by another, more
wealthy, population capable of affording the increased rents. The increased demand is, however, dependent on a conception of cities which conforms quite nicely to ecological ideals. Here, as it is with ecologists, a neighborhood is such only as a relational object to the rest of the city.

For the urban ecologists, blight was a result of the relative delinquency and the filtering out of better and worse populations. For Smith, displacement is a result of changes in relative prices and the filtering out of higher and lower income strata. In substance, these two arguments are more similar than dissimilar but Smith’s depiction of rent gap includes a fundamentally critical component with the capacity to provide a necessary counter-point to theories which fetishize personal responsibility.

**Conclusions**

Ecological conceptions of spontaneous and natural order within cities permeate theoretical discourses and urban ideologies in regard to urbanity. Embedded within these urban theoretical frameworks is the tendency to see urban actors in either wildly generalized terms—i.e. in groupings which are never explored critically but assumed into existence without elaboration—or in the idealized and highly abstract terms of individuality—a discourse which, more often than not, serves as little more than a shroud from which to criticize those found to be at fault for disequilibrium and disorder. With these ideological pretensions in hand, urban theorists have constructed an array of elaborate and complex models to elucidate urban economic, political and social change; none of which, incidentally, have provoked any form of unanimity within the academic community.

The one exception to this flaw in making discourses surrounding neighborhood change intelligible and gaining major support among theorists, however, has been the paradigmatic narrative of gentrification which has come to represent the mode by
which current occupants—be they economically poor or just bearing the brunt of political discourses—are displaced by newcomers. Though, what the definition for the term gentrification is supposed to mean, or in what context a neighborhood or area might be deemed gentrified or gentrifying, has not achieved such widespread adoption. It seems that while we can all agree that people are being displaced from their neighborhoods and perhaps against their will, we cannot find a single reason as to why this displacement occurs, who it affects, or who perpetrates it. In other words, while we can all agree that something happens which makes us sympathetic to the narratives and discourses surrounding displacement, a phenomenon we can all “see” and “feel” in some sense, we cannot positively explain who is affected by, or who is affecting, such changes; much less develop the causal relationships between the two entities.

While certain narratives have been developed which may at first seem plausible, when put to test under any lens of scrutiny, all such attempts to define the causes of patterns of urban displacement begin to evaporate almost immediately. Suddenly, the idea that individuals conform to the standards of idealized groups, or that groups are capable of being reducible to little more than series’ of like-minded individuals, become nonsensical premises which no positive theory is capable of comprehending or defining. What is left is a discursive arrangement of arguments from which researchers and agents can only plead for normative and subjective ideals pertaining to justice and rights while opponents to such arguments need not even proffer a retort—they merely scoff at dissenters and go on about their business.

The best known attempts among urban theorists to resolve a positive description of gentrification have centered around the structural (structural-ecological for the case
of urban ecologists and structural-economic for theorists such as Neil Smith) or around the dominantly aesthetic terrain of neighborhood change (as with Ruth Glass).
Chapter 4

This chapter first seeks to understand how symbols and collective identity works in community development practice. First, the concept of symbols is discussed, while providing examples that aid our understanding of both the signs of gentrification as well as how community groups contest them. As the process of gentrification tries to erase the identity of places by giving landscapes another identity, we turn to the signs of appropriation. In addition, this chapter describes how collective identity is formed and ultimately, deployed to organize community development projects that result in development without displacement and cultural ownership.
Chapter 4
Symbolism, Collective Identity, and Community Development

"Symbolism transforms an object of perception into an idea, the idea into an image, and does it in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely operative and unattainable so that even if it is put into words in all languages, it still remains inexpressible." Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections* (1999)

A major focal-point for this dissertation is on symbols and how low-income communities use them to construct ownership over spaces that would have otherwise been inaccessible to them through recognized, formalized, and legitimate channels. Puerto Rican Humboldt Park, a geography loosely defined, was chosen as a case study to illustrate the critical role of the usage of symbols particularly in a gentrifying community to appropriate space. This conception of contested ownership through symbolism helps us to elaborate the main point of this dissertation: that private property is not natural but is an imposition of the capitalist state and, as such, low-income communities continuously contest that imposition in the only way the can such as, informality (in the case of Vieques) and symbols (in the case of Humboldt Park). The following chapter is a literature review on symbols and collective identity how they operate in the appropriation of space and community development.

On Symbols
This chapter seeks to introduce the reader to the study of symbols through a brief literature review on the matter. I will critically engage in what is often taken as commonsensical presuppositions by positivists pertaining to symbols and the exposition of such symbols left unexamined.
One of the first things that I suggest the reader be cautious of, is that, by defining symbols, we are indeed reifying a concept that is metaphysical and cannot be explained by science. In other words, symbols are not words, and therefore, they could not possibly be expressed in verbal, written or gestural form. Symbols are meant to be communicated and interpreted, not through words or pictures as an end product, but in their entirety—that is, the sound of the word being spoken, the object being observed and the conceptions of its meaning—in a particular historical time and place.

In an attempt to define what a symbol is, we could simply say that symbols are objects, pictures, sounds, actions, things, that stand for another thing. For our purposes we will use the word symbol and sign as synonyms. To my understanding, there is no real difference between the two, except that signs are studied in the field of semiotics by philosophers, specially linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure. For simple definitions, the manner a sign “signifies” is called “semiosis” and the explanation of how semiosis produces its effects its called “semiotics." Unlike a sign and the study of semiotics, a symbol is a term that taken to be more mundane, used by all kinds of people, while signs is an academic term used among Saussurians. However, they are synonyms, a sign is a symbol and vice-versa. In this dissertation we will use the term symbol more often than a sign. So, again a symbol could be the color red used in the traffic light, which indicates danger or stop. One important element of the symbol is that is context specific, the red in the traffic light is something that we can understand because we are part of the driving culture and this would not make much sense in another context. Some symbols are derived from things in nature, like red is indicative of danger in some species of insects, frogs, and so on, so they are nor completely arbitrary, only relatively arbitrary.
THE FLAG AS A SYMBOL

To give an example of a symbol that is more pertinent to our study of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago we could say that a flag is a symbol of a nation. In the next paragraphs we will go a little further into semiotics, which is the philosophical study of signs, including their creation and interpretation. Probably, the best student and maestro of semiotics is de Saussure, a renowned linguist that took the task of elucidating the dyadic of the sign as the relationship between the form (the signifier) and the concept that is being represented (the signified). The two parts of the sign are then the relationship between the signifier and signified (Saussure 1983). In his own words,

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer’s psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a ‘material’ element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept. (Saussure 1983, 66)
Something that we first must note is that Saussure’s whole project was to contradict positivism. The positivist would say, for example, the word “cat” is the synonym of the being that we humans call “cat.” For the positivist, they are one and the same and there are no symbols to speak about. Saussure tried to say that the sound that we make when we say the word “cat” (the signifier) is not the same as the concept that exist of the being we call “cat” (the signified). The sound pattern that we produce for cat is a symbol for something that exists, we use this word or sound to communicate a concept. Thus the symbol encompasses both the signifier and the signified. The concept that a symbol communicates is historically contingent. In our particular culture and our particular time the symbol of a “cat” (in a drawing or in spoken word) stands for an animal that humans have domesticated and often keep as a pet; its from the feline family, in nature they hunt mice, birds, crickets, etc. In fact, if I were going to use the symbol of a “cat” with a cave man or woman, they would probably not understand what we are trying to communicate, even if they spoke English or Spanish, or even if I drew a hieroglyph of a cat on the cave wall. The cave man or woman simply would not get what we are trying to communicate at all, because simply they cannot relate to our reality. All this to say, that when symbols are taken outside of their historical context and thus the associations often made by our peer group, they become absolutely useless. This means that the construction and interpretation of a symbol is socially and communally achieved—it is something that is shared amongst a particular group.

As the quote above describes, for Saussure the signified is immaterial or abstract (Saussure 1983, 15). Our example, of the Puerto Rican flag being a symbol for the “Puerto Rican nation,” is quite over simplistic, as there is a psychological impression of the flag that does not equal the words “Puerto Rican nation.” A Puerto Rican might
equate very loosely or strongly the flag with feelings about “home,” “community” or “family,” maybe a particular family member comes to mind, some might think about the U.S.—Puerto Rico or even Cuban relations, others about Chicago specifically, if that is where they live right now or New York if they used to live there, some might have a general feeling of inspiration, happiness, hope, bravery, power, compassion, and so on—the feelings, interpretations and mental constructions of the signifier are endless. The thoughts, emotions and feelings being evoked by the Puerto Rican flag are simply impossible to be communicated by the phrase “the Puerto Rican nation.” Words cannot fully express everything that is embedded in the symbol of the Puerto Rican flag. And that is the power of symbols.

SYMBOLS OF GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification refers to a practice of neighborhood change linking the movement of wealthier inhabitants into poorer neighborhoods resulting in rent increases and the displacement of low-income residents (Smith and Williams 1996). The physical improvements that wealthier newcomers perform in their new space of residence or business become a sign that triggers further investment in an area. The signs of urban investment in a gentrifying area seem to be for the most part “know” to the point that supporters or condemners of gentrification often engage in considerable debate over these symbols—that is, the presence of white young people, coffee, frozen yogurt, cup cake and bike shops, hip restaurants, gourmet groceries, yoga, dance and art studios; new residents walking dogs, biking, jogging and with baby strollers; new condominiums and housing developments; cultural production events such as, festivals, shows, street vendors and so on; the re-branding of commercial districts with street signs, benches and other beatification projects in the landscape, to mention just some of the gentrification’s most prominent symbols discussed in the literature.
Freeman 2006; Palen 1984; Zukin 2010). The direct inspection of people being
displaced, which is the main feature of gentrification, is more often that not, invisible.
Therefore, most observers seem to fixate on aesthetics, rent increases and the overall
neighborhood upscaling, as well as the bodies associated with those changes—from
black and brown, to white—as ways to “read” gentrification.

Some of the symbols of gentrification are immaterial. For instance, the rhetoric
used in the promotion of the newfound neighborhood: “hot”, “up and coming”,
“revitalized”, “authentic” and so on (Kasinitz 1988). Often times this is accompanied
by changing the name of the neighborhood usually on the web, real estate posts and
op-ed pieces. The rhetoric of an “up and coming” area paves the way for the
settlement of new inhabitants. Cultural control could be considered another type of
immaterial symbol, where the newcomers exercise a form of power over the original
inhabitants (Zukin 1995). The new cultural production of space results in more
policing from neighbors who despise the old residents ways of being; for example, the
public usage of music could be conserved a public nuance and hanging out with
friends could be considered gang behavior. In general, practices associated with “the
poor” are highly contested by newcomers whom are from a very different social class
and thus have little tolerance for the local costumes of other groups. All these normal
everyday practices of the existent community somehow become symbols associated
with a “culture of poverty” (William 1990). On this basis poor people are classified as
deficient in human capital, inassimilable, lacking desirable cultural values, skills,
work ethic and so on.

On the other hand, residents in poor communities often contest the diasporic
forces make them unstable as a community. The material symbols of gentrification
such as new condominiums and the immaterial for example the change of names or
the presence of white young people in communities of color are, often and undeniably, questioned. Local people protest against the presence of new shops and housing developments that do not seem to address their basic needs, while displacing the local shops and places of residence that they can actually afford (Levy, Comey and Padilla 2006). Some communities start grassroots “not for sale campaigns” to create consciousness among local homeowners who might be tempted to sell their homes and to generally make their frustrations known to those who intend to develop the place. The campaigns are managed by old-time residents to oppose the plans that the either investors or new occupants of the area have in mind, hoping to dissuade them of their intentions. There have also been signs telling yuppies to get out. Although some might see the attack on a particular group of people inappropriate, in this context a yuppie becomes a rather clear sign or external representation of the process of gentrification. Moreover, in an effort to put this process to a stop, some residents put the flags of their country of origin if they are immigrants. It is meant to condemn the process in the strongest terms possible (Naegler 2011). Putting the flags of the countries of origin is a way of declaring ownership of an area and to put an end to gentrification. Gentrification has always faced resistance from people who it affects, the inhabitants of the area. In the lack of financial means to contest these changes, poor communities turn to tools that might allow them to re-claim their community.

SPACE APPROPRIATION

In this dissertation I seek to bring to the forefront how people claim space either by using it, being there or by creating territorial markers—such as murals and symbols and other evidence of a group’s presence. Space appropriation is the act of occupying a space for means of residence or even business without necessarily owning the space
First and foremost people come to appropriate space by using it. The phenomenon has been discussed for instance in Lefebvre (1984) “right to the city”. Sack (1986) came to name this trend of appropriating space “territoriality”. Repic (2011) attributes this to mostly rural urban migration owing to the demand for labor vis-à-vis the opportunities that industrial development brings to people. Cohen (1969), Strathern (1975) and Goddard (2005) are all for the idea that as soon as these peoples reach urban centers, they tend to create communities similar in values, norms and traditions to those they are used to in their rural settling. This with time builds in them a sense of belonging what might feel like home and eventually become home. These social networks that are built become extremely important to them in their everyday survival (Hannerz 1980). In times of hardship, these networks work as umbrella protectorates to their members (Colombijn and Erdentug 2002).

Secondly, people appropriate space by creating territorial markers and symbols (Pickering, Kintrea and Bannister 2012). According to Sack, these territories are secured via the symbolic cultural expression of groups (1986). Relph (1976) reiterates on this issue by adding the very humane need for association with places of significance. It becomes therefore a normal practice that once a specific group has identified an area and occupied it they seek to mark it using several methods so that they only or mostly, can become the recognized members of that place or area. In capitalist and western society, where all the land is already own, it is hard for the poor to grab land and claim ownership in this manner even if illegally. That being said, I argue that people turn to other means of appropriation, the creation of murals and other cultural symbols to declare a space of their own.
SYMBOLS IN HUMBOLDT PARK

In the context of Humboldt Park, I explore various types of symbols. The first type involve markers around the concept of a distinct ethnic group such as, the word Puerto Rican. An important point to make here is that we cannot possibly define what being a Puerto Rican really means. All we know is that Puerto Ricans as a particular ethnic group exist, in the sense that there is a group of people that identify themselves as Puerto Ricans. We could say a little more than this—that self-identification with the Puerto Rican culture and people are what makes someone a Puerto Rican. The second type involve symbols associated with being Puerto Rican or belonging to this specific ethnic group, such as the Puerto Rican flag. Puertoricanness always surrounds other concepts that involve a specific heritage and folklore such as the Spanish language, indigenous graffiti, bomba music, native food, and so on and so forth. In the abstract, these symbols equate to Puertoricanness. However, this doesn’t mean that an individual is not Puerto Rican because he or she does not speak Spanish, they do not know how to draw a cemí, dance bomba or cook a pastel. As long as someone declares that he or she is a Puerto Rican and other people who also self-identify as Puerto Rican accept this person as a member of the group called “Puerto Rican,” then you can build a community of Puerto Ricans that are held together by the “Puerto Rican” symbol.

This amalgam of symbols that express the Puerto Rican identity (the word Puerto Rican, the food, flags, and so forth), as interviewees and participants see them, become an integral part of my analysis. On the other side of the spectrum, symbols associated with the opposite of being Puerto Rican—namely, being a “white gentrifier”—are also treated quite heavily by interviewers and participants of this study, including what the “white gentrifier” consumes and their tastes for food,
clothing, modes of transportation, third places, as well as the activities they do like running and walking their dogs and so on. Saussure underlined that, “concepts...are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system” (Saussure, 1983, 115). In a gentrifying space, the Puerto Rican and the white gentrifier are part of the same system, namely, the neighborhood. Taken together, there are symbols that authenticate “Puertoricanness” or on the other side of the spectrum they authenticate “whiteness.” Thus, this study looks at the relationship of concepts, as negatively expressed by symbols employed by research participants. That is, between the binary oppositions of privileged signifier—“white”—and the non-privileged signifier, “Puerto Rican.”

**Collective Identity**

The following section is not meant to give an exhaustive definition of the concept of collective identity—it's purpose to provide a basis that could be used later on to understand how Puerto Ricans, based on their collective identity, organize community development projects in Humboldt Park, which in turn allows them to claim ownership over space. One thing to point out is that the term collective identity in the literature is often mixed-up with other concepts such as, identity politics, social identity, collective consciousness, among others (Schlesinger 1991; Tajfel 1974; Durkheim 1997). Although there are several grey areas in these concepts and authors do not share perspectives on all points, I will assume these terms to be for the most part synonymous. In this section I will refer to the term collective identity most times, but I have also considered literature under the identity politics label.

While a number of scholars argue that all identity is collective because it is socially constructed (Eisenstadt, et. al 1995; Breinlinger and Kelly 2014; Persson 2010) in this section we will use the term collective identity instead of identity to
denote that I am interested in the sociology of identity as opposed to its psychology. That being established, collective identity implies a group unity based on a claim of being. For example, racial, gender, sexual orientation, class and national collective identities imply that individuals in these very broad and relatively fixed social categories share similar experiences. Additionally, collective identity could also be formed out of dress, language, social roles, values, functions, and so on. A simple definition would then be, “identity as an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (Polletta and Jasper 2001).

There are two important elements of collective identity: one, the individual must accept the identity not having perceivable incentives or coercion and two, there must be some sort of social recognition by those within the group. This second element is what distinguishes personal identity from collective identity. For example, my cultural heritage may make me a Puerto Rican and I might have a personal agreement to being Puerto Rican, but unless other Puerto Ricans recognize my membership in that community, my identity as a collective cannot be fulfilled. In other words, collective identity is being with others.

Membership—who is to be included or excluded from a group—is always a contested issue as is practically impossible to define the boundaries of belonging theoretically in itself. Therefore, difference, is one of the most critical elements of constructing collective identities (Woodward 1997). How do we distinguish a hunter from a gatherer? In the specific or individual basis, we might observe that a hunter throws spears to animals whereas, a gatherer, collects fruits and vegetables in nature. In the abstract form, however, we may say that we know that a gatherer is a gatherer because he or she is not a hunter, and vice versa. In other words, social relations are
dialectically formulated in opposing relations—there is a thesis on the one hand and an antithesis on the other. For example, the identity of the feudal Lord is distinguished by its difference from the serf. When emphasizing difference, a symbolic barrier is used to distinguish someone who belongs to the group versus someone who does not. Nonetheless, often times, there are material and physical manifestations of these differences that are evident to each reference group being clothing, possessions, and so on.

**LINKAGES BETWEEN SPACE AND IDENTITY**

Space is an important element on the formation of collective identity (Keith and Pile 1993). National identity, for instance, involves the subjects’ perception of the importance of the national territory. Likewise, residents of an urban neighborhood also rely on a common history, shared experiences and traditions. Thus, the geography of the neighborhood could also become the basis for new forms of collective identity (Sennett 1973). Moreover, in capitalist society, entire neighborhoods tend to be composed of a particular class (e.g. working class) and this social space can potentially produce class consciousness (Massey 1995). Similarly, the spatial organization that capitalist society creates based on class, tends to be correlated with ethnicity and race. On these basis, capitalism produces spaces that are considered to be either superior or inferior, which shows us the construction of differences through geography (Sibley 1995). For instance, the association of ghettoization of Puerto Ricans versus the association of whites with wealth and privilege. These differences are accomplished through an array of institutionalized social and economic spatial practices. I emphasize the spatiality of these social relations, as in the context of capitalist production urban spaces and thus, the neighborhood, become a space of difference and collective identity.
Rinaldo (2002) examines the correlation between physical space and collective identity in Paseo Boricua. The Puerto Rican community of Chicago is heavily tied to its urban area, Humboldt Park, and this space is considered a stronghold for cultural identity. She argues that the Puerto Rican spirit is trying to shake its history of U.S. colonialism. Puerto Rico has belonged to the United States since the late 1800s and was previously a colony of Spain. While the country was granted the rights of a commonwealth territory rather than a colony in the mid-1900s Puerto Rico remains dependent on the United States. Its population is largely poor, unemployed and dependent on welfare. And although it has its own flag and elected governor, the island lacks true independence. Furthermore, it is still a strategic geography for U.S. military bases, meaning that its land is still being used for explicitly for naval purposes, which Puerto Ricans cannot influence or change. According to Rinaldo’s ethnographic study of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, a non-profit and activist organization in Paseo Boricua, this has weighed heavily on its people and has influenced the Puerto Rican identity.

IDENTITY POLITICS: A NEW FORM OF ORGANIZING

An important point to make here, however, is that in the literature more often than not, collective identity is employed by a minority group within a social hierarchy—females, people of color, gays and lesbians, ethnic minorities, nationals, the working class and so on—in opposition to the dominant group. In fact collective identity as a subject of study aroused among social movement theorist who were studying the women’s, civil rights, gay rights and the New Left in the 1960s (Polletta and Jasper 2001). These theorists where particularly interested on how collective identity motivated people to act without any direct material incentives been laid out on the table, like in the case of labor unions. Theorizations on collective identity challenged
the class identity as put forward by Marxists, to argue that people also organized
based on other identities such as sex, gender, ethnicity, race and so forth (Calhoun
1994). Collective identity offered new conceptualizations to marginalized groups
from which they could denounce power, inequality and other forms of oppression.

As Manuel Castells (2000) noted, identity politics (which is often equated with
collective identity) is based on an ethnic, racial or religious community’s rejection of
the disembodied and individualized global culture that capitalism and the network
society produces. Under capitalism, there is two disparate but overlapping tendencies:
globalization (which seeks homogenization) and localization (which seeks
differentiation). In a neoliberal society, the individual raises over the collective. As a
response then, in the absence of labor politics, nowadays, identity politics raises as a
new form of demanding the redistribution of equality and social goods, often at the
neighborhood level. This idea of labor politics dying and identity politics taking its
place, needs to be contextualized a little bit before continuing with our argument.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, cities across the United States faced
manufacturing job flight which resulted in increasing poverty for those who were
trapped in the inner-city—for example, in Chicago from 1970 to 1990 the percentage
of families below poverty almost doubled from 10.6 to 18.3, according to the United
States Census. To historicize this point, David Harvey would take us back to the crisis
of the 1970s where the deindustrialization of the U.S. was deliberate push towards the
commodification of labor through layoffs and union busting (Harvey 2012). As a
point of reference, in Illinois unionized jobs went from 35.6% in 1964 to, 22.6% in
1984, to 18.7% in 2000 (Hirsch 2001). This economic shift is recognized by Harvey
and a whole host of other scholars as “neoliberalism”—which has been characterized
by: tax-cuts for the wealthy, the privatization of public services, the deregulation of
corporations, the abolition of labor unions, the creation of free-trade agreements (that is, the free-movement of goods and capital while impeding the movement of laborers) and the expansion of international organizations like the IMF and the WTO (Harvey 2006). As the idea of privatization becomes more popular around the world, attention must shift from the wants of public officials formally in charge of the property and onto a rule of law specifically for private property. Who exactly is the rightful owner of newly privatized property is still in question.

In the 1980s and 1990s, society began to apply widespread privatization with efforts like Structural Adjustment Programs and the WTO. The initiatives privatized government service and deconstructed communal property. Garrett Hardin’s well-known “Tragedy of the Commons” justified these actions. The 1970 article argued that people will always over-use communal property for their personal benefit, so the land must be privatized. Opponents promote applying usage rules to preserve available resources while allowing for collective utility.

According to these theories, these policies have been used to restore the class power of the ruling class which was undermined by Keynesian economics, the raise of labor unions and communists politics. These new set of liberal policies, in the economic sense, have resulted in inequalities in the U.S., as well as, Third World countries where capitalism has been expanded forcefully. The classic example that Harvey would give us of forcing neoliberalism under the throat of Third World countries is the CIA-led coup against Salvador Allende and the US-led war on Iraq (Harvey 2006). One of the points that are reiterated under this narrative is that even when the GDP of the U.S. and Third World countries has marginally increased, there are more inequalities than ever—the rich are becoming richer and the poor, poorer. In
other words, both power and capital have been redistributed from the laborer to the capitalist and from the Global South to the Global North.

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Community development emerges from this context where the state is retrieving from the social welfare system. It was institutionalized through the federal War on Poverty as a response to the poverty among inner-city disadvantaged populations that resulted from suburbanization and historic segregation. Grounded on the principle of “maximum feasible participation”, under Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, residents in low-income communities were given a voice in community development practice. In the past, under urban renewal, these communities were robbed of the right to have a say on federal and local projects that affected their communities. The replacement of urban renewal funds for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) provided community-based organizations and local government agencies with flexible funds that would improve living conditions in areas that met high concentrations of poverty. These funds required community participation so residents themselves could decide funding priorities. The role of federal government during the 1960s in funding and promoting Community Development Corporations (CDC’s) resulted in the further institutionalization of community development practice. As a result of federal de-funding in the 1970s, CDC’s started to depend more from private foundations (Pierce and Steinbach 1987).

We could simply define community development as the process of changing conditions related to the quality of life at the local level being environmental, social, economic and so on. It is based on the assumption that communities can self-determine their own development and future. Ethicists of private property often appeal to the principle and value of autonomy. Property offers one means of ensuring
autonomy, for it grants to the owner the rights of decision, use and control. Similarly, some might argue that claiming symbolic ownership is relevant to the very issue of self-determination.

The well-being of the members of a community is primarily improved by strengthening the social relationships that exist within a locality. In other words, community members work together to address common social, environmental and economic needs. Community development could only take place if local actors have something in common (as the word community implies) that brings them together in the first place. Gusfield (1975) denoted two notions of community: geographical or interest-based. The primary element would be geographical, people living in the same locality. In U.S. cities, there are many intertwined collective identities that are manifested through space such as, race and ethnicity. There could be, of course, other identities at play such as people who are interested in gardening, furthering art or businesses in an area, being a punk, among other activities. These identities however, tend to be less systematic. In the case of Humboldt Park, I will argue that the Puerto Rican ethnicity and culture along with the geographical space that they occupy are a major driver of the community development system.

Within the context of planning, community development, involves the creation of plans from outlining what exists to articulating goals and objectives to envisioning what could exist in the future and go as far as the actual implementation and evaluation of the project. An example of community development might be the establishment of a local nonprofit organization that builds affordable housing. An effort like this would start by conveying together a group of like-minded stakeholders—people who reasonably agree on what are the housing needs of the community. These stakeholders would contribute to such cause by bringing their
knowledge, expertise and networks in an asset-based approach and put them into the disposition of creating such project. Stakeholders often would seek out external resources from federal and local government, private institutions, and organizations to achieve these local projects—nonetheless, this is a second step after assets in the community have been mobilized (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). At many meetings this small group of people would discuss what are their opportunities for action in a participatory process and they would create an agreeable plan of how to proceed. This organization might be in the long-run formalized by hiring an executive director and other staff members, whom may be or not involved in this initial process of creating the actual institution. The important thing to note here is that the continuous capacity building and conveyance of stakeholders creates a lasting legacy of support within a community thus, establishing a core-group that can get together in the future and lift from the ground equally successful projects. For example, in the Humboldt Park community, a group called the Puerto Rican Agenda was able to mobilize community leaders that identify themselves with the Puerto Rican culture. Puertoricanness then is used as a symbol to lead a variety of community development projects. Under this premise of collective identity, community leaders often assume that other Puerto Ricans understand the issues and problems that relate to the community, while others outside of the group are incapable of understanding these issues or problems. In other words, Puerto Rican activists and residents in Humboldt Park were able to organize because they share a definition of their situation and therefore a common identity.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I will show how the Puerto Rican collective identity was used to give meaning and value to the practice of community development via the use of symbols that would contest gentrification. Gentrification in this instance refers to a
social process of urban renewal where the original inhabitants are forced to move on. For Humboldt Park in Chicago this involves landlords refurbishing blocks of flats or houses to a “higher” standard, or of new developments on plots of land previously used for industry or business. Previous tenants, often Puerto Rican or Latino and of a lower income bracket, are evicted or bought off. The new dwellings attract a more affluent crowd, often white students, professionals, IT specialists or artists. Rents go up and the Latino population cannot continue living in the area. Locally owned businesses with Puerto Rican influences are forced to close as upper class stores and restaurants move into the area to cater for its new inhabitants.

Local activist believe this process of gentrification is about removing unwanted minorities from the city center and allowing Chicago to become more chic and white—in this landscape their collective identity becomes important to mobilize politically. Gentrification is a very real threat for the community of Humboldt Park and one they respond actively to trough symbols of appropriation.

Furthermore, this research addresses the gap that exists on symbology by developing a conceptual context on the social pathways of gentrification, community development and introducing the idea of reading communities and their claims of ownership over space as a literary text, not as a reification. Because symbols depend on relations, they are not things in themselves that can then be simply defined. Again, rationalizations can be made, but no explanation of such phenomenon exists. Symbols communicate meaning and because of that, they are dependent on sense-making. This fact does not, however, make them “simple.” Positivism implies that meaning is extracted without the act of interpretation and that the symbol has some kind of essential or intrinsic nature. Nonetheless, Saussure understood that a symbol has no absolute, or true, value that is independent of its context (Saussure 1983, 80).
The study of semiotics has been developed substantially by Geertz, who is most well known for arguing that culture should be read and interpreted as “text” (Geertz 1973). This idea of “reading as text” comes from literature in where the job of the critic is to use lenses (e.g., a Marxist lens, a feminist lens, and so forth) to read and interpret a “text” (Fish 1982). The following chapter will seek to conceptualize the processes of gentrification through the lenses of institutionalism, hegemony and cultural imperialism while rendering displacement processes intelligible through the analysis of narratives, stories, semiotics and narrative frames.
CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY

Having established in the previous four chapters a basic outline for the system of analysis to be used in this paper, the following chapter seeks to expand upon, solidify and synthesize the analytical framework that will be used to interpret the case study presented in Part II of this essay. Most importantly, this chapter seeks to clarify the non-orthodox and non-Marxist positionality that will serve as the basis for studying Humboldt Park’s Puerto Rican community by detailing and distancing this work from Marxist works and aligning it with Institutionalist and Post-Keynesian frameworks. Further, the following chapter will also seek to distance itself from positivistic interpretational methodologies by advancing Giddens’ concept of “structuration” and Geertz’s belief that communities should be treated, not as things with internal truths, but instead, to be read “as texts.”
Chapter 5
Analytical Framework

“We are told by men of science that all the ventures of mariners on the sea, all that counter-marching of tribes and races that confounds old history with its dust and rumor, sprang from nothing more abstruse than the laws of supply and demand and a certain natural instinct for cheap rations. To anyone thinking deeply, this will seem a dull and pitiful explanation.”

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Will O’ The Mill*, (Stevenson 1895, 9)

Part I of this essay has, up to this point, dealt exclusively with laying out the context from which to understand the case study presented in Part II. This chapter will now seek to synthesize the conclusions made in the first three chapters of this paper and formulate a method from which the analysis of the Puerto Rican population of Humboldt Park, Chicago, can be rendered intelligibly. While Chapter 1 sought to show the *un*-naturalness of market economy and reconceive it as parallel with the rise of the national state and Chapter 2 sought to elaborate on the state’s creative process by demonstrating the expansion of private property rights (and, therefore, the expansion of market economy) into ever wider arenas, Chapter 3 sought to outline some of the ecological beliefs held by planners which led to the creation of policies supporting the expansion of market economics at the cost of displacement, vilification and disintegration of neighborhoods and communities thought to be under- or mal-developed, while Chapter 4 sought to understand how symbols and collective identity works in community development practice.

Fundamentally, what is being called into question here is the idea that the problems of market economics are only capable of being solved with more, or better, market economics.
Part II of this essay lays out the experience of Puerto Ricans in Humboldt Park without the embedded economisms implied in the works questioned above. My most basic contention is this: While economics should be properly understood as representing a mere byproduct of broader social interactions, economy has been misconceived by researchers as constituting the determining causal factor in shaping the social interactions that, nonetheless, preceded it. To put it another way, my contention is that social interactions, expressed in shared manners of speech, dress, culture, customs, beliefs, even the very act of explanation or the creations of commonly held expectations, mores, and so on, should be understood as the subject of interest and the byproducts of these interactions—in the case of economics we might see these as the need to eat, or the need to take out the garbage or wash the dishes, for example—as offshoots of the subject and not representations of the subject itself. The ideology of economism tends, conversely, to take these byproducts as the structuring cause of all impending social interaction. For Adam Smith, this archetypical man has become known as “Homo Economicus,” or “Economic Man.” The “historical materialism” of Karl Marx (1998) maintained the same starting point for all human interaction as that of Adam Smith:

“… life involves before everything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life.” (47)

While it is tautologically true that humans must reproduce themselves in order to continue their survival, it is fundamentally untrue that this process happens separately from the social context which creates such acts of production. As presented in Chapter 1 and following closely with the analysis of Marshall Sahlins, the idea that reproduction is difficult, or that it is dependent on scarce resources which require
equitable allocation and therefore require the existence of a market economy, is not accepted here as an explanation for the structuring of social interactions by way of productivity, distribution, or consumptive patterns.

To reiterate, it is precisely this claim of economists which is being called into question, as succinctly presented here by Marx: “The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself” (op cit). I take this statement to be an inversion of the facts of social life. Stated simply, humans must be socialized in order to reproduce themselves. Incidentally, this phenomenon is not constrained to humans: A tiger or a lion brought up in captivity, for example, if suddenly released into the wild, will simply starve to death. The act of reproducing themselves, then, is socially contingent and not structured by their “needs.” I believe this to be the case for humans as well. To paraphrase Heidegger, we might note that we could never truly know of an “Economic Man,” as he could only be economic with others.

To invert this logic, as Marx and other economistic interpretations do, is to distort the cause of outcomes by inferring those causes from the consequences. In other words, to infer the basis for a philosophy by assuming and speculating on something’s origins, to analyze retrospectively from outcome to origin, is to fundamentally misrepresent human interaction and reduce it to its product. I take this to constitute a conjectural analysis built from conceived outcomes to assumed causes.

The problem of economism might, however, be seen as innocuous if it were not for the problematic that it imposes a logic on all debates before they even begin. It forces all debates into the narrow confines of arguing which type of market economy we should have as opposed to whether or not market economy should exist at all. If the only questions to be asked are economic ones, then a lively debate can seem to
take place only within extremely narrow confines. And this is how power manifest itself. By controlling the range of the discourse, by disallowing any potentially genuine counter-argument to develop, the rules of an argument are stated in such a way that only the progression of the underlying points of the argument are allowed to be advanced. To this end, I agree with Noam Chomsky (1998) that “The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum” (43). In this way, all attempts at creating counter-arguments to economism by premising these arguments in the first place on economism and this was as true for Marx as it was for Smith, have only served to advance the logic of market economy ever further.

It is, therefore, precisely the economistic premise embedded in Marxism and economism more generally from which I will be distancing the following chapters. Economism will herein be abandoned and where it is found existing within the discourses of community members and stakeholders within the Humboldt Park community, I will attempt to shine a spotlight on it and subsequently elucidate the underlying logic of it. But first, it will be necessary to outline some of the underlying premises which will guide my methodology as it pertains to structures, institutions and the processes of structuration before I might make explicit the methods that will be utilized in Part II of this essay.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

Tony Lawson’s (2010) description of the distinction between social structure and social practice helps guide my own analysis.

Gravity … does not reduce to and cannot be directly read off from, the path of the autumn leaf, even though it influences the latter. Similarly, it seems clear enough that social phenomena are not reducible to the actualities of experience. In particular, social structures do not reduce to the practices they facilitate.
I take the concept of path-dependency, when applied to social structures, to mean that events, big and small, are marked by a continually unfolding set of processes. Similarly, I take it as a given that there are few elements of human behavior that could be “read off” from anything on par with a static “human nature;” and that those which are, are relatively obvious and only worth a cursor study. The need to reproduce (pace Freud), for example, as well as the need to eat, to sleep and so forth, constitute deep structural needs for humans to continue existing. But those obvious structural truths do not have obvious implications in the activities of real people any more than a falling leaf will follow a fixed pattern to be constituted in a pre-ordained fashion by the structure of gravity. Humans, further and completely unlike leaves, are also definitively animate. We move, we change. And we, unlike any other animal known to us, can do so with some sense of conscious deliberation.

Further, I take path-dependency to infer that social groups change over time and do so socially far more than physically. But even in the sense that we can perceive ourselves as being nearly static, as with our biology, we still cannot draw ready-made conclusions even in the most controlled of experiments. Imagine your great, great, great grandparents, for example and the pathways that were followed to get you here. There is no way that they or anyone else could have predicted you, your thoughts, your actions, etc.—nor would any science be able to discern such a thing. There was certainly a physical evolution taking place between them and yourself, but its subtleties and vagaries cannot in any meaningful way be “read off” at any stage or even generalizable through time. The social conditions that changed over time would be even more impossible to comprehend—and no list of those changes could be considered, in any way, meaningful.
STRUCTURATION

The concept of “structure” has plagued sociology from its very beginnings. Structuralism—the most blatant articulation of the social structure—failed because it too strictly cast individuals as helpless pawns in social interactions. Functionalism, on the other hand, envisioned the whole of mankind as being driven by a machine-like functionality of reason occurring in the depths of the mind and outside of our control. There are a host of other philosophical formulations of the structure which could be named but, for brevity’s sake, we might note that the individual’s reliance on some force exogenous from herself is an important theme in the structurally conscious social sciences—but one which can easily become overstated.

While still not perfect by any means, I believe that Anthony Giddens’ formulation of what he termed “structuration” to be the most apt in a practical sense. For Giddens, as opposed to a pure structuralist or functionalist, the structure is a force constantly in motion—or, to be more precise, as it is with the structural concept of gravity, this structure cannot be directly read-off from our object of analysis, a falling leaf, and is not immediately visible or self-evident. The object of study is in continuous motion while the fixed structure itself serves as an abstraction that cannot be “seen” even if its effects can be “felt.” Sociologically speaking, in a simplistic sense, we might say that individuals act upon the structure and the structure acts back upon them. This is true even if no absolute representative can perfectly embody the imagined ideal of an individual (there is no ideal representation of a falling leaf either) and no visible structure can be seen, only felt (as with the structural logic of gravity, the concept of a society is not a visible thing even if it stands as a perceptible force).

For Giddens, “[h]uman action occurs as a durée, a continuous flow of conduct, as
does cognition” (Giddens 1986, 3). As opposed to structuralists and functionalists (and empiricists more generally), Giddens presents society as a space of continuous change and as such, “[t]he basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time” (ibid., 2). This concept of “social practices” is of the utmost importance to my work. Put simply, I see individuals as acting continuously with and against one another, whereas some come to exercise their capacity for agency and some are able to formulate and create larger agendas with others.

William Sewell (1992) has set forth the concept of agency quite succinctly:

Agency entails an ability to coordinate one’s actions with others and against others, to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce and to monitor the simultaneous effects of one’s own and others’ activities. (21)

For the purposes of conceptualization, we might place agency at one side of a gradation of social practices and structure at another. At one extreme of social interaction, we might note that no coherent pattern is apparent for the purposes of analysis. This structure is an area which precedes the formation of agency, where interactions taking place are merely accidental and analyses tend to be mostly conjectural. Structures exist through their being acted out and in this acting they are re-enacted, changed and so forth; to an extent it is an ordering force immanent in agency; subjects are socialized to be passive users; yet, as each of them constitutes a unique being (e.g., its existence as an individual is a function of its differentiation from others) structure is at the same time acted out and reenacted and worn out or actively resisted causing adaptations that make structure a moving target and reality. At a more formalized level of social interaction, we might more readily find patterns for analysis; and here we might find individuals being formed by their positions or
forming groups and committees to affect social change. Nonetheless, at this level, much of the interactions are still not fully formulated and are perhaps still unclear. As these groups formulate and especially as they coalesce, they begin to re-shape social contexts. At the deepest level of this formulation lies what has been traditionally seen as the structure of society itself.

In the practice of analysis, at one end—the area preceding that of agency, for example—we might place an individual who enjoys bicycling to work, perhaps another who is learning to dance and so forth. At this level of analysis, we could only hope to gather occurrences, actions, activities and so on, but we are unlikely to see any patterns emerging—just random sensibilities and unconnected events. A study at this level of social interaction is likely to find only accidental occurrences, or personal preferences that diverge from the society writ large. Where patterns begin to emerge, however, is usually when individuals exercise their agency, perhaps only as individuals at first, but at this level of analysis we are also likely to start seeing groups of like-minded people coalescing around similar goals. At this level of social interaction, our study begins to find patterns—of changing moods or ideals, perhaps, or of initial attempts to preserve and cultivate identities—and where patterns emerge, analysis can begin. Yet, as noted above, the more abstracted our analyses becomes from the actual, physical, concrete reality of the individuated activity, the more our need will be to hold such a perceived pattern together with conjectures.

In the most abstract sense of analysis of social interactions, we might begin to find the formation of intelligible institutions which affect, however slightly, the sensibilities of others and here we begin to get a sense of the real, tangible motivations for social change that might be taking place. The consequences of these social changes may or may not, however, be readily intelligible. For example, a group
named “Critical Mass” organizes bicycle group-rides which run through the city of Chicago fairly regularly. Participants ride without stopping for red lights intersections or for automotive traffic and tie up traffic without mercy for extended periods of time. It is not entirely clear as to what affect these rides have on participants, on bystanders, or on the drivers waiting for the swarms to pass. The organizers claim no political agenda—they only seek to “take back the streets” for the period of time the riders make their way through the city streets. While these events certainly have an affect on all involved, that affect might be illusive at best.

At the most abstract level of social interaction we find the structure. As noted previously, for those who subscribe to the various permutations of structural determinism, its force is omnipresent. The structure of society is constituted by something which, if it moves at all, does so at such a slow pace that is almost imperceptible to the untrained eye. At this level we might find, as did Marx, a material necessity to reproduce oneself and a constant struggle over the right to do so without coercion. For a number of functionalists, the deepest structural concern is of the mind which some philosophers—like Hilary Putnam (2012), for example—perceive as being little more than a machine which continuously programs itself to perform activities. In the most exaggerated sense of functionalism, humans are merely automaton operating by synapses firing in our head which are largely beyond our control.

In the last analysis, where Marxists, Structuralists and Functionalists tend to over-emphasize the dominance of structure and where individualists and those who fetishize entrepreneurialism tend to over-emphasize agency, Anthony Giddens’ view of structuration demands analysis of the reciprocal and constant intercourse between the two poles—neither one can exist in isolation or in a fixed-state. This might most
easily be represented with the following gradation.

Figure 4 — The movement from agency to structure.

At either pole of the gradient represented in the above figure, I have added labels to distinguish between liberalism, on the one hand and conservatism on the other. This addition coincides with Thorstein Veblen’s conception of progressive social forces as a constant attempt to undermine the established, dominant social order—the dominant social order being itself constituted by coercive, formal and conservative social forces (Veblen 2009, 125–139). Veblen’s construction was of an evolutionary society flowing from continuing processes of conservation and liberalization. For Veblen, the evolution of society ran along a path through time whereby institutions (i.e. habits, customs and the like) accepted as the most appropriate at any given moment would
embed themselves into the social fabric only to become antiquated by changes in the broader social order. While this position clearly represents an evolutionary point-of-view of social change, as opposed to social Darwinists like Herbert Spencer, the continual process of change was never deemed to be a good or bad thing for Veblen; there was no good (i.e. most evolved) society, only a society in a state of constant, unremitting change. At any given moment, the study of society from this viewpoint would result in a snapshot of this change. A real, thorough analysis of today’s affairs could only be constructed if the purpose was to understand the ways in which today’s institutions came into being and how they are being contested throughout the progression of time.

The addition of Veblen’s understanding of progress and conservation is useful for my purposes because it adds a temporal dimension to Giddens’ construct. The formal values of yesterday are imposed on us today and our values, to the degree that we’re capable of embedding them into the social fabric, become the stagnant formalities of future generations. As such, there is a reciprocal exchange not only between the agent and the structure taking place presently, but also a temporal exchange occurring between the instilled values of previous generations and the changing social circumstances of today. This permanent state of contestation between conservation and liberalization is extremely important in any work that seeks to understand the process of social change. In Veblen’s view,

The situation of to-day shapes the institutions of tomorrow through a selective, coercive process, by acting upon men’s habitual view of things and so altering or fortifying a point of view or a mental attitude handed down from the past. (Veblen 2009, 126)

In Veblen’s view, these institutions, “are products of the past process, are adapted to past circumstances and are therefore never in full accord with the requirements of the present. This process of selective adaptation can never catch up with the progressively
changing situation in which the community finds itself at any given time; for the
environment, the situation, the exigencies of life which enforce the adaptation and
exercise the selection, change from day to day; and each successive situation of the
community in its turn tends to obsolescence as soon as it has been established”
(Veblen 2009, 126-127).

For the purposes of analysis, this essay will be taking up the theory of
of a Theory of Structuration* and bracketing it within the view of a constantly
changing and evolving social sphere dominated by an arena of contending progressive
and conservative forces over time as posited by Thorstein Veblen in his book, *The
Theory of The Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. By combining these
analytical frames, I believe I will have far greater success in documenting the
struggles between established institutions and their origins, the conservative and
formal forces which, to varying degrees, enforce established values and “common
sense” principles onto them and, lastly, how it is that the structural apparatuses of the
city, the state, the market, etc. impose the greatest constraints against social change.
In the broadest sense, I believe this tactic will help me to follow the story of how
agents are able to establish institutional coherence and social change over time as well
as how those institutions are capable of interacting with and changing the broader
structural dynamics operating at any given moment.

Throughout this analysis, the framework laid out above will allow me to place
occurrences into a broader narrative on social change and, more importantly,
understand the interaction between social forces on the ground and those outside of
the control of local groups. For example, understanding structures which are largely
outside of the control of community members, but which implicate them nonetheless,
(say, for example, the capitalist mode of production, or the constraints imposed by individualized, as opposed to communal or social, forms of ownership) will be extremely useful in this case study. But these structures do not dictate the interactions on the ground or compliance for that matter. Similarly, actions on the ground certainly do not act to dictate changes into the broader structural apparatuses; yet they can contribute to them. My interests here are on the undeniable interactions between the two poles of social interaction—the structure on the one hand and the formulation of randomness and conjecture into patterns of agency and institution on the other.

It is the continual, reciprocal interaction between the largest social forces (the structures) and the smallest social forces (the individual, the accidental, the agent) that society’s form gets enacted and re-produced through time and space. The ways in which we as researchers analyze such structuration, the ways we act to change social constructs and in what contexts our work might become effectual, pose separate problems from the problems of analysis itself—all of which require independent systems of analysis and thus become increasingly abstract and, in the worst case scenario, entirely scholastic, disconnected and ineffectual. Systems of analysis, no matter how meaningful they may seem to the researcher, are not useful to the broader community (be that a neighborhood, an ethnic group, the academy more generally, and so on) without a system of presentation that effectively demonstrates findings and articulates actionable solutions within any given context.

To reiterate, the problems here, as I see them, are threefold. First is the ability to create a system of analysis which, on the one hand, avoids reification and reductionism while on the other avoids presenting conjectural evidence to support spurious claims. A relationship has to be maintained between the grandiose scale of structural analysis and the far-too-particularized scale of an individual’s everyday life.
Second is the difficulty accompanying the creation of effectual presentation methods within a given context. Even the most pristine system of analysis ever developed would become useless if its mode of presentation—an essay, a speech, etc.—fails to convince an audience of its conclusions. Third is the ability to translate findings and the presentation of those findings into actionable programs which are both rooted in reality and capable of changing it. For the purposes of simplification, we might simply see the first problem as one of philosophy, ontology and epistemology. The second is a problem of communication. And third is the technical problem of management, leadership and praxis.

None of these problems are separable; they all exist and depend on each other for their development. Further, all of these problems are embedded in the very nature of this type of work. While the problem of praxis is not entirely capable of being handled in this format, it has to be continuously buried in the work itself. These problems are omnipresent and cannot be overcome in this format alone. They can be, however, managed to the greatest degree through the establishment of a critical theoretical framework.

**Institutional Economics**

Before moving into the next section, I would like to elaborate on my understanding of institutional economics and how it might aid my analysis. As previously discussed, institutional economics emphasizes the role of institutions and their impact in changing the processes of economic behavior. Thorstein Veblen, who is best known for developing the concept, criticized orthodox economists arguing that economic influencers are rational decision-makers directly and purposefully involved in shaping the economy. He proposed, instead, a new way of understanding institutional
economics saying that culture and norms (that is, institutions) influence the economic behavior of people.

Furthermore, John R. Commons proposed that joint action by a number of different social groups within an economy can shape economic institutions through their collective action and this, in turn, influences the market economy. As an example, we can see that the institution of private property (both a social convention and a social tradition) became entrenched in the United States and that this tradition had more influence than the rational actions that supported the practice of buying property itself. In this instance, the property-buying tradition resulted in conflict and a weak economic system where banks did not lend, and people did not borrow, invest and so forth. Ultimately, the institution of property ownership resulted in a system that could not modernize, according to orthodox economists.

From this, we can try to conceptualize how the agglomerate of laws that legitimize private property in the United States, in particular, is influenced by social institutions that were constructed ideologically by a group of people rather than by a single organization (such as government) imposing a law. In other words, there is an interaction taking place here between social traditions, relations of power and how they manifest themselves into laws. However, it is important to note that in the United States the introduction of private property was largely ideological (brought in from Europe), while in other countries such as Britain it was more of a social convention of power imposed by one class over another before it was eventually extended and embraced by that other class. For social activists from other cultures and those with different cultural traditions in the so-called “Third World”, the concept of private property is a foreign one, at least for the vast majority of people. This is why many, in
particular farmers and urban informal settlers all over the world, contest this hegemonic imposition furiously.

Oliver Williamson’s theory of firm emphasizes how the behavior of public institutions (such as government agencies, corporations or businesses) influences the market economy—this is called ‘new institutional economics’. New institutional economists expanded the old concept that the behavior of people (abstract or informal institutions) can affect the market economy and proposed a mechanism by which firms, organizations, corporate standards and government regulations (non-abstract or formal institutions) work in a multi-directional and multi-interest economic environment. In new institutional economics, markets are viewed as groups of firms, organizations and institutions, where each is working in a divergent, parallel or convergent direction. This understanding of institution extends to an organization like the Puerto Rican Agenda and how their understanding might clash or coalesce with that of other institutions such as banks, financiers, realty companies and so on. That being said, I believe that both these strands of new and old institutional economics can help in the interpretation of the Humboldt Park case as using theories of institutional economics builds on the political economy of urban inequalities. These theories also allow me to bring to light the consequences of class, race and ethnic inequality in addition to capitalist accumulation as factors of uneven development by understanding culture as an institution as well as the mechanism by which organizations on the ground also interact with markets.

**Method**

1. Summation

If not in intent, then in effect, the arguments of planners have historically contributed to the spread and dominance of market economies. For the ecological narratives
which largely governed planning discourses from the field’s inception to the mid-60s, arguments supported the expansion of market economy for instance by labeling spaces with the pejorative “blight” and therefore legitimizing the clearance of these proclaimed slums for the social good—or to borrow Neil Smith’s phrase (albeit anachronistically), to improve these spaces for a “higher and better use.” Today, planning discourses are less dominated by this form of direct compulsion for the expansion of market economics than by the indirect—and highly ideological—imperative that development as the improvement of market economics constitutes the only path. For those on the proverbial “right,” they are likely to take the tract that markets can be improved by decreasing state interventions which, they feel, merely distort the market’s ability to self-correct. For those on the “left,” the argument is likely to be constituted by the inversion of this argument; for the market to function properly, they claim, the state can and should provide and correct the course of market outcomes through policies and social redistribution strategies to cultivate an economy of relative equitability.

This paper, however, rejects both of these arguments on the auspices that the naturalness and inevitability of market economy is, in the first place, fallacious or, at least a historical project. As has been contended above, this essay operates on the assumption that market economies are products of national states and not naturally occurring systems. In essence, where modern discourses struggle to find the right balance of state and market, the right path to what might be called “good capitalism,” this paper rests on the premise that the problems being experienced are caused by market economy and that the solution cannot be found by improving it with increasing or decreasing degrees of state intervention. It follows that this paper seeks to problematize the commonsense narratives of today which dominate mainstream
discourses surrounding development. Namely, this analysis rejects the claim that market economy is natural and seeks to demonstrate how this ideological framework has come to dominate pathways that might otherwise present solutions by subjecting all discourses to the narrow confines of its own construct.

2. **Voice and Authority in Authorship**

With this having been said, the question still remains: How can this framework be utilized to analyze a specific case? Recent literature in planning has framed this problematic of misrepresentation in terms of the biases presented at the authorial stage of the research process. Lake and Zitcer (2012) have expressed concerns that modern planning scholarship too often skews and biases planning narratives as the products of their works are not open to the review or revision of the subjects being studied. As such, the authors advocate for a movement “beyond conventional narrative practices in planning and the social sciences, beginning with the avoidance of interpretation as the purpose and product of analysis” (398).

This is, of course, a problematic request as the researcher herself is only capable of researching, analyzing and writing what she understands within a given context and this may be limited by simple constraints like deadlines and pressures on time, geographic inaccessibility, language barriers and so forth—or by the same paradigms they apply to the research of their objects. Indeed, the researcher may be limited even further by deeper constraints like ideology, interpretation, or merely a general inability to write in a fashion that might adequately capture her subject and portray the findings intelligibly to the reader. The very choice of what or whom to study in the first place may, in fact, be seen to represent a bias in the researcher or more broadly reflect biases within her department or discipline more generally.
The way that I have chosen to deal with the problem here and I take this tactic to conform to the underlying spirit of Lake and Zitcer’s paper, is to separate the work into sections of deliberate analysis and interpretation, on the one hand, while partitioning off the case study containing corresponding documentation (both qualitative and quantitative) and descriptions and offering as little purposeful commentary as possible on the other. In other words, to the greatest degree practicable, this paper intends to constrain deliberate acts of interpretation to those spaces outside of the case study itself which is merely intended to describe and document the happenings of Humboldt Park, Chicago and the Puerto Rican influence therein. In essence, the flow of the study is intended to run through in this way:

Establish Framework => Present Case Study => Interpret and Comment

This method does not, however, “solve” the problems noted by Lake and Zitcer. My intention here is not to create an unbiased case study so much as it is to partition off the case study from acts of deliberate interpretation. A complete rejection of bias, if we were to follow the authors’ advice to its (il)logical end, would entail an abandonment of research and authorship altogether. The inevitability of the addition of my biases, in this fashion, instead of being removed from the work altogether, are “cordoned off” into visible spaces and allowed to be rendered as clearly as possible to the reader. It is my contention that, while biases are unavoidable, it is the mythology of “objectivism” that is genuinely problematic and to be avoided.

3. Case Study, Read as Text

What has been presented in Part I of this essay should be seen as a lens from which I will later, in the concluding chapter of this essay, attempt to interpret and analyze my case study. It should not, however, be seen as an attempt to discover the lens from
which to understand Humboldt Park or the Puerto Rican influence in that community. As such, it is important to note that the interpretation, as well as the framework established for the presentation, are my own. The conclusions being reached here are, similarly, my own and should not be attributed to the community being studied. Further, the case study is a representation of the way Humboldt Park appears to me and to me alone. The case study should be seen as a “text” which seeks to capture a particular moment without attempting to define or encapsulate that moment in its entirety. As Roland Barthes (1976) wrote:

We know now that a text is not a line of works releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (146)

Inevitably, another researcher would have provided an entirely different case study and constructed their analysis within another framework altogether. Furthermore, the lens being constructed within this paper is not intended to serve as the only, or the correct, lens for interpretation. With this being said, we might further position the following case study by noting that I am in agreement with a major pioneer of discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough (1995), when he writes that “Texts are social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world and social interaction” (6). As such, I feel comfortable in the conclusion that the work within this essay should be presented without the mythological allusions of “objectivity” by partitioning the spaces of interpretation from those of mere description.

CONCLUSION

In Part II of the dissertation, the above-mentioned approach will be used to tease-out an analysis which will run the gamut from the broadest social forces all the way down
to the most random and accidental acts and statements of individuals. With the broadest lens, for example, we might note that individuals are compelled in capitalist society to purchase commodities in order to live. But with the smallest lens, we might see an individual consumer turning those products into durable goods which never need replacing; or using one commodity to make non-commodified goods and thereby reducing some part or portion of the commodity marketplace to redundancy; or reproducing themselves in communal relationships within their respective families.

By training and educating others, the individual consumer exercises her own agency and through her agency and leadership, institutions are capable of forming. But as these institutions become formalized, they may or may not continue to serve their original purpose—they may even prove to undermine the original goals.

To understand these arrangements and to create a discourse around them in this written work, we can understand the agents and the structures that make up society, on the one hand and the forces for either creating change (i.e. progress or liberalization) or maintaining traditional formulations (i.e. conservation) on the other. By placing all of my research topics somewhere on this scale (agency or structure—progress or conservation), I am able to then parse out how they interact, how they come to affect one another and, eventually, how they continually interact to create what we see on the ground today. By applying the same concepts throughout the history of Puerto Ricans in Chicago and of the expansion of capital more generally, I am able to add a temporal dynamic to the narrative. Ultimately, by continually anchoring the rolling narrative of the dissertation to this framework, I am able to contextualize an otherwise incoherent series of events and interactions into a coherent storyline, which more accurately captures the processes of social change as they pertain to my case study.
Shifting from the structuralist to an institutionalist perspective helps me to address literal institutions like banks, financial companies, housing developers, community organizations and even relatively obscure concepts like homeownership while simultaneously shifting focus away from broad generalizations and abstract concepts like “commodities,” “capitalism,” “workers,” and so forth. Said differently, I will be shifting my writings away from an explicitly Marxist lens to a more broadly heterodox one. I believe that this shift will also help me get away from the esoteric debates which mire Marxist discourses while creating something more palatable for readers who will certainly be coming from a diverse array of backgrounds. However, I will still employ Marx lens on political economy as it pertains to class and class dynamics of power.

This dialectical theme is maintained further within the writing of the work itself by allowing for the construction of the theoretical framework and interpretation outside of the case study itself. In this way, interpretations being offered within this work can be seen as one lens being applied without limiting the creation of others. By doing this, I hope to avoid the trappings of works depending on the mythos of “objectivism” while simultaneously avoiding bias by making the interpretive spaces within the essay as visible and explicit as possible.
Part II

Case Study of Puerto Rican Humboldt Park

Chicago, IL
2010-14

My warriors no longer play the horns and drums, and fearful they follow me not daring to look at me; I asked the whole world, and no one answers me.

– JOSE GAUTIER BENITEZ
CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

This chapter outlines some of the empirical tools and instruments employed in the gathering of information for the case study, such as U.S. Census and other publicly available data, as well as interviews, focus groups and participant observations.
Chapter 6
 Research Strategy

The research will rely on qualitative and quantitative methods: demographic analyses using information from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey from 1970-2010, interviews, focus groups, questionnaire, participant observation and historical records (by laws, news-clips, reports, documentary films, government documents, meeting minutes, websites, blogs, face book pages, etc.). I will utilize a case study approach as I believe that this research design will help me to answer the research question I have proposed: How do narratives of collective-identity-claims impact conceptions of private property? The following table outlines the various characteristics of the case study inquiry and how they apply to my own research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>How is it reflected in my research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>“A problem” (Creswell 2008, 99)</td>
<td>Gentrification may displace the Puerto Rican community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of research question and thesis statement</td>
<td>“How” and “Why” research questions (Yin 2008, 4)</td>
<td>My research question: How do narratives of collective-identity-claims impact conceptions of private property? My thesis statements: Symbols can be used by communities to slow the process of gentrification. The poor claim symbolic forms of ownership as they have been excluded from legal forms of ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time/Space</td>
<td>A contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (ibid.)</td>
<td>Chicago, West Side of Chicago, Humboldt Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodologies</td>
<td>Usually employ quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>- Quantitative (e.g. census data, GIS mapping).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodologies</strong> (C. Marshall and Rossman 2010)</td>
<td>- Qualitative data (e.g. interviews, focus groups).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedure/Sources of evidence</strong></td>
<td>Multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in triangulating fashion (Yin 2008, 13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|  | - Various stakeholders (government officials, community residents, real estate actors, etc.) with different interpretations of the phenomenon.  
  - The use of different tools: Statistical analysis, structured interview/questionnaires, interviews, historical documents, newspaper clips, etc. |
| **Unit of analysis** | The characteristics of an individual unit are observed – a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, 181) |
|  | The unit from is multi-scaled with individuals and collectives of individuals the focus. |
| **Study boundaries** | The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin 2008, 13) |
|  | The phenomenon is context-based and it could be perceived differently. |
| **Control variable** | The researcher does not have control over the behavioral events (Yin 2008, 4) |
|  | The research takes place in a natural (non-controlled) environment. |
| **Cause-and-effect relationships** | Explains the casual links in real-life interventions (Yin 2008, 25) |
|  | Explain and describe the links between symbolism and neighborhood change broadly. |
| **Outcomes** | Interventions being evaluated have no clear single set of outcomes (ibid.) |
|  | It is not clear which effects symbols have on low-income residents and gentrifiers as well as other agents involved. |
| **Ontological assumptions** | “associated with interpretative/constructivism that multiple realities exist that are time and context dependent…will choose to carry out [their] study using qualitative methods that can help gain an understanding of the constructs held by people in that context” (Mertens 1997, 161) |
|  | Constructivist research approach. |
UNIQUENESS OF THE CASE

The existence of Paseo Boricua’s flags is primarily what makes my field site such an interesting case, semiotically speaking. To say the least, they are the largest flags in the world that are not made of cloth and function as a community gateway. As a result, Humboldt Park is the only neighborhood in the United States with an official Puerto Rican identity. In 1995, with the installation of these monumental flags, Puerto Ricans were able to finally put themselves on the map of the city—becoming a designated Puerto Rican space for residents, tourists and others, to see on paper, the media and even experience as they wished.

Besides the flags, Paseo Boricua has more Puerto Rican restaurants (in terms of density) than New York, even though New York has about seven times more Puerto Ricans than Chicago (723,621 vs. 102,703, respectively, according to the 2010 Census). Moreover, the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (NMPRAC) is one-of-a-kind. It is the first and only Puerto Rican museum in the United States showcasing the richness of Puerto Rican arts and culture. In addition to all these elements, Chicago has been a major player in the expansion of Puerto Rican nationalism and a communitarian political ideology, mostly (although not strictly) led by members of the independentista movement, which advocates for the independence of Puerto Rico from the United States.

Many activists in the Puerto Rican community have argued that the most radical forms of Puerto Rican anti-imperialism, grassroots organizing have emerged from Chicago, which is home to the Young Lords Street Gang and most of the members of the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN) and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN). With the constant attacks of anticommunist sentiments,
revolutionary activists transformed their politics into reformist ones, taking part in
traditional, instead of radical, community organizing.

Today, Chicago is home to the largest Puerto Rican leader’s collective in the
U.S., the Puerto Rican Agenda, which engages in the development of programs,
policies and legislation affecting the Puerto Rican community in Chicago. I will be
concentrating much of my work on this organization as they lead, in one way or the
other, all of the identity projects in the area.

As evidence of the political awakening of the Chicago community, community
leaders at public meetings often recall the 1960s and 1970s riots—they point at these
events as major struggles that took place in Chicago, not New York City. All these
elements assert a Puerto Rican social presence and agency upon the urban
environment that secures representational and physical space within the city of
Chicago. Puerto Ricans have been at full force since the early 1990s, materially and
symbolically, constructing both through their labor and activism a Puerto Rican space
within the city.

Historically, there has been a fluidity of people into and within urban areas. In
capitalist societies people are not fixed in space; structural forces pull immigrants into
cities and structural forces also make workers move from the center into the
periphery. Puerto Ricans are a good example of a group composed of mostly laborers
and marginalized subjects that have been moved off and on the Island. This has
occurred repeatedly within the U.S. mainland and within the city of Chicago. Scholars
have characterized the Puerto Rican Nation as a “commuter nation” (Torre 1994) or
“on the move” (Duany 2002).

In contrast to more upwardly mobile groups, like the European immigrants, the
collective identity of Puerto Ricans, emerges less from possibilities of assimilation
and more from their experiences of marginalization on the Chicago streets and in the minds of their American neighbors. Puerto Ricans have drawn upon their cultural traditions and national identity as a way to create a sense of belonging and to some extent a degree of friction against others (the police, slumlords, gentrifiers, etc.). The Puerto Rican status as a diaspora and as a group of colonial migrants that have been constructing a community in exile, in constant change and mobility, has very specific social and spatial manifestations in Chicago, making this case study unique and worth examining.

Paseo Boricua and Humboldt Park have become a kind of national territory and politically sovereign state, that in the face of neighborhood change, according to activists, must be protected in order to protect Puerto Rican rights and citizenship. In conclusion, the existence of an expansive Puerto Rican symbology as a form of social and political power makes this an interesting case for studying how the production of symbology affects the abstract forces of market accumulation and vice versa.

**A Historical Case Study**

Given that there is a fluidity of the Puerto Rican community and that they have not been fixed in space, I will offer an historical account that tracks the movement of Puerto Ricans in the city of Chicago from 1970-2010 (see appendix A). This is done in order to demonstrate how the process of urbanization and capital accumulation has affected this ethnic group over time. More attention will be given to the time period from the 1990s to the present—when the pressures of neighborhood change encouraged community leaders to establish a stronger and clearer Puerto Rican identity through symbols.

I will use publicly available documents for content analysis (newspaper clips, blogs, websites, etc.) and personal accounts from residents to historicize and explain
the everyday life of Puerto Ricans. I will also document the pressures that have contributed to the mobility and change of the community. I will tell the story of how the community has constructed strategies of resistance based on identity and symbols. To maintain focus while in the past, I will be anchoring myself to dwellings and following their relationship with the Puerto Rican population. Given the remarkable level of interplay between capital, the state, urbanization and housing, I feel comfortable in saying that the storyline will be relatively free-flowing through the method outlined above.

As for historical models and written works that I will use to guide my work, I will be relying most heavily upon Gina Perez’s, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement and Puerto Rican Families*, Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas’ *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago*, Arlene Davila’s, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos and the Neoliberal City*, Christopher Mele’s, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City* and Janet Abu-Lughod’s, *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York’s Lower East Side*, among others. While I couldn’t possibly hope to match the breadth, skill, style, or technique of any of these masterpieces, I think this project will provide me with an excellent opportunity to find my voice and help me to broaden and improve my work in the future.

**DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS**

This case study aims to provide an evaluation of the problem by using both quantitative and qualitative tools. Much of this information was gathered as part of the research I conducted for the Puerto Rican Agenda, *60 Years after Migration: The State of the Puerto Rican Community of Metro Chicago*. Through this research, I already had access to five focus groups and interviews with more than sixty
community members, leaders and business owners. I also collected statistical secondary data from the Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS); Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council: Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA); Great Schools’ Rating; Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) U.S. Postal Service Vacancy; HUD’s A Picture of Subsidized Households; and other databases. All of that data was not included as part of this dissertation, but that is to say that the data that I analyzed for Puerto Ricans in Chicago, as well as for the geographic spaces that they occupy (Humboldt Park, West Town and so on) was quite vast and inspiring.

The first phase will include the collection and analysis of quantitative data in order to identify the community characteristics and changes through time including racial makeup, median incomes, housing values, along with others from the census and data sources mentioned above. Because census tracts change over time, census data from 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 was normalized to 2010 census tracts boundaries. These indicators will be used throughout the narrative to aid the storyline. The census data is collected at the census tract level from 1970-2010 for all of Chicago, but the analysis will be focused where the Puerto Rican population is concentrated. Data collected includes: population, family and household, housing characteristics, income, poverty status, educational attainment, among other variables.

I interviewed stakeholders—community leaders, government officials, developers and residents, among others—about their thoughts on symbols, urban change, gentrification and so on. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with various stakeholders (government officials, developers, real estate agents, community leaders, organization representatives, politicians legislative assistants, gentrifiers, Puerto Ricans, etc.) with different interpretations of the phenomenon.
At times I interviewed several subjects at the same time, family members, friends, co-workers and so on. These interview sessions become a sort of impromptu focus group. In some cases, I conduct more than one interview with the same participant. I will always conduct the interview at the convenience of the participant. Most subjects will be drawn from north/northwest Chicago, primarily the Humboldt Park region. My initial subjects are people I know from the Puerto Rican Agenda, whom I know personally and from there, the sample expanded to people I did not know. Interview questions inquired into assessments of the current, past and future conditions of the Puerto Rican community.

I tape-recorded most in-person interviews, but some participants choose not to be recorded. Some of the participants requested that I did not take notes during the meeting, this was often the case with outsiders and non-Latinos that did not know me. Audio tapes were transcribed by me and by an Internal Review Board (IRB) approved professional transcriber. I did not record any private conversations without verbal, or written consent. However, I did used a tape-recording for general assembly meetings. I explained the consent process to the person volunteering to participate in the study. To participate, the interviewee agrees to the research by signing an informed consent form, or verbally agreeing to participate. I keep the signed copy for my personal records and I give the participant a copy of the informed consent. If the informant choses to do a verbal consent, I keep a record of such an event. Participants could refer back to their IRB copy if they had any questions about the research, or any complaints and would like to report any perceived abuses with the IRB. I did not interview persons under the age of 18, in accordance with the exempt IRB protocol.

All interviews were transcribed. Information is coded and queried by theme and subject position, in order to ensure that all data on a particular topic and point of view,
is included and considered in the analysis. I also give attention to the subject positions of the participants in three categories: race, gender and whether they are community leaders, residents or realtors.

I used an assigned participant pseudonym for all individuals that were not considered public figures. The names of public figures were kept (if they agreed to) as they add to the richness of the story. Later on, stakeholders could make these participants accountable for the information that they gave me. I informed public figures (politicians and community leaders) about these distinctions, so they are more careful about what information they decide to share with me. I promise anonymity and confidentiality to all other participants. The interview subjects have the right (if they ask) to review the transcripts (although they wouldn’t be allowed to edit them). An executive director of an organization asked for them. In other words, transcripts will not be changed, even though my interpretation of those transcripts could be changed after having an open conversation about them.

This research attempts to remain as close as possible to the data, by heavily using the quotes from interviews in the narrative text. I include direct quotes as much as possible and/or key interview transcripts to ensure reliability and transparency, in a way that readers will be able to judge my interpretations (C. Marshall and Rossman 2010). These quotations are presented with relevant subject position information about the speaker (e.g. are they a female or male, low-income residents, or are they public figures who actively support a particular project, etc.). I used standard English spelling for quotes from English speakers and quotes translated from Spanish. Speech fillers such as “hum,” “uh,” “you know,” etc., were for the most part eliminated from the publication text, unless they were clearly important to add to the context of that quote. For example, a non-Hispanic white resident may not find the correct words to
tell me that they do not feel welcomed in Paseo Boricua. Original Spanish quotes were included as footnotes for each translated passage. Spanglish quotes are presented in the narrative in full English translation, while the mixed language will be provided in the footnote.

As part of the Puerto Rican Agenda I conducted several focus group with members of the Puerto Rican Agenda, business owners in Paseo and community members at large. I expected to conduct a couple of additional focus groups with: (1) Puerto Ricans who have moved out of Humboldt Park, (2) Gentrifiers in the Humboldt Park and Wicker Park area, (3) Long terms residents of Humboldt Park (regardless of ethnicity, race, etc.) and (4) Puerto Ricans living in the community.
However, due to limitations in time and resources, I abandoned the idea of conducting these focus groups as part of this project. These focus groups could be part of my future research in the community, outside of this dissertation.

Throughout the field research, I carried a tape-recorder and journal to record observations about my interactions with residents and research participants, as well as any other relevant information. These notes were typed and analyzed together with interviews and structured interview/questionnaire data. The following diagram summarizes the conceptual model that guided my analysis.

![Dissertation Process Diagram]

**LIMITATIONS**

Regarding quantitative data, one of the biggest limitations is that with the exception of the Decennial Census and American Community Survey, other datasets such as
The Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Postal Service Vacancy and HUD’s A Picture of Subsidized Households, among others do not distinguish between race and ethnicity. That being said, Puerto Ricans are aggregated with other Latinos, or Latinos are not even distinguished.

In regards to the qualitative data, because case studies draw on a wide range of perspectives from diverse community members, it is impossible to claim a single truth, or even generalize from this case study to the larger society. In that sense, I could argue that the non-exclusion of viewpoints and the non-generalization makes this study less biased. However, as a constructivist researcher, it is my responsibility to highlight different views, find their points of divergence or convergence and give them interpretation, at least to some extent. This constructivist approach—of giving meaning and bringing personal experiences to the research—could be considered biased to begin with. Though, I would argue, as Phillips and Pugh (2010) have, that “there is no such thing as unbiased observation” (57). This is why I am putting my interpretations upfront as a possible research limitation. Again, my main intent as a researcher is to provide useful information that can inform future community planning efforts, so as to create a development that is reflective of social justice and equality. Another possible limitation, is that some participants might withhold information or present their narratives with incomplete information.

**RIGOR**

These are some techniques that I use to ensure rigor on my research:

1) Triangulation – The different methodologies (i.e. quantitative and qualitative) and sources (interviews with residents, public officials, etc.) were used to corroborate and interpret the data.
2) Corroboration – I included the input of participants (specially from the Puerto Rican Agenda) in my research as much as possible. After roughly interpreting the data, I asked participants if they agreed with my interpretations.

3) Peer collaboration – Seeking the feedback from not only the participants, but also my classmates and professors at UIC, was essential to my research. Since they were observers of my project, they helped to reshape my process and methodologies from an outsiders’ perspective.

4) Time spent interpreting data – It is really important in the research process to spend time defining the problem and interpreting the data. Terry Moore (1991) in *A Practical Guide for Managing Planning*, said: “Planners typically spend 80 percent of the time gathering the data and 20 percent of their time interpreting it: the percentages would be better if they were reversed.” Regardless of the amount of time spent in each of the research phases (defining the problem, gathering the data and especially interpreting the data), it is crucial to ensure rigor in my research.

5) Field log journal – The effective use of a field log journal helped me to have a clear record of the logistics of each interview/observation (e.g. who said what, when, etc.) and it made the process more efficient. To my best possible, notes were taken with transparency and clarity, rather than with detail (as too much detail can obscure, more than illuminate the data).

**Significance**

The analysis of gentrification presented in Dávila’s *Barrio Dreams and* Mele’s *Selling the Lower East Side*, follows consumption and production-based interpretations where consumers, as well as developers are attracted to the identity and the character of the neighborhood. In *Barrio Dreams*, Dávila explains how East
Harlem became gentrified by middle class Puerto Ricans and other Latinos that sought the culture of the place they felt affinity for. In *Selling the Lower East Side*, white gentrifiers were attracted to the place, because the reinvented Alphabet City offered them not only a cool neighborhood identity, but the amenities they wanted: new housing development, location, environment, entertainment, etc. Although both of these works show how symbolism could act as a double-edge sword—attracting new residents and helping those who stay to resist cultural and spatial change—I concentrate mostly on how symbols act as a barrier against those who might be attracted by the profitable investment and/or the consumption of place.

I believe that I can make a contribution to the knowledge base regarding symbols and neighborhood change through this particular case study. I hope that by bringing attention to the planning challenges that the Puerto Rican community in the Humboldt Park Area faces, this research will be useful to community members at risk of losing their social, cultural, economic and political assets to gentrification. In addition, by examining symbolism in the urban landscape, I hope to give recommendations on how communities might incorporate identity projects that fight gentrification and preserve community in place.
This chapter lays out a brief historical review of the Puerto Rican diaspora and how have their work and migration patterns been deeply impacted by the colonial relations between first Spain and then, the United States. Although Puerto Ricans have migrated to the U.S. since the early 1900s, their mass migration started in the late 1940s as a result of the Operation Bootstrap (Puerto Rico’s industrialization project, sponsored by Puerto Rico’s Department of Economic Development and the U.S. Federal Government).
Chapter 7
Puerto Ricans, Work, and Migration

“Across the aisle, Mami’s eyes were misty. She stretched her fingers toward mine and we held hands as the plane rose about the clouds. Neither one of us could have known what lay ahead. For her it began as an adventure and turned out to have more twists and turns than she expected or knew how to handle. For me, the person I was becoming when we left was erased and another one was created. The Puerto Rican jíbara who longed for the green quiet of a tropical afternoon was to become a hybrid who would never forgive the uprooting.”
Esmeralda Santiago, When I Was Puerto Rican, (Santiago 2006)

From the time of Spanish colonial rule until today, Puerto Ricans have been subjected to the political decrees and juridicial whims of other nation’s governments. In economic terms alone, since the island’s encomiendas, habitants of Puerto Rico have been pushed by foreign authorities from horticultural communities, into slavery and colonial systems of production. Later, having fled from the prosperous coastal regions into the center of the island, in search of refuge from the hacienda economies of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Puerto Ricans have subsistence levels of production in the highland regions of the island. However, as technologies progressed throughout the 19th century, the Spanish government was able to construct road and railroad networks which left no place for Puerto Ricans to hide and with the passage of the jornalero laws of the 1840s, Puerto Ricans were no longer allowed to live off of their own piece of property but rather of a labor contract. Those who resisted, or were otherwise insubordinate, had their libretas (small journals which functioned as passports and were required to be carried by all landless workers for the purposes of identification) marked with their offense and risked being subjected to continuous harassment, forced labor and incarceration for the rest of their lives.
As the United States took possession of the island at the turn of the century, all notions of democratic potential were crushed under the weight of presidential appointments for governors and diplomats—mostly comprised of former generals and admirals from the United States’ armed forces. Land was privatized, formalized and policed according to evolving British-style classical economic doctrines; those deprived of access were left to beg for work, or squat on land which was later seized by the state. By the late 1940s, a century after having had the jornalero laws thrust upon them by the Spanish crown, Puerto Ricans were displaced once again from their horticultural and agricultural roots and cast-off into the competitive and frequently deleterious world of industrialized economic development. Ever since, Puerto Ricans, both at home and abroad, have been subjected to what Marx (1990) in Capital Vol. 1, Chapter 28, called “the dull compulsion of economic relations.” Whereas other formations of power being used to repress Puerto Ricans were overt in their tactics, subordination to underemployment and instability in capitalist market economies takes on a far less explicit character.

In 1953, Leonor Díaz Roman, originally from San Sebastián Los Pepinos, migrated to the United States and headed towards Chicago. He had left in the island of Puerto Rico his three children and wife Blanca López Ruiz, originally from Arecibo’s Barrio Esperanza, to work in the butcher yard on 47th and Ashland. Later, like many other males in his position, he sent for the rest of his family (Jiménez 2012). Depending on how you define migration and immigration, Mr. Díaz Roman was among the 470,000 Puerto Rican immigrant, or migrants that entered the United States in the 1950s (Vázquez-Calzada 1988). Following the path of Puerto Ricans for more than 60 years became part of “the Great Migration.”
Immigration implies that the person is moving from one nation-state to another nation-state. For economists, migration is used to explain an internal movement within the same nation-state, over a long enough distance to be considered a change from one labor market to another (Luibhéid 2007). According to the economistic behavioral model of migration, (im)migrants usually expect an improvement on their economic situation from the move (Lowry 1966). According to the Puerto Ricans that participated in the 2006 National Latino Survey after being asked, “what would you say is the main reason you came to live in the United States?” the vast majority indicated that the primary cause for the move was to improve their economic situation (63 percent), followed by “my parents brought me as a child” (13 percent) and “family reunification” (10 percent) (Fraga et al. 2008). Although the respondents of this survey could have migrated at any point in time, either in the 1940s or in the 2000s, economic opportunity is often cited as the main reason for migrating, being real or perceived. As a 1966 pamphlet titled Emigración created by Puerto Rico’s Community Education Division states,

The news and letters of those who leave almost always speak of good things. It will be hard for someone to write saying he or she has failed. It doesn’t matter if he or she is doing well, when writing he or she would say that the place is phenomenal and that they are doing better than ever. This news, false or real, can make us try our fortune in the North. (Marqués 1966, 10)
In pure economistic terms, there is the other coin to economic opportunity in America, that is economic depression, or the lack of opportunity in Puerto Rico. By having the option of moving to the U.S., Puerto Ricans could escape unemployment and low-wages. Borgas has argued that there is a positive correlation between receiving destinations and average wages, while there is a negative correlation for unemployment rates (Borjas 1987). From an economic perspective, many scholars like Borgas also argue that (im)migrants move where they have family ties in order to reduce the costs and risks of first (im)migrating. These neoclassical economic models, assume that individuals are making rational decisions about when and where to move, mostly based on their perceived economic opportunity, by weighting costs and benefits. While economic explanations have long been central in the literature, others have tried to explain mobility based on primarily cultural factors (Portes and Böröcz 1989). These scholars write about how migrants seek the support of their kinship,
family and friends, to understand migration flows. Furthermore, there is an informational component where the established family and friends help newcomers to settle, find a job, find housing, receive social services and understand to navigate the laws and regulations of their new homeland.

As the industrial production of agriculture from the late 1880s to the 1920s spread throughout southern and Eastern Europe and as the rural lifestyle of the farmer began to fade away, capitalist cities in the U.S. burgeoned with immigrants seeking positions as wage laborers. These new immigrants encountered their predecessors already living in American cities. Old immigrants were already established, acculturated and had accumulated some wealth. They had moved to the U.S. originally from northern and Western Europe between 1820 and 1880 (Legreid 2005). On the other hand, new immigrants were rarely able to gain wages adequate for sustaining a family in even a moderately decent—much less healthy—living environment. They were both blamed and feared for their poverty.

By the end of the 19th century, the political consciousness of nationalism was emerging and Americans (once Europeans) were demanding a halt to immigration from Southern-Eastern Europe and Asia which had high numbers of “undesirable” migrants (Hobsbawm 2012). As a result, the United States implemented very strict immigration quotas in the 1920s, with the exception of the rest of North America, through the Mexican and Canadian guest worker programs. Due to labor scarcity during this time, there was a growing demand for low-skilled workers from Mexico and Puerto Rico. This shift in migration policy favored Puerto Rican workers, who enjoyed a special status in the labor market as American citizens (granted through the Jones Act in 1917 seeking to enlist Puerto Ricans in the armed forces and to deter sentiments of nationalism in the Island). When Puerto Ricans started to migrate from
the island to the mainland, the United States already had emerged as the single most important industrialized society in the world.

**OPERATION BOOTSTRAP**

But what specific factors prompted Puerto Rican migration to the United States? Operation Bootstrap has been cited as the root cause of the massive migratory phenomenon of the mid-1940s and 1950s. Although during the 19th century, Puerto Rico was developing its agricultural potential, it wasn’t until the 20th century, when Americans took control of Puerto Rico, that agricultural production, especially sugar production industrialized the Island’s agriculture at a large scale. The main goal of Operation Bootstrap—*Manos a la Obra* in Spanish and better translated to “Let’s Get to Work”—was the economic development of Puerto Rico. In addition from the 1900s to 1940s the population of Puerto Rico more than doubled and unemployment increased (Walter 1948). Puerto Rico’s poverty was compared to the poverty of West Virginia mining towns and sharecropper areas in the Deep South (Chase 1951). By the 1940s the number of landless workers had increased. These workers lived on land that was not theirs. As Stuart Chase (ibid.), social theorist and economist at the time, noted the farm laborer is,

> mostly the wielder of the hoe and the machete in the sugar fields, working only part of the year constitutes the heart of the problem … there is no place on the land for all of the many children of these agregados and they come crowding into the slums. (4)

During this time land had become more monopolized than during the Spanish rule. Although in the 1900s the U.S. Congress instituted a law that limited agricultural corporations to 500 acres, the law was largely disregarded and, by 1941, about forty corporations owed almost all the land in the Island (ibid., 17).
At the time, industrialization was considered the only way out of poverty, as it was believed to contribute to a falling birth rate and therefore, the means for achieving a better life: A better a house, a college education for the kids and so on.

And so the farm people, many of them, must come down from the hills and from the sugar fields. They must go into factories and into the occupations which serve industry. If Puerto is to avoid the doom of Malthus, it must do what the United States, Britain, Western Europe, have done and reduce the proportion of farmers in the total of gainfully employed to 30 percent or less ... This means mechanization, technology, inanimate energy from oil, coal, falling water and large increase in capital investment. (ibid., 5)

In the same vein Teodoro Moscoso head of Fomento (Puerto Rico’s Economic Development Administration) alleged,

Puerto Rico is going to get clean away from subsidies and handouts. We are building a strong self-supporting economy. We are also conducting a testing ground for political and economic experiments in the atomic age. We have a hard decade ahead of us as we shift from an agricultural society to an industrial one, but we will in through. (ibid.)

Congressman Crawford, an ultra-conservative Republican in Michigan, called Operation Bootstrap the “most significant economic operation under the American flag today” (ibid., 14). Operation Bootstrap was envisioned as a model for how to modernize through capitalism, not only Puerto Rico, but other undeveloped countries. Puerto Rico was considered an experiment of industrialization for others to watch. It was believed that if Puerto Rico could solve its problems, other majority “low-income” societies would follow the model. The ambitious campaign which started in 1948 under the leadership of Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marín, was designed to create job opportunities on the island and therefore, allow Puerto Ricans to stay in the island if they choose to. Governor Luis Muñoz Marin had the support of the banking and business sectors and almost the entire community (ibid., 6).

Fomento (Puerto Rico’s Economic Development Administration) engineered Operation Bootstrap. The government of Puerto Rico offered tax breaks and subsidized space for industrial units, to private U.S. corporations that moved and
invested in the island. Many people where lifted out of poverty during this time. But at the same time that the unemployed found work, traditional farming was being transformed into industrialized agriculture. In 1940, agriculture accounted for about 70 percent of Puerto Rico’s net income, but that was about to change as investors were running away from the agricultural production of coffee, tobacco and sugar all together (Walter 1948). Together, these factors resulted in a surplus of displaced agricultural workers whose manual labor was no longer needed (Duany 2002, 102–105). In addition, during this time small landowners started to take mortgage loans in order to improve their agricultural production but, unable to compete with larger productions or find agricultural workers willing to take lower wages, many of them faced foreclosure and bankruptcy (Marqués 1966, 10). The new unemployed, that resulted from industrialized modern agriculture, could not be absorbed at the same rate that the jobs were being created under export oriented manufacturing. The government of Puerto Rico, in order to ease unemployment, encouraged these dislocated workers to migrate to the United States instead (A. M. Carrión 1984, 89–94).

**THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA**

This is how the conceptualization of a Puerto Rican diaspora emerges. Workers were forced to emigrate, thus resulting in the dispersal of Puerto Ricans throughout the U.S. mainland. The term diaspora indicates an involuntary movement that has been forced upon a population and it is used by scholars to make comparisons of ethnic groups, or populations that are located in different geographies. The term was first applied to Jews and African American slaves, but Puerto Rican scholars, as well as many other ethnic scholars have appropriated the term to call attention to the Puerto
Rican condition. The term diaspora, therefore, includes those Puerto Ricans in the United Stated, being first, second, third generation and beyond.

Historians trace the beginning of the migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. to the late 1800s (Whalen and Vasquez 2005). However, it was not until the 1940s that the first sizeable group of Puerto Rican migrants arrived and consisted of thousands of agricultural laborers, primarily to work on New England’s shade tobacco farms, in the Connecticut River Valley (Glasser 1997). Although some agricultural workers returned to the island after the end of the season, many decided to stay. After the end of World War II, the U.S. economy was restructuring—there was a decline on agricultural jobs and an increase in industrial jobs. Puerto Rican workers from New England’s farmlands started to migrate to New England cities such as, New York and Hartford in search for manufacturing jobs (ibid.). After that shift in the economy, many Puerto Rican migrants started to move directly into cities in search of manufacturing jobs. Most of the men worked in industrial jobs, or in the service sector, especially hotels and restaurants, while women were employed as domestic laborers, or in particular manufacturing industries such as garment (Toro-Morn 1999). With the money they earned, although very modest, they supported their families in the U.S. and those who were in the island in the form of remittances (ibid.).

While a previous generation of migrations came by boat, transportation innovations such as the commercial airplane made it easier for Puerto Ricans to travel. Puerto Rican migration to the United States constitutes the first massive airborne (im)migration to the United States. For example, a ticket from Puerto Rico to New York in 1966 was about $64, that is $470 in 2012. Compare that to the price of traveling to Europe in 1966, which was about $200 or $300, or $1,400 and $2,200 in 2012 (Marqués 1966). Another reason that is often brought up as to why so many
Puerto Ricans chose New York City as their main destination, is that a direct flight from Puerto Rico to New York is only a few hours. Nonetheless, the cost of transportation, as well as the time of travel, is only second and third, to the ability of Puerto Ricans to move to the U.S. without a passport and visas because of their American citizenship (ibid.). A fourth reason that has a lot of weight is the encouragement of friends and family members to move, in search or opportunity or to be close—this is called “chain migration”. These factors taken together have contributed to the growth of (im)migrants from the island in the U.S. mainland and in the 1950s specifically to New York City.

The primary migration to New York City has long been explained by the gravity model, which takes into account the higher earnings differentials, as well as geographical distance. Places where migration costs are lower tend to be preferable. With more Puerto Rican migration and the creation of geographic enclaves in New York City, cultural barriers could be erased. This in turn facilitated more migration into the area by increasing cultural familiarity. Although Puerto Ricans according to citizenship did not cross national boundaries, culturally speaking they had experiences similar to immigrants. They did not know the language, or the local customs or laws. Therefore, they experienced a much more difficult transition than someone moving within the U.S. mainland. In addition, many migrants were relatively rural people that moved into large urban areas in the United States. Most of them had never worked in industries or lived in rental apartments before.

Although in terms of percent change, from 1910 to 1950, the population growth of Puerto Ricans was substantial (with the exception of the 1930s). It was not until the 1950s that the U.S started to see Puerto Rican (im)migrant growth in terms of sheer
numbers. For example, in 1940 there were 69,967 Puerto Ricans in continental United States. By 1950 that number had almost tripled to 226,110.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Puerto Ricans in the United States</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1,513</td>
<td>681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>11,811</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>52,774</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>69,967</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>226,110</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>892,513</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1,391,463</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2,013,945</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2,651,815</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3,406,178</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4,623,716</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 — Puerto Rican in the United States 1910-2010. Source: U.S. Census. The data from 1910 to 1950 only takes into account Puerto Ricans who were born in Puerto Rico (nationality), while from 1950 and on the Census started to count those who were not only originally coming from Puerto Rico, but also their descendants.

These figures show the number of Puerto Rican emigrants to the United States.

Between 1950 and 1960 about a half million (470,000) Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States. Although the vast majority of Puerto Ricans migrated to New York City, others like Leonor Díaz Román, as mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, sought for opportunities elsewhere as was the case of Chicago. Other family members and acquaintances, in the circuit of connections, followed them to these newer destinations.
According to Elena Padilla’s, *Puerto Rican Immigrants in New York and Chicago: A Study in Comparative Assimilation*, written in 1947, Puerto Ricans started to migrate to Chicago in the late 1940s. The population was very small as evidenced by the 1950 count of 255 Puerto Ricans. Because of their small number, Puerto Ricans were not forming any “colonies” yet in Chicago, according to Padilla (1986). In 1960, Puerto Ricans started to disperse across the country as revealed by the percent decrease of Puerto Rican representation in New York City from 82.9 percent in 1950, to 68.6 percent in 1960.

By 1960, Chicago became the second largest Puerto Rican population outside of Puerto Rico and it remained as such until 2000. In 2010 Philadelphia surpassed Chicago’s Puerto Rican population becoming the 2nd largest Puerto Ricans community in the United States after New York City. Still, New York City has far more Puerto Ricans than any other city including San Juan, Puerto Rico. For example, New York City had twice as many Puerto Ricans in 2010 than San Juan (the capital and the most populous city of Puerto Rico). In the year 2010, Chicago had about one Puerto Rican for every 8.5 Puerto Ricans living in New York City.
Given Puerto Rican history in New York City, it should not be a surprise that most of the academic work being developed on the Puerto Rican diaspora originated from New York City. On a side note, I wish to notice that this dissertation is part of the continuous effort of scholars such as Elena Padilla, Felix M. Padilla, Maura Toro-Morn, Nilda Flores, Marixa Alicea, Lourdes Torres, Merida Rúa, Arlene Torres, Frances Aparicio, Lorena García, Gina Pérez, and Ana Ramos-Zayas among others, to document the history of migration and current conditions of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago.

After nearly a century of migration, Puerto Ricans have been labeled as a “nation on the move” (Duany 2002). Today, the exodus of the population continues to gain momentum with the island’s high unemployment (above 15 percent) and the nearly economic collapse of Puerto Rico’s economy, which holds more than $70 billion in public debt. The 2013 American Community Survey estimates the total number of Puerto Ricans in the United States at 4,970,604 (41 percent) and those living in Puerto Rico at 3,515,844 (59 percent). The American Community Survey indicates that Puerto Rico has been losing its population and that since the early 2000s more Puerto

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**Figure 9 — Chicago's and New York's Puerto Rican Population.** Source: Census of Population and Housing (1950-1990) and Decennial Census Summary File 2 (2000 and 2010).
Ricans live in the United States, in the diaspora, than on the island of Puerto Rico itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Puerto Rico</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3,668,730</td>
<td>3,781,317</td>
<td>7,450,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3,745,007</td>
<td>3,981,947</td>
<td>7,732,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>3,765,840</td>
<td>4,120,295</td>
<td>7,886,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3,781,815</td>
<td>4,216,533</td>
<td>7,998,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3,784,396</td>
<td>4,426,738</td>
<td>8,211,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3,554,642</td>
<td>4,691,890</td>
<td>8,246,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3,542,571</td>
<td>4,885,294</td>
<td>8,427,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3,515,844</td>
<td>4,970,604</td>
<td>8,486,448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10 — Puertoricans population in Puerto Rico and the United States. Source: Selected Population Profile in Puerto Rico and Selected Population Profile in the United States form the American Community Survey 1-year estimates for 2005-2009 and 2011-2012 as well as 2010 Census Summary File 2.

Scholars have theorized that the labor commodity follows the rules of supply and demand. Put simply, Puerto Ricans tend to migrate during periods of economic stagnation and may stay on the island, or even return to their homeland in periods of economic stability. The Puerto Rican economy has stagnated since the late 1990s and when Operation Bootstrap formally ended, Puerto Rico dismantled its manufacturing industry. In addition, during the Great Recession of 2008, the Puerto Rican government announced massive job layoffs. The media, both on the island and in the U.S., stressed the severity of the crisis by stating that the population of Puerto Rico had decreased by two percent from the previous decade. According to the 2010 Decennial Census, about 244,000 Puerto Ricans left in search of economic opportunity in the “promised land” (Vargas-Ramos and Meléndez 2013).

Puerto Ricans in the late 1940s and today, have migrated to the United States and Chicago because they feel the compulsion of escaping their current economic condition. They also have the hope of doing better for themselves in the context of a capitalist society, where one has to sell its labor in order to reproduce in one’s life. But not all the decisions about migration are based on economic factors; they are often based on migrant’s family networks and social ties. Today there are 102,854 Puerto Ricans in the city of Chicago, representing 3.8 percent of the total population (“U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Census” 2010). Puerto Ricans in Chicago have less schooling than African Americans—12.9 percent of Puerto Ricans have a college
degree, in comparison with 17.8 percent of African Americans. Although the Mexican population’s educational attainment is lower, 8.9 percent of Mexicans have fared better with housing than either Puerto Ricans, or African Americans—with a 46.7 percent homeownership rate, compared to 36.3 percent for Puerto Ricans and 34.7 percent for African Americans. Nonetheless, Puerto Rican families have lower poverty rates than Mexicans and African Americans (17.9, 22.5, 22.7 percent, respectively).

These statistics indicate, contrary to what was believed by sociologists of the Chicago School of Sociology, including Elena Padilla, that Puerto Ricans like other minorities in the city of Chicago, have not “assimilated” like Europeans did. However, when Puerto Ricans first migrated to Chicago they were praised as “hardworking,” “a model minority,” “stable and organized,” and “peaceful and furiously ambitious” (Pérez 2004, 73–74). This was a very different picture painted by researchers, policy makers and the media of Puerto Ricans in New York City, who on the contrary were “violent, welfare-dependent and involved in gangs” (ibid.). Put simply, Puerto Ricans in Chicago in the 1950s and early 1960s were depicted at the antithesis of those in New York City. Nonetheless, this image of Puerto Ricans in Chicago was transformed in June 1966, when the “model minority” erupted in a riot, protesting decades of discrimination and mistreatment. Carmen Whalen and Victor Vazquez argue that, “Puerto Ricans did not passively accept unemployment and poverty, horrendous working conditions, or second class status” (Whalen and Vasquez 2005). Thus, in the context of Chicago a narrative that rejects assimilation takes place in the form of creating a Puerto Rican ethnic enclave and the symbols that surround it in order to achieve self-determination.
CHAPTER 8 SUMMARY

The factors that gave the impetus to construct two massive Puerto Rican flags at either end of Paseo Boricua—a strip of Division Street running through the neighborhood’s Puerto Rican community—are investigated in this chapter. The flags, as well as the meaning they symbolically convey to Puerto Ricans and outside communities, provide a conduit for a form of ownership which challenges private property rights as recognized by the U.S. legal and economic system; rights which would have been unattainable to the community through normal market interactions.
Chapter 8
Paseo Boricua

Paseo Boricua is the most densely commercialized Puerto Rican business district in the United States and is located on the West Side of Chicago, Illinois. This space serves as the epicenter of Puerto Rican Chicago and is often described as the Puerto Rican’s pedacito de patria (a small piece of the motherland) (“Paseo Boricua Directory 2007” 2007). Constructed of steel and made to arch over the entryway and exit of Paseo Boricua, the two large artistic representations of Puerto Rican flags function as the gateway for either side of the seven-block corridor of Puerto Rican businesses, restaurants and non-profit organizations. The strip that composes Paseo Boricua is considered by those living inside and outside of the area, both Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans, to be the “heart” of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community (ibid).

The waving flags, designed by the architectural firm DeStefano and Partners and produced by Chicago Ornamental Iron Co., each weigh about 45 tons and rise up 56 feet into the air, while spanning the 59 feet across the width of Division Street. The flags mark the boundaries to Paseo Boricua that extends for an entire mile, or 6 blocks, between them; the business district running from Western Avenue, in the east and California Avenue to the west. They are the largest flags in the world that are not made of cloth (“Paseo Boricua Tour and Humboldt Park Tour” 2014). This monument is physically located in the West Town neighborhood of Chicago. These flags were made of strong steel to commemorate those Puerto Ricans who first arrived to Chicago and worked in the steel mills (Cruz 2007, 80).
Paseo Boricua includes a Puerto Rican walk of fame, resembling the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, California and features the names of distinguished Puerto Ricans like Lucecita Benítez, Tito Puente, El Gran Combo Andy Montañez, Chucho Valdés, Calle 13 and many others. The area has many street murals painted by Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican artists. Street banners showcase the three heritage pillars of Puerto Ricans: the sun (indigenous), vegigante or carnival mask (African) and garita or watch tower (Spanish).

As part of a sidewalk beautification project, 78 large pots were placed, each decorated with paintings of one of the 78 town flags of the Puerto Rican island. The strip has about 16 small plazas with stone tables and benches for public use. A total of 50 street light posts illuminate the sidewalks at night and provide additional safety for residents and visitors. In addition, some of the building façades of affordable housing projects like La Estancia and Teresa Roldán Apartments have been built to look like the architecture of Old San Juan—with pastel colors, wrought-iron balconies and tile-
roofed buildings. Supermercado La Municipal is made to resemble a Spanish fortress in San Juan. Many businesses are named after rather rural towns in Puerto Rico such as Yauco, Rincón, Jayuya and others. This Puerto Rican business district is unique in the United States. The flags of Paseo Boricua make the area the “only officially recognized Puerto Rican community area” in the United States (Guerrero 2003).

The name for the strip, Paseo Boricua (or, simply, Paseo), has been attributed to Ramón López, a Puerto Rican artist and writer trained in cultural anthropology. He explained the meaning of the steel flags in an article published by the Claridad newspaper:

The flag is a monument with multiple meanings…. It commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Puerto Rican patriots who fought Spanish colonialism and declared it the national flag…. It also commemorates the nostalgia, the visible symbol of our belonging to a territory that we always remember, always with the hope to return or visit…. It commemorates the tradition of images—the Three Kings day celebration, coquis, vejigantes … that accompanies us in a city that belongs to another climate and whose rented walls we want to paint and adorn with our own footprint…. It commemorates the many times when Puerto Ricans filled the streets with the flag during parades and protests…. It commemorates all the times that we hung the flag from our necks…. It commemorates the bloodshed in the history of that Island and in the pavement of this street. Here in Chicago the flag is painted in the most total sense: to reclaim space, to mark a point, to announce that our presence is much more than a transitory passage, that we have made history in Chicago and that we are going to continue making it. (as cited in Ramos-Zayas 2003, 214)

For Ramón López, the flags on Paseo are shaped by narratives of belonging and cultural meaning and at the same time by narratives of colonialism, cultural domination, otherness and violence. These narratives, the “good” and the “bad,” are brought together and represented by these two seemingly inanimate objects. In the above citation López draws attention to the ways in which these flags have become the spatial expression of the history of Puerto Ricans everywhere, but especially in the city of Chicago. For López, the flags are a sign of the struggle for Puerto Ricans to claim a space of their own. López implies that Puerto Ricans have not been fully recognized by the city of Chicago as citizens and that the flags themselves are meant
to act as a highly political “landscape of power” (Zukin 1991). Rather than Puerto Ricans being assimilated, the flags are an affirmation that a migrant does not necessarily need to fit into the norms of a dominant culture in order to succeed and make history.

In the following excerpt, Enrique Salgado, former executive director of the Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA) summarizes how he sees Paseo Boricua representing the Puerto Rican community,

Paseo Boricua is—how do I say it?—the microcosm of the Puerto Rican community, civically, culturally, socially, economically and that really has been what Paseo Boricua has tried to be and it has been that at different points and it still has the potential to be all of that still. So the function of Paseo Boricua to our community is almost as a marker, a place that you know you could always go back to, or a place where you’re related to in a real way, you’re related to it in an abstract way, if you are part of the Puerto Rican community. And even if you did not grow up in Humboldt Park you’re somehow related to Paseo Boricua. And it has come over time, to embody a set, also, of values as well as a perspective of the Puerto Rican community that obviously is one of more self-determination and self-reliance, which I don’t mind …, but it has also acted as a place where no matter what ideology you are of, that you can find a possible compromise for the broader good of the community.

According to Salgado, Paseo is approximate to an archetypical model for the Puerto Rican community in virtually every way: “civically, culturally, socially, economically.” While López explains that the flags “mark a point,” Salgado conversely asserts that Paseo is the “marker.” With the language of “self-determination and self-reliance,” Salgado emphasizes how Paseo can be a space for Puerto Ricans to create their own spheres of influence and to re-invent themselves in the city; and not only for those living in or near Paseo, but all Puerto Ricans in the city. It doesn’t matter which political ideology an individual Puerto Rican may subscribe to, according to the promoters of Paseo the flags benefit all Puerto Ricans.
because they grant them legitimacy regardless if they lived in the neighborhood, or not.  

**THE FLAGS**

In 1993, Billy Ocasio, then serving as Alderman for the 26th Ward, which encompasses the Humboldt Park community and Paseo Boricua, convened local businesses, public officials and other community stakeholders in a summit to discuss a plan for the community’s business district. The following section seeks to explain the set of historical factors that created the impetus for the creation of the flags. 

Roughly speaking, this process brought together a number of factors: (1) A need to unify the community outside electoral politics, (2) A need to reconcile the Puerto Rican community’s internal divisions, (3) An effort to instill pride in a community overflowing with socio-economic problems and a long history of marginalization, (4) A drive to slow or stop gentrification pressures coming from the westward expansion of the trendy West Town community, (5) organization and articulation of emergent feelings of sympathy within the city government for projects surrounding conceptions of identity, especially those leading to (or intending to lead to) economic development.

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3 Some interviewees spoke poorly of Paseo Boricua not because they do not like the Puerto Rican shops and restaurants, but because the space is associated with supporting Puerto Rico’s independence and therefore, communism. Some of the signs that Puerto Ricans from the statehood party read are the color of the flags (baby blue) and the work of organizations like the Puerto Rican Cultural Center as such. Jose Lopez and Oscar Lopez are particularly called communists by groups who advocate for Puerto Rico’s statehood. In addition to these internal divisions, there are divisions between the “old guard” and “new guard” leadership. For those who are part of the “new guard” (although they do not call themselves this), the “old guard” (referring to Puerto Rican leaders who started organizing in the 1960s to 1980s) focus on the past instead of moving forward. The “new guard” (who tends to be well connected professionals) as well as other higher income Puerto Ricans talk about how Puerto Ricans should assimilate. They claim that rather than insisting on a communist, nationalist and Independentista past, Puerto Ricans should embrace capitalism fully as well as live with others across the city. For this group Paseo Boricua is not really needed because maintaining Puerto Ricans in a Puerto Rican space is anti-progressive.
Billy Ocasio, who served for 16 years in his position as Alderman for the 26th Ward, was appointed to his aldermanic seat in 1993. He stepped in for Representative Luis Gutierrez who had left the 26th Ward to become a U.S. Congressman—a position he continues to hold today. Although there were several other Latino politicians interested in the seat, Ocasio had the backing of both Gutierrez and the Mayor. The following year was far less simple for Ocasio, as he would have to run for election to hold the seat appointed to him the previous year. To make things harder, for the first time, the Cook County Redistricting Committee had redrawn the district boundaries and created two majority Latino districts. This meant that both Billy Ocasio and a fellow Puerto Rican were to run against one another in a Puerto Rican enclave—and thus divide the Puerto Rican community even further. Ocasio approached Mayor Richard Daley’s staff, who was similarly engaged in their own re-election campaign and pleaded with them,

You guys just created a mess! I am running for the first time and you guys have just created such a division in our community that I don’t know how we are going to win elections next year. So they came and said, “okay well, what do you suggest we do?” [And I said,] “we got to do something big, we got to do something big that is going to reunite this community.” I remembered that we had done this big summit day, something that we had talked about in 1993. We had done a summit in May and over that summit I kind of looked at everything and okay where can I get started here and for me if I could create a business district, if I could create something that could instill some pride in the Puerto Rican people. Then I told the mayor’s people, then it will help me unite the community again because they have taken like Puerto Rican elected officials and put them on this side and we have some on this side so you just created a real big division among us. So really? This is all kind of a what you call it, one of those things you gain—spoils of war. It’s like, one of those things that we ended up winning in the elections but since they had created such a big division in the Puerto Rican community and I use it to our advantage. And so I need something done, here’s what I need done and I need something done on Division street. So that’s when they kind of said “Alright, let’s see what this one look like” and they brought in the Commission of Transportation in and that was kind of the beginning of how we got the flags and business control.
As noted by Ocasio, the idea of establishing a business district came out of a retreat organized by the Puerto Rican Agenda (and activist organization) and himself in May of 1993. At this retreat there were also discussions about the ability of Puerto Ricans to state their claims to space and although the idea of flags as markers for a business district did not yet exist, the idea of a business district was already circulating through the discussions of the community’s leadership. The envisioned business district for the west of Western on Division Street, was to become a landmark for the Puerto Rican community capable of effectively unifying them after the political heat.

Something to note in the above quote is the kind of power that Billy Ocasio had, to ask of the staff in the Major’s office for a project to be funded in his district. Community activists from the Puerto Rican Agenda, often talk in informal conversations with me about how they had to compromise their beliefs when dealing with City Hall, in order to accomplish things for the community. Many community leaders are from the Independent, or the Socialist Party in Puerto Rico and they did not consider themselves Democrats in the United States. At times, it was even hard for Puerto Rican leaders from the Socialist Party to work with those that were from the Independent Party. Actually, they could not stand each other, or even be in the same room with each other. But leaders from these far left politics learned how to work together and eventually become part of “machine politics”, especially during the administration of Mayor Harold Washington. Turning out voters for their candidates provided community leaders with the political support they needed for their districts, local organizations and projects.

2. INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND THE PEDRO ALBIZU CAMPOS STATUE

Nilda Flores in her 2001 article, *Paseo Boricua: Claiming a Puerto Rican Space in Chicago*, discusses the issue of the city of Chicago park district denying the
placement of the Pedro Albizu Campos statue in the park as one of the main factors giving impetus to the establishment of the flags on Division Street. The paragraphs that follow explain briefly the incident.

In 1993, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) and the Alderman of the 26th Ward, Billy Ocasio, along with members of several other Puerto Rican organizations, wanted to pay homage to lawyer and activist Dr. Albizu Campos, by placing a statue of him in the park. Dr. Albizu Campos, the son of a former slave and a mulatto, was the first Puerto Rican to graduate from Harvard Law and was well renowned for his theories on colonialism and the fight for Puerto Rican sovereignty. But while the proposed statue of Dr. Albizu Campos was crafted with plaster, the Chicago Park District board told Alderman Billy Ocasio, that the PRCC and other supporters would need to make the statue out of bronze in order to conform to city zoning codes. Upon completion of the bronze statue, the Park District agreed to its placement in the southeast corner of the park between California Avenue and Division Street.

However, after the bronze statue was finished, a group of statehooders objected to Dr. Albizu Campos’ memorialization on the grounds that he was a spokesman for the Puerto Rican Nationalists Party. The group opposed to the statue argued that, Pedro Albizu Campos was a terrorist sentenced to 80 years in prison for attempting to overthrow the U.S. government (Chicago Sun-Times 1993). In addition, according to non supporters, he was linked to two terrible acts of violence: the 1950 incident where Puerto Rican Nationalists surrounded the Blair House with the intention of assassinating President Harry S. Truman; and the U.S. Capitol shooting incident of 1954 where Lolita Lebrón, Irving Flores, Andrés Figueroa Cordero and Rafael Cancel Miranda injured five congressmen while denouncing Puerto Rico’s U.S. military
occupation, shouting “¡Viva Puerto Rico libre!” (Long live a free Puerto Rico!) and waving a Puerto Rican flag.

Pedro Albizu Campos supporters, including Alderman Billy Ocasio, tried to make their case to the board of the Chicago Park District by clarifying that Dr. Albizu Campos was only found guilty of violating Public Law 53 or the “Little Smith Act” (Chicago Tribune 1993), not the other acts of terrorism listed by non supporters and spread by the Chicago Sun Tribune editorial. “The Little Smith Act” prohibited certain subversive activities including, for instance, advocating for the independence of Puerto Rico. In 1957 the U.S. Supreme Court had found this law unconstitutional.

Nonetheless, the issue of the statue divided the Puerto Rican community. Because of these discrepancies, the Park District board decided to reject the request of Albizu’s followers, even though they had already approved the erection of the statue provided that it was made of bronze instead of plaster. After being denied placement in the park, the bronze statue is now located in La Casita de Don Pedro y Doña Lolita, built in 1997 to honor Pedro Albizu Campos and later on, Lolita Lebrón. La Casita (the little house) resembles the wooden shack of vibrant colors built in the hills of Puerto Rico by the rural peasantry and it is used to give tours to students and other visitors in the area.
Flores (2001), concludes that, “many community residents believe that the revocation of the permit had little to do with the controversy surrounding Albizu Campos, but more with the reluctance to place a Puerto Rican marker in the park” (11). I am not sure I agree with the theories of the “many community members” that spoke to Flores. Why would the Park District not allow Puerto Rican markers in the park and yet allow the Institute for Puerto Ricans Arts and Culture to be located precisely inside the park premises? And why would the state not allow Puerto Rican statues to be placed on the park, but still allow the aforementioned massive flags of steel on Division Street, which are way more visible than any statue could possibly be? If trial and error could be a possibility in this case, one may suggest that Pedro Albizu Campos was considered too “controversial”. I am more inclined to theorize that the state not only regulates private ownership, but it also regulates symbolic ownership. Put simply, the state allows groups to claim ownership over a space, as long as there is no direct contestation, or as long as that “ownership” may be considered not controversial. Whatever the reason, the state is still essential to the
assertion of ownership, even if such “ownership” is symbolic. The state has the power
to distribute “property” (symbolic or not) by saying what is valid and what is not.

In short, Billy Ocasio identifies the issue of the statue as the first big division
within the Puerto Rican community, the second being having several Latinos
competing for the 26th aldermanic district:

There were a couple things that happened, first was the statue. The statue
became the first big thing. We had the summit in May and we had this statue
issue. So the statue was probably the first big division, right? That was the
first big division. The first big division was that they divided the community
right around the statue. That was part of it. Second part of it is now that we
had a bigger division created, because now we have this race that we’re on,
so I used those two issues to kind of say now I have to do something. We
have an election coming up in February of 1995 and I need to do something
that’s going to spark—get people united again because you guys kind of
blamed it on the mayor, that’s what I said, “You guys just divided up the
Puerto Rican community, you divided my community”. So those two
combined issues lead to creating a division between the flags. Basically, we
got the idea [of building the flags] from the summit [of the Puerto Rican
Agenda] and everything that had happened at the summit, people wanted a
business district.

The installation of the Puerto Rican flags sort of represented a new chapter for the
community—a Puerto Rican space that was ripe and ready for success and economic
development. This was key after the devastation coming from deindustrialization of
the previous decade. The construction of the flags, created an idealized version of
Puerto Ricans in the city of Chicago and beyond—strong, hopeful, proud and capable
of self-empowering. Although Puerto Ricans constructed themselves as “others,” by
doing so they wanted to erase the negative stereotype that stood in the way of their
ability to progress. The next section explores some of these points.

3. BRINGING HOPE TO A MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY

In addition to these two factors of division—electoral politics, plus the Albizu
Campos statue incident—Billy Ocasio spoke of a third element, but he used different
phrases to describe it “bring in pride to the community” “hope” “self-determination.”
Although in my personal conversation with Ocasio, he didn’t explain directly what
this meant, this is what I made of it. Even before the monumental flags were installed there were Puerto Rican restaurants and shops on Division Street. Thus, there were notions that Division Street was a “Puerto Rican space”. But the socio-economics and the physical appearance of Division Street, propagate the notions of an undesirable space, not only among the mainstream, but also among the Puerto Rican community.

As discussed in Chapter 3, urban scholars have long discussed the relationship between suburbanization, white flight and exclusion, processes that have contributed to poverty concentration, hyper segregation and in many cases downward socioeconomic mobility since the 1960s and 1970s (Downs 1973). Paseo Boricua has experienced several commercial shifts in stability and decline. Many Ukrainian and Polish immigrants settled in the area between Western and California—thus Division Street had many business ethnically targeting the residents of the area. But as white flight occurred during the following decades, Polish, Czech, Ukrainian and other Eastern European bakeries and grocery stores started to close. These were later transformed into Puerto Rican bakeries and bodegas and the same phenomena was experienced by hardware and retail stores, restaurants and so forth. While the original features remained in the buildings (say ovens like in the case of Café Colao)—the identity of the business, as well as the clientele, completely turned around in a few decades. Change in the neighborhood started before the 1960s, with the oldest Puerto Rican restaurant in Paseo Boricua being the Latin American Restaurant, opening for business in 1958. With the demographic and socio-economic change, the commercial district also started to experience decline.

Thus, before the city investment, inner-city blocks in West Town were considered a sign of failure. Arson was a familiar everyday experience for Puerto Ricans and it carried a sense of normalcy. Buildings were very close to one another
and, in the Windy City, fires tend to spread very fast. Statistics showed population
decline, high commercial and residential vacancy rates, demolition of condemned
buildings, high poverty levels, unemployment, a very weak tax base, and so on.
Eduardo Arocho explains that many of the businesses in Paseo at the time were just
“surviving.” All these things were reflected in what is the predominant image of the
disinvested inner-city: The abandoned, filthy and crime-ridden city block.

Gangs such as the Latin Kings, Maniac Latin Disciples, Insane Spanish Cobras
and Imperial Gangsters, among others dominated this inner-city territory.
Occasionally tensions between gangs and community members emerged. In March
1996, for example, about 75 residents in West Town who were critical of the gang
violence and their ways of taking over the streets, held signs that read: “Hey, Hey, Go
Away, Gangs and Drugs, No Way” (Chicago Tribune 1996). The rally was organized
after the police arrested 44 suspected gang members in mid-march of that year. “We
own these streets. We pay the house notes and the property taxes,” a 20-year resident
commented to the Chicago Tribune on how the community needed to take the streets
back (ibid.).

The proliferation of organized crime, along with the 1966 riots, further
compounded families’ fear about living in the area. This fear of crime, for a very long
time, was reinforced by real estate developers who avoided the area and categorized it
as “blighted”. The banking industry through redlining discouraged buyers from
moving to the area, depressing housing prices even further (Betancur, et. al. 2001).
And, as more families left the area for safer communities and better schools, the more
these problems were exacerbated. Under these conditions the residents of West Town
and adjacent communities including Humboldt Park and Logan Square, were
automatically deemed morally suspect, criminal and lazy, incapable of organizing
themselves and with weak social capital and ties. The Puerto Rican community was described by community leaders themselves as “fragmented.”

All these conditions constituted forms of “divisions” according to key informants. Even though Studs Terkel stated at the beginning of his 1967 book, *Division Street: America*, that, “although there is a Division Street in Chicago, the title of this book is metaphorical” (xxv). He probably would have enjoyed learning that, for the Puerto Rican community, *La Division* was more than a metaphor.

Eduardo Arocho, Executive Director of DSBDA, speaks about what the metaphor means, as well as the transformation of *La Division* to *Paseo Boricua*,

> Cause’ we also have the challenge of the history of Division street, “La Division” because I see them as two separate places “La Division” and Paseo Boricua are two different places but they occupy the same space … The history of “La Division” is gang, violence, drugs and all of the bad *cositas que la gente le gusta hablar* (little things that people like to say). Paseo Boricua is this new place that we are trying to create out of that history.

Flores (2001) explains how *La Division* changed its identity to become *Paseo Boricua*:

> While “La Division” has been the location of Puerto Rican economic, political and cultural expression for the past thirty years, it has been an unorganized space with unmarked and ambiguous boundaries that made it difficult for outsiders to distinguish it as a Puerto Rican community. This left the neighborhood prey to urban development and gentrification. By contrast, Paseo Boricua is a planned and conscientious effort that transforms “La Division” into a recognizable economic, political and cultural space for Puerto Ricans and clearly demarcates the boundaries of the community. “La Division” contains the spirit of the Puerto Rican community, but Paseo Boricua is the concrete reaffirmation of Puerto Rican collective identity in Chicago and their will to stay put (9).

As Flores explains, prior to Paseo Boricua, *La Division* was a non-organized and unmarked area. Paseo Boricua became the central space through which community leaders began to realize the goal of advocating for hope and self-determination. Even further, planning the space in a deliberate manner had a great potential of claiming ownership and thus, fighting gentrification.
4. **HALT GENTRIFICATION**

This block from Western to California, like the rest of West Town, has many characteristics that made it susceptible to gentrification: its proximity to downtown, good public transportation, highway access, buildings of good quality and most importantly in this case, the blocks were zoned as commercial. Additionally, just blocks away are highly successful businesses in the Wicker Park/Bucktown area that mostly belong to gentrifiers, LLCs and other types of corporations. As one Puerto Rican leader put it:

> The city is growing to become a Greater Loop and while many poor neighborhoods have been losing population, there is a concentration of capital and land spilling out to our neighborhoods. There has been a great competition from yuppies.

At the Puerto Rican Agenda meeting that Billy Ocasio convened in 1993, Puerto Rican leaders came to the realization that Puerto Ricans needed to establish a place once and for all, after being displaced by urban renewal projects from Old Town and Lincoln Park first (during the 1970s) and more recently from Wicker Park and Bucktown (neighborhoods within West Town, during the 1990s). Puerto Rican leaders and politicians wanted to create a permanent symbol for Puerto Rican culture in the community, capable of sending a strong signal of “who owned the area,” as described by a member of the Puerto Rican Agenda. The chair of the Puerto Rican Agenda at a public retreat reminded everyone about the purpose of that first retreat in 1993:

> Puerto Ricans have been the nomads of the city. The idea would be that we would be following the Poles and the other groups that moved in and moved out. We all know that if you do not control the land, you will be displaced. Some thought that we would end up in Wisconsin. So, we started thinking about coordinating our strategies. We wanted to coordinate our capacities. So, we have been meeting the first Saturday of every month. I have not seen a group more faithful to this vision. So, we are still here, but now the forces are reappearing that want to move us.

José López, a long term community leader and visionary added,
How do we actually lay claim to that area?—this was the discussion at Clemente in 1993. The flags, the Institute, etc. came out of that. Division Street had the most Puerto Rican owned buildings at that time. I think we ought to talk about “critical space”. Others may talk about social justice. This is the last area that has a Puerto Rican space. No other place has ten Puerto Rican-focused restaurants. For me critical space and place is important.

Puerto Rican leaders seem to be in agreement that, although the official creation of Paseo Boricua, with the city of Chicago’s installment of two steel Puerto Rican flags acting as gateways, has not generated much wealth for the community, it acts as a physical and mental barrier against gentrifiers. These gateways inadvertently serve to defend the space. A community leader further explained:

In my view is, one, you need the mechanism to go out there and to tell them and say, “We have a map, we are here” and then another mechanism is of just keeping people out. I don’t like to say the term “white” because, to me it doesn’t exist. But keeping that audience or the other places over there somewhere else. Keeping it separated.

When a white resident, who lives a couple of blocks away from Division Street and Rockwell (the heart of Paseo itself), was asked, “Do you go to Paseo, the restaurants there?” she replied,

I haven’t. I’ve never been to any restaurants yeah uh…You could have loved to expect it. For some reason, then again, maybe I don’t know if it’s that…that…coz. I’m not that you feel that uh, I just feel like uh, I just feel like giving them space, you know.

Paseo Boricua, then became a strategic focus for the strengthening of the Puerto Rican community, the anchoring a space that gave it recognition and thus a place to marshal the forces against gentrification. The blocks around Paseo Boricua remain the key concentration of Puerto Ricans in Chicago today and form a “critical space,” as José López puts it.

5. City Support for Identity Projects That Fueled Economic Development

Scholars have argued that the creation of tourist attractions by cities are reflections of global processes and changing economic circumstances transcending the local urban landscape (Sassen 2013). In this context, community spaces through the creation of
infrastructure in the form of symbols, become spectacular ethnic destinations for others to consume. This concept is surprisingly very similar to the World’s Fair, where aboriginal cultures became one of the major attractions to Westerners—in an European’s obsession with the ‘exotic’ other. Today, Paseo is similar to other ethnic business districts in Chicago, including Chinatown, Greektown, Little Italy, East Indian Strip (Devon), Little Vietnam, Pilsen and Little Village (both Mexican).

Ocasio points out that the gateway would not have been build if there was not a pool of money from the Department of Transportation (DOT) dedicated to streetscapes. He also emphasized that even though Chinatown and Pilsen had gateways, it was not until Paseo Boricua, that a close cooperation between the DOT and the Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) was actually formalized (Chicago Tribune 1994). The power of these two planning organizations working together was reflected in the usage of sophisticated financing mechanism that otherwise would not have been available. The costs of the flags are estimated to be $450,000 dollars and an additional $750,000 was spent on street enhancement projects (Chicago Tribune 1995). It was estimated that the project would generate between $70,000 and $80,000 per year, which means that the total investment of $1.2 million would be paid in about 16 years. More than 18 years have passed and the project has been paid for. When these two city departments started to collaborate, the city itself started to think about identity projects for other communities. According to Billy Ocasio, other projects began to be modeled after Paseo Boricua, like Boys Town and Greektown,
the columns and all those sort of things and use the same architects. They also used the same architects to then do Boys Town and they started doing this cause then you’ll see that the Portage Park has these things like, “Welcome to Portage Park.” Then they started kind of identifying neighborhoods after we did.

Simply stated, just after Paseo was developed, other enclaves started to use the combination of tools that both DOT and DPD had employed, to create gateways that could be used to enhance their commercial appeal to outsiders. In some cases, like in Chicago’s Chinatown and Boys Town, part of the intention was to enhance a community that was already there, one might even say rooting a community with the looming threat of been displaced. In other cases, like Greektown the interest was mostly commercial. Although historically the Greek population had been centered in the area for decades, during the time of this development, the population had declined and become practically non-existent. This decline was not due so much to urban renewal or other displacement, but mostly due to voluntary “white flight” or the repatriation of Greeks to their country.

The idea of community leaders involved with the Puerto Rican Agenda was in part to strengthen Puerto Rican businesses that already existed on Division Street and attract new ones. This initiative was to become a community and tourist attraction that would lift up the entire Puerto Rican community. There was a need to bring investment into the blighted areas and create an economic engine that would augment amenities in the community, while creating a sense of place.

Paseo was designed to secure a “critical space”, meaning that it necessitated for the community to be there. This was not to become a Greektown where the Greek people, even the business owners, lived somewhere else. The idea was that the west side of West Town would not follow the footsteps of the east side of the neighborhood. Puerto Rican leaders wanted Paseo to be more similar to a Chinatown, distinguished by a density of Puerto Ricans from different generations who lived and
worked in the area. Some of them worked and some of them owned their businesses.

Some of them were low-income, while other ones enjoyed higher incomes. Some of them were renters and others homeowners. Some of them lived temporarily in the ethnic enclave and some of them had been there and were to stay for generations to come. Whatever the case, the ethnic enclave would become a place all Puerto Ricans could relate to.

**Why the Puerto Rican Flag as a Gateway?**

In 1994, Billy Ocasio with the support of individuals such as Luis Gutierrez, José López, organizations like Division Street Business Development Association and other Puerto Rican leaders, many of whom were part of the Puerto Rican Agenda, started to formalize the idea of having some kind of marker in the community. Although the involvement of José López and other Puerto Rican leaders from the Puerto Rican Agenda when compared to the role of Billy Ocasio in the creation of Paseo Boricua, has been overlooked by the media, their contributions were highly significant. According to numerous conversation I have been part of, López and others at the Puerto Rican Agenda were key to the idea of creating a Puerto Rican business district, as well as meeting with the architects and the agencies involved in developing the project from an idea, into fruition.

As previously stated, Paseo was following the model of Pilsen—at the time one of the only communities in Chicago with any kind of identifier. When asked why specifically these flags were chosen, Ocasio replied,

> The flags, we need it. I personally wanted some type of gateway. As long as we are looking at Division Street, I’m looking at bringing pride to the community, I want a gateway. I mean you already had a gateway in Pilsen, in 26th Street. You have those, the big arches that they have there, so you had those. And I thought about that, you know it makes sense, so why not. Why don’t we do something so that was one of the tasks that was given to the architectural firm. You guys need to design, we are going to use money to do sidewalks, to do lighting, new lightings, to do banners, to do tables and all
those sort of things and garbage cans, you know all those kind of stuff. But we need something that’s going to anchor all of that and let people know so that’s where I said I wanted gateways. The architects came back with ten different designs of gateways. Yeah, there were ten different designs for those gateways. I mean right away, just by looking at the design, I told José, I had taken José to the meeting that time. José and I just looked at each other and I said that one. Do you want us to describe this and this. And I said no, no, no, we just want this. They had laid them all out and the whole meeting was that they were goanna take each design and kind of explain it and explain what they thought it would do to the community and right away we just kind of forgot all that. This meeting is short, we are picking this one [pointing to a piece of paper].

Architect Edward Windhorst and his partner came up with the design by walking around the community, Ocasio explains:

We asked the architect to explain what they thought and [what was] behind it. [And they replied,] “when you took us out to the community, we saw that there were flags everywhere. We asked you about it when we did the walk and you told us why the flag is really our symbol.” I mean we really use it. And if you notice, we always use it alone too [without the American flag]. So that’s where they got the idea. Well, maybe we are talking about pride, and we know that in the Puerto Rican community everybody likes to wear their flag, whether they have it in a tattoo, whether its on a t-shirt or they wave it on their cars. Everybody had it. They said, “Look! Why don’t we do this?” And so that’s how they got the idea … I think, they just felt that the flag really captured the pride of the Puerto Rican people and so that’s why that was one of the ten designs that they had. They said, “Billy everywhere you took us, people or somewhere, every store every restaurant, everybody had the flag somehow. So we thought that it’s not like any other flag because, people take pride in a lot of things, but in the Puerto Rican community the flag has always been the symbol.”

But Ocasio notes that the architects did not know the history behind the use of the baby blue vs. the navy blue for the Puerto Rican flag,

They came back with the regular [navy] blue the American flag blue because they don’t know the history behind it so remember during the Puerto Rican festival, it was always that [navy] blue that they use. It was always that [navy] blue but we kind of see that no, no, no, we want to do this, we want to use this [baby] blue. And so then, that’s when the merchants around the Puerto Rican festival started changing their colors because people started finding up the history of the real blue [baby blue]. That blue [navy] has been used because it was the most commercial thing, it is easy to produce because of the American flag … We bring out the history of the flag to the people and explained the colors to the people and all sorts of things. I mean, the minute we explained that to the architects they totally understood and they said okay we got it.

Ocasio emphasizes how choosing the color baby blue helped him and other community leaders to have a teaching moment for those who do not know the history
of the Puerto Rican flag. The original Puerto Rican flag had baby blue stripes and it was presented in public for the first time in 1895 in New York City by Club Borinquén, a group of exiles who were linked to the Cuban Revolutionary Party (J. M. Carrión 2006). The Puerto Rican and the Cuban flag are mirror images with white stripes and a blue instead of red triangle with the same single white star in the center. Revolutionaries from both Islands strategized together how to become independent from Spain. The Puerto Rican flag was not adopted until Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth in 1952. Before then, the only flag allowed to be flung was the United States flag and before that the Spanish flag. The Puerto Rican flag, created by revolutionaries was deemed illegal and one could be charged with a felony for displaying it in public. Nonetheless, members of the Independent Party used the flag constantly at protests and demonstrations. When the flag was adopted officially in 1952, the color blue was changed by Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marín to resemble the navy blue of the United States flag. This created a controversy internally. To this date, using the baby blue may indicate that you are a supporter of Puerto Rico’s independence, or that you are a historical purist. By using the baby blue for the flags of steel, the Puerto Rican leadership was sending a message to everyone: they wanted self-government. Nonetheless, in informal conversations with statehooders (those who wanted Puerto Rico to become a state) revealed that at least for some among this group using the baby blue meant disrespect of the United States and it was anti-American.

There are all kinds of theories that one could use here to analyze why using the flag in Paseo is important. One theory in particular that resonates with me, is that the flag for Puerto Ricans has always been a symbol of resistance and claims for autonomy. Professor José López in his Puerto Rican Studies class at the University of
Illinois at Chicago, eloquently speaks about how Puerto Ricans in NYC during the 1960s popularized the Puerto Rican flag by putting it on their bodies, in the form of tattoos, on their necklaces, t-shirts and patches on the pockets of their pants. Some may believe that is disrespectful to wear any flag. Others may say that wearing the flag is the ultimate sign of respect. Whatever the case, Puerto Ricans in the U.S., even more than Puerto Ricans in the island use the flag to affirm their identity and sense of belonging. In doing so, in my view, they engage knowingly, or unknowingly in a radical role of claiming the right to self-determination.

**UNVEILING OF THE FLAGS**

According to Ocasio, Paseo was developed rather quickly, in just about five months. The process was expedited for two reasons: (1) The elections were coming up and (2) The Three King Puerto Rican day parade, which was an opportunity to present the flag as a Christmas gift from the three wizards to the Puerto Rican people was around the corner. There were genuine fears of gentrification—community leaders did not want another Greektown or Little Italy, which is merely characterized by a business corridor, without a Greek or Italian population surrounding it.

The construction of the flags was completed in 1995 and dedicated on January 6th (Three Kings Day) of that year. The day the flags were unveiled they were still trying to complete them. Only the pendant and the stripes were finished. The second flag did not go up until a month and a half later. The unveiling of the flags of steel was a city-sponsored celebration, Mayor Richard Daley, as well as Congressman Luis Gutierrez joined Alderman Billy Ocasio to celebrate the “gift”

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\[4\] Alderman Billy Ocasio referred to the flags as “a gift to the Puerto Rican community” in our personal interview.
community. Other politicians demonstrated their support including State Senator Miguel Del Valle, State Representative William Delgado and Cook County Board Commissioner Roberto Maldonado. Division Street was filled with an air of spectacle. Even though this was a gift to Puerto Ricans by the Alderman and the Puerto Rican leadership, the presence of Mayor Daley invited the city of Chicago as a whole to participate and Congressman Luis Gutierrez confirmed that Puerto Rican grassroots leaders could make changes throughout the nation. Given that Puerto Ricans had lived decades with long-standing discrimination, having a reputation of living in the “ghetto”, filled with poverty and deprivation, the flags of steel represented a unique chance to reshape their image among whites and more generally, American society. It seemed as if all of Puerto Rican Chicago came together to contemplate the shiny monumental flags of steel. There was a great sense of hope during that time. According to Ocasio those who were not in agreement at the time with the expenditures of such a colossal infrastructure project, or with the baby blue color of the flags, found themselves taking pictures and inviting others to come and contemplate the astonishing objects.

**Paseo’s Target Audience**

According to the researchers at the UIC’s Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP), Paseo Boricua restaurants were hoping to attract “upscale North Side residents and local Latinos” (*Paseo Boricua: A Feasibility Study for the Establishment of Restaurant and Entertainment Strip on Division Street* 2001).

Among Latinos, there is a market segmentation between those who are high-income, low-income, those who were residents and those who were not. The study’s interviews found that community leaders were not in agreement exactly about who was the Latino target audience for Paseo—Latinos who lived in the area or beyond,
with low or high incomes. The study showed that the market strategy, including the ambiance of the restaurants, the shops and the price, might vary depending on just who the Paseo was meant for. As the study states, “if the primary market is the outside community, then issues like safety become more important, some respondents argue and issues of maintaining affordable housing near Paseo become less important” (Paseo Boricua: A Feasibility Study for the Establishment of Restaurant and Entertainment Strip on Division Street 2001, 26). This research study was issued in 2000, so today we can see from a vantage point what Paseo Boricua has become and perhaps one may be more able to conclude that Paseo has adopted a sort of mixed strategy: from high end to low-end restaurants, condos to affordable housing developments.

Nonetheless, a local and community-driven market has dominated. For example, in a video (Paseo Boricua Food Crawl Tour by DSBDA 2009) where DSBDA promotes their Paseo Boricua’s food crawl, various business owners stated, without explicitly being asked, that the primary market has been Puerto Rican families of all incomes. For example, Roberto Tañón from La Bruquena, explains how their customers thank him for the food saying, “thank you, I feel like my grandmother cooked for me.” Epifanio Vélez talking in Spanish adds to the cinematographic vignette, “I wanted to make a pretty restaurant for the Puerto Rican community, something that represents us well, so that all Puerto Ricans have a place to bring our families and make them feel proud of their culture.” The Latin American restaurant owner concludes that they have a, “familiar environment … that everybody can

5 Original quote: “quize hacer un restaurant bien bonito para la comunidad Puertorriqueña, algo bien representable, pa que nosotros los Puertorriqueños tengamos donde ir a llevar a nuestras familias y que se sientan orgullosos de su cultura”
afford.” Ocasio describes on a DSBDA flier exactly “who” is part of the community in Paseo Boricua,

Young entrepreneurs and seasoned businesspeople, youth and seniors, bankers and workers, community-based organizations and mainstream institutions; in other words, a whole host of people coming with different interests and perspectives to weave together our community’s cartography in a beautiful tapestry. (“Paseo Boricua Directory” 2007)

From the very start, community leaders have shied away from recruiting large retail chains such as, Walgreens or a CVS, from outside the community. There is only one exception that comes to mind: Roberto Maldonado directly supported the establishment of Family Dollar (a discount store) on the basis that people in Paseo didn’t have a store to buy the affordable goods they needed for the everyday life. The IRRPP 2001 report mentions that there is a “need to get people on board” with a common vision, especially concerning product selection, since a lot of businesses have products that do not match the Paseo concept, including the many second-hand and discount stores” (Paseo Boricua: A Feasibility Study for the Establishment of Restaurant and Entertainment Strip on Division Street 2001, 28). Nonetheless, establishments like these are really the exception. Paseo Boricua’s vision has been to encourage entrepreneurialism from within the community that reflects the community.

Community leaders, generally speaking, think that having Puerto Rican businesses is of the utmost importance. Small businesses are welcomed as long as they further a community purpose. The example that community leaders often bring up is, West Town Bikes. Although its Executive Director, Alex Wilson is non-Hispanic white, he has a deep commitment to the community, as he hires and trains local youth in the art of bike mechanics.

Although the community leadership was on board with establishing Paseo, most of the disagreements emerge when thinking about who is the target audience and the
kinds of establishments that should be a part of it. There is a large number of non-profits organizations in Paseo including, Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA), Vida Sida, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Batey Urbano, Puerto Ricans Unidos en Acción and Pedro Albizu Campos High School, among others. This indicates that there is ambiguity between what Paseo is, a place for “community,” including businesses, or a place for just businesses. East of Western on Division Street, in contrast, only has a few non-profits, or organizations for the residents in the area. Their non-profits are highly commodified and cater to another clientele consisting principally of private school, art classes, and childcare establishments. But most community leaders feel that Paseo is for the community and many aspects of it are non commodified. The leadership east of Western Avenue and the leadership in Paseo are doing completely different things. Therefore it does not make sense to judge Paseo by how much they have, in comparison to what the other side of Division Street has. Paseo is about empowerment and community control, which are different goals than the other group.

The DSBDA (2008) study “Path to New Strategies” showed that although most people used the space for shopping (57 percent), a large number of people who frequent Paseo use it as a space to socialize (46 percent). One of the cultural differences is that Paseo usually has people just hanging around, sitting and chatting, playing domino, standing on the corners. In Paseo, there is not a clear distinction between the sphere of private enterprise (or economic activity) and the public sphere (which engages in the creation of a socio-cultural space). The creation of Paseo Boricua was not about making a Puerto Rican Business District, but more about remaking it as an identity community area. Since the 1960s, Paseo has had many Puerto Rican establishments, including a theater, record stores, small groceries,
barbershops, florist, restaurants, clothing and jewelry stores, bakeries, and bodegas, among other establishments primarily serving the community internally. In small informal chats with people just hanging around Paseo, I got responses about what Paseo Boricua has become for them: “a place for Puerto Ricans to meet,” “a fun place to go,” “a place to learn about culture and history.” Such comments demonstrate that Paseo is a space mostly dominated by community ties—in fact through the informality of “word of mouth,” the majority of the people find out about events (69 percent) or housing opportunities (59 percent) (ibid.).

Jeremy Nowak (1999) speaks of the ambiguity of community developers engaging in economic development activities:

In most of America’s low-income urban neighborhoods, even the best community-based development efforts function as managers of decline [author’s emphasis] as much as catalysts of significant renewal …. The neighborhood development model, organized around place and community, has tended to consider neighborhoods in terms of constituent service rather than in economic terms (150).

Paseo is not about supporting economic development for economic development’s sake; it is about creating a space for Puerto Ricans. Paseo is not about supporting Puerto Rican restaurants, so they can profit, it’s about supporting the restaurants claim to have a stake in the space, to feel proud about being the only community in the United States with so many Puerto Ricans in one single strip. As it is frequently mentioned, New York City, which is home to more Puerto Ricans than Chicago, doesn’t have the density of Puerto Rican restaurants in one single space. This a testimony of how the community organizing efforts of Puerto Ricans in Chicago have successfully resulted in the establishment of the Paseo Boricua space and concept. To many in the community this simple fact communicates that there is hope for the Puerto Rican community to stay in place and to flourish.
While the local market could be expanded to the extended Latino community, the IRRPP 2001 report states that this might be limited because Latinos in general are low-income (*Paseo Boricua: A Feasibility Study for the Establishment of Restaurant and Entertainment Strip on Division Street* 2001). While it is generally true that Latinos have lower incomes than non-Hispanic whites ($41,979 and $61,040, respectively, in 2010), on Chicago’s West Side, where Latinos are densely concentrated, there are also a large number of wealthy Latinos. The following map shows a rate that compares each geographic area to other areas where Latinos are concentrated and creates a summary of the household income for Latinos that are above the average. The average is represented by a rate of 100. As the map shows, most of the census blocks adjacent to Paseo Boricua have a rate between 175-200, quite above the average. Specifically, a lot of Latinos that are better-off live within walking distance of Milwaukee Ave. We could assume that many of these Latinos are young professionals. On the other hand, one of the challenges, is that some Puerto Ricans living on the North West Side of the city or the suburbs, where many Puerto Ricans are relocating, have said in informal conversations that they do not have any connection to Paseo Boricua. In addition, for many Puerto Ricans who left Humboldt Park, this area is a “ghetto” that they are happy to have left behind.
Meanwhile, some key informants have noted that suburban Puerto Ricans come to Humboldt Park to get certain items that are not sold in the suburbs (e.g., Puerto Rican sofrito (a cooking base), PR-specific groceries, and musical instruments). Some Puerto Ricans may sponsor Puerto Rican businesses based both in the uniqueness of the products that they sell and “bounded solidarity” (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). What is clear is that many suburban Puerto Ricans will travel considerable distances to go to Paseo, at least once every couple of months.
Nonetheless, some business owners and especially community leaders believe that the fate of Puerto Rican businesses really depends on the non-suburban Puerto Rican population. In other words, Puerto Rican business require a critical mass of the local Puerto Rican population in order to survive. And many business owners believe that currently their local Puerto Rican base is not supporting them. A business owner with a beauty salon explained,

Well, I would say that for me the biggest challenge is to get our own people to patronize our own establishments. I would like to know where the support is in our own communities, if you go to our businesses you don’t see the majority of the people that live in the community in our businesses. We have to go outside our community in order to get the clients to come into our business, that’s what I find the most challenging. I find it a little bit hypocritical actually, because we talk about all this support this um…you know for the community interest. but when we have the business, when we have sweated, when we have had to endure inspections, when we had endure floods, when we had to endure bad economy, when we had to endure all these different things and we discuss it as a community group we’re really not there for each other. Does that make sense? And I think that to me that’s the most challenging.

There is a structural issue within Puerto Rican businesses. In part it needs the support of Puerto Ricans and in part it needs the support of others, because “their own people” as a business owner explained cannot or will not—monetarily or even in terms of just bare numbers—provide the critical mass required for Puerto Rican businesses to grow.

Some restaurants cater almost exclusively to Puerto Ricans and it is difficult to determine why exactly this is the case. I might speculate that much of it has to do with aesthetics. Some restaurants like La Bruquena, are able to attract tourists, but at the same time, they are very successful with Puerto Rican patrons. They hold “Bike Night” for mostly Puerto Rican and Latino motorcycle riders on a regular basis, thus this has allowed them to create a space for the community to socialize.

Some restaurant owners have mentioned that Puerto Ricans are less likely than other groups to frequent a Puerto Rican Restaurant. Mexicans, according to this
narrative, are much more likely to visit a Mexican Restaurant, when eating outside. Puerto Ricans are more likely to say, according to informants, “why I would eat there [in Paseo], when I can cook here [home]?”

In some respects non-Puerto Ricans are also a targeted audience of Paseo Boricua—those who live in the area and those who do not. The IRRPP report indicated, that there is a low awareness of Puerto Rican food (Paseo Boricua: A Feasibility Study for the Establishment of Restaurant and Entertainment Strip on Division Street 2001). In personal interviews, when outsiders (non-Hispanic black and white) were asked why they did not frequent Paseo Boricua restaurants, even when they lived in the neighborhood, many mentioned they were unfamiliar with the food being served. One of the most popular restaurants among outsiders is Papa’s Cache Sabroso; it has the most reviews on yelp6 than any other Puerto Rican restaurant in the city. The restaurant sells primarily pollo-chon which is chicken marinated with traditional pork seasoning. Along with others in the community I have speculated as to why this restaurant is so popular. We have concluded that it sells primarily a product that everyone is familiar with: Chicken! The other traditional foods such as tostones (fried plantains), yucca (casaba) and arroz con gandules (pigeon pea rice), come on the side. The jibarito (a sandwich that uses plantain instead of bread) is one of Papa’s signature dishes as well. It is also important to note, this restaurant is closer to Western Avenue (closer to Wicker Park, a gentrified area), which may explain why some on the other side may be willing to venture to Paseo. Additionally, as far as customership goes, white people attract more white people. While this restaurant’s

6 Yelp is a San Francisco based company hosted in Yelp.com. Users can rate and review businesses.
clientele is very diverse as the owner states, “people from all nationalities come here, not only Puerto Ricans, but Mexicans, whites, African Americans and even Chinese,” he adds, “everyone that I see walking in here I see them as green? You know what I mean”. Many Puerto Rican tourists come as well from San Francisco, Los Angeles, etc. The owner explains that word of mouth is what has helped him the most to build his clientele. Papas Cache Sabroso restaurant has some independence from the Puerto Rican clientele and it’s more about the product that it offers and therefore, it depends less on a regular Puerto Rican clientele base. This restaurant in terms of capacity is rather small and is looking into expanding to serve up to a 100 people. He notes that the other restaurants are not as successful as his and he attributes that to a “blessing from God” and not the product, the place or his highly diverse clientele.

In addition to being unfamiliar with the food, some assume that the staff doesn’t know enough English—which is not true, based on my field experience. Many, including Puerto Ricans, have complained about the service—that the waiters are not attentive, or that the food one orders takes too long to get from the kitchen to the table.

DIVISION STREET BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION’S BACKGROUND

The Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA) was created by a group of Puerto Rican business owners in 1984 with the leadership of Roberto Maldonado, currently the Alderman of the 26th Ward (2009-present) and, at the time, a Cook County Commissioner. The organization has a long history as the organizer of economic development activities in West Town and now increasingly in Humboldt Park. The organization was formally incorporated in 1989 as a 501(c)(3) under the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) under the general designation of
“Community Improvement, Capacity Building” and more specifically “Urban, Community Economic Development.”

In 1989, gentrification was already becoming a threat in the Puerto Rican community. DSBDA was born from the gentrification struggles in West Town. In their earlier years, before gentrification fully took place in the area, the organization was located on Ashland Avenue. With the westward displacement of Puerto Ricans, the boundaries of primary service have been reduced to Division Street from Western Avenue to Central Park Avenue. Initially, the organization served Ashland Avenue to the east and California Avenue on the West. Today the organization is located on Division Street specifically, on Paseo Boricua. The history of the DSBDA on Paseo Boricua and particularly the promotion of a Puerto Rican space, is closely tied to the threat of further gentrification. They moved their offices to 2459 W. Division Street and since the development of the flags of steel in 1995, the organization “has actively sought to raise the visibility of the local community and business market, establishing a brand presence for the Paseo Boricua cultural enclave” (“Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA): Overview” 2014).

With strong Puerto Rican and more loosely Latino roots, the mission of DSBDA, “has been to facilitate the organization of individuals that seek to enhance their participation in the burgeoning economic structure of Humboldt Park, while at the same time remaining dedicated to the cultural development and empowerment of its Puerto Rican/Latino community” (as cited in The Past Is Always Ahead of US: Empowering Indigenous and Minority Leaders in the Southern Philippines 2010). In terms of their target audience, DSBDA serves “the business community on Division Street generally composed of small micro-enterprises with informal structures and infrastructure. Many are family run, or individuals that are under-capitalized and
under-informed by standard business practices/financial responsibilities” (“Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA): Overview” 2014). DSBDA is also trying to encourage “development without displacement;” along these lines, they have promoted various affordable housing projects in Paseo.

According to the former executive director of DSBDA, Enrique Salgado, before the installment of the flags the city was not doing too much for Puerto Rican businesses, so they needed to take care of themselves (Casillas 2008). This is why Ocasio, DSBDA and the Puerto Rican Agenda organized activities in Paseo Boricua. For example, one of the first initiatives that businesses in Paseo initiated was to hire someone at minimum wage to clean up the streets of the business stretch, as the government was not assuming that responsibility. In contrast, the businesses districts in West Town and Bucktown are designated Special Service Areas—which means that businesses and homeowners in that area pay extra for street cleanup.

DSBDA carries out a wide variety of activities. They sponsor networking events and provide technical assistance to businesses primarily through workshops and special seminars. Some of the classes include, “how to start and manage a business,” “how to create a business plan,” among other kinds of training. The organization also hosts a business incubator and links businesses to finance sources. It also assists businesses that are in need of getting a building permit, or a business/liquor license. In order to attract new customers to the area, they host various festivals such as, the Haunted Humboldt Park, Puerto Rican Day Parade, Fiesta Boricua, Three Kings Winter Festival & Parade and the Paseo Boricua Classic Car & Bike Show. In addition they provide food crawls and walking tours as a way to expose others to the history, as well as the businesses that exist in the area and that are unknown to most Chicagoans. The organization also engages in marketing assistance, by hosting a
website with a business directory that has about 300 visitors each month. The organization also distributes marketing and/or special activities materials at community events. DSBDA also engages in lobbying activities and uses its connections with public and elected officials to advocate for more resources for Paseo Boricua. Research has been a major component or what the organization does. About a half dozen reports and feasibility studies have been produced by or for DSBDA.

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), during the DSBDA 2012 tax period the organization’s total revenue was $86,500. Its assets were $73,774 and its liabilities stood at $121,525. About 70 percent of its support in 2012 came from a government grant. In 2012, all eight members of the board and the executive director, the only paid staff member, were Puerto Rican. The board included a Puerto Rican restaurant business owner, a County Commissioner and the rest were professionals from the community. Deciding on a sorely Puerto Rican board is the result of DSBDA changing the by-laws in order to be able to promote the Puerto Rican culture in light of gentrification.

In the past, a few board members had come from other ethnic and racial groups. For example, for several years, Stanley Kustra, a Polish-American and owner of Joe’s Hardware, was the President/Vice-President of the Board of Directors of DSBDA. When Mr. Kustra passed away in 2012, Enrique Salgado, former DSBDA Executive Director wrote in the Humboldt Park Portal, “he believed in the mission, vision and work of the organization because as a proud Polish man and person of faith he believed and understood the importance of community, identity and also of taking responsibility” (Salgado Jr. 2012a).

Usually, the board of directors fairly represented the various stakeholders in the area. Being that all the board members of DSBDA are now Puerto Rican, raises the
question if DSBDA views itself as a Puerto Rican serving organization only. The identity of Paseo Boricua is certainly Puerto Rican, but what about the rest of the businesses in the area? The example of Mr. Kustra demonstrates that a long-term Polish resident, who fully understood the importance of the struggles of maintaining a community that slowly was disappearing, was a strong match for the organization’s mission and values.

But there is growing ambiguity over who DSBDA serves. The name itself indicates that it serves Division Street, or we could say more specifically Division Street between Western and California (thus Paseo Boricua). However, DSBDA also claims Humboldt Park more generally, including the west of Western or “WOW”, a gentrifying commercial strip corridor on North Ave. In other words, DSBDA claims as its territory areas where Puerto Ricans have been historically located around the Humboldt Park area, are not yet gentrified and are not being serviced by another businesses association.

PROFILE OF BUSINESSES IN PASEO

According to an extensive study conducted for DSBDA in 2008 by a graduate student in Urban Planning and Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Paseo Boricua had a total of 114 businesses that year (García Flores 2008). That is an increase of about 30 percent from 2003, when the business district started to flourish. In 2000, Paseo had just three Puerto Rican restaurants and by 2003 it supported a total of 10 restaurants—although some restaurants have opened and closed since then. This indicates that although from 2000 to 2003 the number of Puerto Rican restaurants increased by 233 percent (from 3 to 10), in a period of a decade, from 2003 to 2013, this number has remained stable. Maintaining a total of 10 Puerto Ricans restaurants in one single strip in the United States, is considered by many Puerto Rican leaders to
be a victory. Many leaders in the Puerto Rican Agenda often point out that not even New York City enjoys this type of critical mass.

A non-published 2012 study from DSBDA, showed that the mean tenure for all these businesses and institutions was around 10 years. The majority of the business owners (56 percent) were younger than 30 years old (“Business Survey” 2012). This study categorized the types of businesses using a sample of 34 establishments in the following manner: 38 percent were for profit and 32 percent non-for-profit with 21 percent having a sole proprietorship designation and 9 percent in the category of “other.” An interesting fact to point out is that a very large number of the establishments are not businesses, but non-for-profit organizations, which speaks to the particular character of Paseo Boricua—a space for community.

**What type of business do you own?**

![Pie chart showing business types]

Figure 14 — *Business types in Paseo Boricua.*

As the chart above displays, there are is a combination of retail (including discount, clothing, record and book stores, at 20 percent), restaurants (17 percent), and grocery/liquor stores (12 percent), among others. Although there are many types of retail, Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican restaurants comprise the largest category
of Puerto Rican businesses. Many of the non-profit organizations fall under art, education and “other.” In personal conversations scholars that work within the community have mentioned that non-profit organizations, as well as medical services, educational services and churches act as a detractor of gentrification, because these are services that do not attract consumers into the area, but they are of service to local residents.

It is interesting that about 10 percent of businesses fall into the “Professional Services” category which consists of, among other things, consultants, architects, medical and marketing offices. A great example of such a business is BOCA, which is a consulting firm that does political strategy and marketing. The office of BOCA appears to be a very hip space. BOCA very proudly displays in its front windows the Puerto Rican and the Cuban flag, one besides the other, showing very clearly the kind of politics that it supports. Most importantly, organizations such as DSBDA support “Puerto Ricaness”. More consulting, or professional businesses in Paseo may be a
way of halting gentrification. This is mainly because they do not attract that many outsiders and if attached to the politics of the Puerto Rican Agenda they may even serve as a mean to declare ownership over the space.

Of the 34 businesses that completed the survey only about four reported receiving technical assistance from DSBDA. In the interviews with the business owners, it was clear that although most businesses knew about the existence of DSBDA—mostly by the name of the executive director and their board not necessarily by the name of the organization—they seemed to be generally unaware of the services that the association provided. For example, they knew that the organization conducted tours of the neighborhood and conducted meetings, but outside of that they knew very little about specific programs or resources that they had available. My interview data suggests that some business owners are not interested in working with DSBDA because they do not have the time. Additionally many perceived their operations to be small-scale and therefore not needing their services. According to “traditional wisdom,” most business development organizations at the scale of DSBDA have “been weak and ineffectual developmental actors” (McCormick, Hawley and Meléndez 2008). Some business owners mentioned the organization had cultural (oriented towards the Puerto Rican identity) and political biases (for example, some business owners associated the organization with promoting the independence of Puerto Rico).

FINANCE

According to community leaders, the majority of the buildings are mostly owned, not rented, by the Puerto Rican business owners. In 2003, the leadership of the community with the help of Banco Popular (a Puerto Rican bank), started to lead a campaign in order to encourage the businesses in Paseo Boricua to buy their
properties, instead of renting them (Chicago Tribune 2003). The idea is that owning reduces the chance of rent increases that may displace business owners from the area. The following quote from the business focus group on Paseo illustrates the importance of ownership and not having to pay rent, a mortgage, or even better being able to collect rent as a source of income:

I think that businesses that engage in retail are not necessarily successful. We’ve had a few clothing, retail clothing stores and music stores that haven’t been successful. Primarily because they don’t own their own property which I think that always is really helpful. For example, Lily’s Records. I’m sure she rarely sells a CD in this time period. But she maintains herself because she obviously owns several properties here. She gets rent. The festivals will bring people in, plus she’s been there for a long time so she has a name. So, if people go in there and they want to dress with the flag for the parade, they’ll walk in and walk out with the flag.

The fact that many buildings are owned by Puerto Ricans, has helped the businesses avoid, to some extent, gentrification. Nonetheless, many business owners in Paseo fear that property taxes might displace them from the area, even if they own their business. The 2012 DSBDA survey estimated that 27 percent of the business owners got business loans in order to buy the building or fund their business activities. Anecdotal data collected from interviews showed that in the past a Puerto Rico-based bank, Banco Popular, was a major player in helping businesses to acquire financing. As a result, in 2005, DSBDA awarded Banco Popular, the Paseo Boricua Corporate Partner of the Year (La Voz Del Paseo Boricua 2005). Nonetheless, the majority (72.7 percent) of business owners according to the DSBDA 2012 survey, used their own savings for the aforementioned purposes. In a focus group for the Puerto Rican Agenda, I learned that many business owners refinanced their own homes in order to obtain the financing needed to maintain their businesses.

When Puerto Rican business owners were asked in the focus group about their challenges, the most important roadblock they cited was the “lack of capital,” or obtaining the necessary funding for their start-up or business improvements,
especially from a bank or from government sponsored programs. In addition the IRRPP 2001 report states, “it is a long and difficult process for many in the community to improve their lot and thus be more active patrons of the businesses in Paseo.” Such banks have requirements that may be hard to fulfill for business owners of color. For instance, some may require formal education, a business plan and/or previous business experience. For example, the DSBDA survey showed that most start-ups in Paseo Boricua (70 percent) did not have any sort of previous business experience. The kind of money that some of these business owners reported needing, was not in the six-figures. It was more around $20,000 and other small loan amounts.

The majority of the successful businesses (35 percent) in Paseo, generated more than $225,000, while the rest had revenues of less than that annually (these figures are not adjusted for inflation). According to the CRA, in 2012, between 22-37 small businesses received small loans of $100,000 or less in the tracts west of Western, surrounding Paseo Boricua. As a point of comparison, more than twice that number of businesses in the tracts east of Western received loans for that amount. The CRA reported more lending activity in the year 2012, than in 2011. As an example, the number of loans in Paseo increased by more than 60 percent from 2011 to 2012. In comparison, this number decreased between 60-70 percent from 2010 to 2011. This means that we are starting to see more lending activity in Paseo Boricua—perhaps from new businesses in the area and/or renovations.
Whether or not bank discrimination exists, some business owners said that they had to rely on people they knew in order to afford their start-up costs. For example, business owners Zuleika and Ricardo were able to initially get a loan through the help of a friend,

We’ve had our business for 25 years. When we bought the business, the owner financed to us through a lawyer, the business because we couldn’t find one, 25 years ago. And then we had a partner; when we wanted to buy him out, we couldn’t find a bank neither. A major league baseball player, a friend of ours came and said “You need what, $200,000 dollars? Here’s the money, you got it” and he lent us the money to buy out the business. Yeah and in two years we paid him out, in two years we paid him out! And we couldn’t find a bank that would say “Okay, we believe in you, we’re going to do it and we still 25 years now our business has been started as everybody else. We’re suffering because the economy is going up and down. But still we are solid and we’re trying to get a loan now and it’s like, you know? Every door that we knock is, you know?

Many Puerto Rican businesses like Zuleika’s and Ricardo’s have been bought out from other Puerto Ricans and in some occasions financed by friends and family, as it was hard to be financed by banks. Zuleika explains the current difficulty that she has in finding funding. This means that Puerto Rican business may be more likely to fail than those of non-Latino whites. Many community leaders have raised the point that some Puerto Rican business fail because they do not seek the assistance of the established networks. Members of the Puerto Rican Agenda have expressed, for
example, how they will be willing to pull some strings in order to save a Puerto Rican
businesses in Paseo. Instead of reaching out to DSBDA, PRCC and other members of
the Puerto Rican Agenda, business owners remain silent of their financial problems
until it’s too late. As migrants get accustomed to formalized forms of finance for
example, applying for a loan at a bank, they become less likely to seek out the
financial help of their social networks (that is, borrowing from family and friends) for
financing their enterprises (Portes 1998). For example, Portes (1998) emphasizes how
important it is for migrants to seek ethnic solidarity to finance start-ups, or financial
assistance. Members of the Puerto Rican Agenda have mentioned the idea of using a
rotating credit model similar to that being used by Latinos in both the U.S. and Latin
America (Vélez-Ibáñez 1986), as well as other ethnic groups such Koreans and
Chinese.

**Humboldt Park Redevelopment Area**

Paseo Boricua is part of a Humboldt Park Redevelopment Area (HPRA), which “is an
innovative and landmark effort within the city of Chicago to promote housing and
economic development along with giving the community power to acquire and
assemble land for purposes outlined in the Redevelopment Plan” (“HP
Redevelopment Area” 2014). The HPRA was a concept created by the Humboldt Park
Empowerment Partnership (HPEP), a collective of more than 80 community
organizations. The Near Northwest Neighborhood Network (NNNN) was the main
agency involved with these organizations and put together the HPRA (which is
different from the Empowerment Zone). The plan is broader than Paseo and it
entailed the development of affordable housing projects, cultural projects,
manufacturing and the provision of educational and social services. The planning
process to create the redevelopment area which was approved by the city of Chicago
Planning Commission involved over 1,000 residents and 100 organizations (*Path to New Strategies* 2008). NNNN at that time had more than 30 organizers in staff and they were able to find enough support to leverage this proposal and make it a reality.

The redevelopment plan was approved in 1994. The plan involved the development of affordable housing projects. HPEP was able to work with the city’s Community Development Commission and using eminent domain, they were able to obtain 159 parcels of land which were used for affordable housing projects targeting homeowners (*Leveraging Assets: How Small Budget Arts Activities Benefit Neighborhoods* 2003).

For example, under the Humboldt Park Redevelopment Area, Alderman Billy Ocasio was able to facilitate the development of more than 500 units of affordable housing (*Chicago Tribune* 2001). The recruitment of new businesses in Paseo was also part of such a plan and in the first few years the commercial strip went from 70 percent vacant, to 95 percent occupied. When the flags were installed in 1993, Paseo Boricua was born and, by around 1995, according to key informants, more Puerto Ricans started to invest in the area, rehabilitating the façade of the buildings, making renovations to the interior and even expansions.

**ANTI- GENTRIFICATION EFFORTS**

After West Town bounced back from disinvestment, the occupancy rates grew quickly from 70 to 90 percent from 1997 to 2003 and home prices stabilized (ibid.). Today, West Town is an increasingly popular community area evidenced by its population growth, property values and property taxes. Most of the once rundown three-flat grey stone mansions have been renovated and sold, or rented to mostly young professional households seeking a relatively easy train ride and access to jobs around the Loop. These gentrification pressures along with the gang and crime
presence have driven middle class Puerto Rican homeowners away from the area. In 2004, Jim Houlihan (Cook County Assessor) and Roberto Maldonado (Cook County Commissioner at the time) introduced State Senate Bill 1498, known as the Community Area Preservation Homeowner Exemption. At the time the bill was introduced, both the community areas of Humboldt Park and West Town averaged between a 70-150 percent increase in property assessment. This bill successfully capped property tax assessments at seven percent per year, which in turn avoided potential tax increases of 50-70 percent. A maximum reassessment is allowed at 21 percent every three years. From conversations with members of the Puerto Rican Agenda, this piece of legislation has helped homeowners stay in the community. Nonetheless, they feared that in the future this legislation might be attacked, weakened, or outright eliminated.

Paseo has been very successful in the production of affordable housing and the delivery of social services to the community. In 2004, Hispanic Housing Development Corporation (HHDC), a 36+ year organization created to serve the Latino community and one of the largest developers of affordable housing in Chicago, and built a five-story building at 2501-11 W. Division Street (on the southwest corner of Division and Campbell Avenue). The Teresa Roldán Apartments have 56 units. All are one bedroom and studio apartments that serve low-to-moderate income seniors in the Humboldt Park and West Town area. Nine market-rate units in the development are being rented at $780 a month and the rest of the units are rented from between $375-$625. The development is mixed-use, with commercial space at the bottom which provide services and employment for residents in the area. This development was specifically created because the executive director of HHDC noticed that an increase in property taxes and rents for elderly people (who live on
fixed-incomes) was becoming detrimental to many retirees and forced them to move away from their community. The total cost is estimated to be $11,908,181—60 percent of the project was funded with Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), an indirect Federal subsidy and 25 percent of the capital was provided by the city of Chicago itself (‘Teresa Roldán Apartments on Paseo Boricua’ 2014).

**CONTESTATION OF THE FLAGS**

I asked Ocasio if anyone had contested the flags and to that he replied:

> I think after the fact. I don’t think we kind of told people what was coming (laughs). It was just something we wanted to do. I kind of kept it quiet because I wanted this to be a gift to the Puerto Rican community. I’m sure there were a lot of rumors. People contest the fact that how come we are spending all these dollars on these two things when we have all these other problems. One thing people contested was the color of it. But a year later, you even had the statehooders in front of the flag, taking pictures. During the first few months that we put them up, there was a lot of talk.

Although the colors were contested between the statehood supporters and the Nationalist—who preferred the navy and baby blue, respectively—generally Puerto Ricans supported the flags. Mexicans, African Americans and whites living in the community, didn’t contest the flags. But realtors did contest them, including Puerto Rican realtors that were opposed to the politics of the Puerto Rican Agenda.

Today these flags are at the center of current contestation. I received an email from a member of the Agenda, spreading the rumor that the Alderman of the First Ward, Joe Moreno, which includes the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods, both considered Chicago’s main hipster enclaves, could follow the wishes of a constituency that wants the flags on Paseo Boricua to come down, suggesting that the area be put to its best and most profitable use. To this rumor, the executive director of the Division Street Business Development Association, replied,

> No politician in Chicago or the world has any power to take the flags out of Paseo Boricua! ... So the idea that we need to have an audience with Alderman Moreno would be an utter waste of time. We need to focus on how
we can do away with these rumors forever and not use this as a scare tactic for elections or to gentrify ourselves. Those flags are permanent monuments that belong to the city of Chicago. The flag’s unique history is specific to Puerto Ricans in Chicago area, not New York. The Flags are made to last 500 years, perhaps longer than Chicago itself and most definitely longer than any of us will be around. So please next time you hear a rumor about the Paseo Boricua flags, send them back with this rumor: “Did you hear that the flags on Division Street are PERMANENT?!"

Rumors were quickly dissipated as activists are generally convinced of the permanency of the monuments. They seem convinced by the physicality of those flags: They are constructed of steel, each one weighing 45 tons and they are taller than Goliath, rising fifty-nine feet into the air. These individuals are convinced because of what the flags represent—a postmodern public monument, built with public dollars, with politicians and large numbers of people behind it. They represent the unique history of Puerto Ricans in the Chicago area and that history can never be erased. Although the gates were built to be welcoming, their ambiguous and hybrid nature have made them the perfect tools to push and resist. As Manuel Castells (2000) noted, resistance identity is the exclusion of the excluded, constructed by the marginalized, in order to fight back. Thus, the flags produce and reproduce identity from a shared symbol of not only nationalism, but also communal resistance.

TENSIONS BETWEEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Authors like Ed Blakely (1991) have argued that communities need to become economic engines and market themselves; they need to create partnerships with government and businesses in order to attract capital; in other words, they need to create a “good business climate.” In Blakely’s framework for communities to be successful they should create a competitive advantage based on the quality of the physical (e.g. housing, recreation, etc.) and social environment (institutions, labor force, etc.). In a similar vein of thought, Kevin Cox (1993) suggests that local actors
need to develop a concept of “local interest,” and know what their strengths are in order to market those strengths to incoming businesses.

The creation of Paseo Boricua, as a business district, is an easy target for critiques of capitalism. The critique often includes mention of how the place is trying to attract tourists. From this perspective, Puerto Rican culture then becomes a marketing tool. Yet this shift from industrial capitalism, towards a more service-oriented market economy is the product of forces larger than any local community, and any of their aspirations to the good life. This trend instigated a taste for distinct consumption areas. Under this paradigm, spaces have been carefully transformed into places by orchestrating tasteful food, stylish architecture and design, as well as being able to attract a diverse group of people.

Nonetheless, even after such critiques, most community leaders seem to ignore the relationship between economic development and gentrification. A community organizer once raised the question at one of the Housing and Economic Development Puerto Rican Agenda meetings I organized: “Are we shooting ourselves in the foot by attracting a Latino middle class into the area and by mixing economic development goals with housing and community development goals?” I personally agree with this comment, as in “school” I have been taught that in furthering “economic development” will always result in more capitalism and therefore, gentrification. Of a group of 17 people only three agreed that there is a clear contradiction between advocating for affordable housing and furthering economic development goals. Those three being, the community organizer, myself and an academic.

Community leaders have considered these criticisms to be “antagonistic,” and they have clarified that they are mostly interested in their contribution to “self-determination.” According to their philosophy, economic development in poor
Communities could only be wrapped around community development and notions of empowerment. Community leaders in Paseo offer an agonistic model for considering commercial districts like Paseo as a possible tool for both community and economic development, with community development taking precedence over economic development. Nevertheless, this ideal could only have worked if the case met very specific circumstances that is, if adopted with both of these goals in mind. One might even say, that the number one goal of the leaders was in fact community development and not economic development and this is why they have not been entirely displaced. Some informants argue that the complex negotiation between the two has resulted in what Paseo is today.

This point is fundamental to judge if Paseo Boricua has been or has not been successful. Because if the objective of Paseo is to become the place to be in the eyes of tourists and others, then we can say that Paseo has not been incredibly successful. If on the contrary, the purpose of Paseo was to empower the community, then the presence of both businesses and the different community development projects, then we might declare that indeed Paseo has achieved most of its sociopolitical intentions.

**Discussion**

Community leaders have assigned distinct values and meaning to this socially produced space. These values and meanings do not comply with hegemonic constructions of capitalist spaces. Paseo is quite a true mix of Puerto Rican businesses, community services and affordable housing. There seems to be, to the naked eye, a disparity between the discourses of business owners of what Paseo should be—a place that is capable of attracting tourists—and the views of the community, more generally, who would like to have a place for community facilities like schools, health services and non-profit organizations. But community leaders do
not see this as an accident. Development for them, is a combination of community
development, along with the possibility of economic development.

Paseo Boricua, considered “a city within a city,” serves multiple roles as a
residential neighborhood, a business district and a space emblematic of the Puerto
Rican community. The vision for Paseo and more broadly Humboldt Park is quite
ambitious. As stated by community leader José López, to “make our community the
heartbeat of the Puerto Rican diaspora.” The rich history of Paseo Boricua makes it a
useful case study that provides insights for understanding the complex politics around
identity within a gentrifying space. Puerto Rican leaders continuously try to politicize
Paseo in the face of gentrification by promoting institutional, social and cultural life
in that particular space. Here I employ Pitkin’s (1981) definition of politics,

the activity through which relatively large groups and permanent groups of
people determine what they will collectively do, settle how they will live
together and decide their future, to whatever extent this is within their power.
(343)

Furthermore, Iris Marion Young’s (2011) observations are very apt to understand the
flags in Paseo Boricua and the rest of it:

Politicizing culture, then, means bringing language, gestures, forms of
embodiment and comportment, images, interactive conventions and so on
into explicit reflection. Cultural politics questions certain everyday symbols,
practices and ways of speaking, making them the subject of public discussion
and explicitly matters of choice and decision. The politicization of culture
should be distinguished from a libertarian insistence on the right of
individuals to “do their own thing,” however unconventional. Cultural
politics has a primarily critical function: to ask what practices, habits,
attitude, comportments, images, symbols and so on contribute to social
domination and group oppression and to call for collective transformation of
such practices. (86)

The flags of steel, aside from being simply a symbol that facilitates the expansion of
business and consumption in the neoliberal era, could be conceived of as a
mechanism of ethnic empowerment and identity formation for the community at
large. Counter-discourses that contest the logic of capital accumulation (gentrification
and displacement) and embrace claims of equality, social justice and fairness for the
Puerto Rican people, are created through notions of cultural ownership, belonging and membership. This is a way of expanding the understanding of property, as in a state sanctioned title, protected by law.

As discussed, Paseo Boricua represents many things to Puerto Ricans living in Chicago, but especially for those who have fought for its establishment and for those whose monument is part of their everyday lives. For many residents, it is a place for community, entertainment and treasured memories. But Paseo also represents a decrease in access to formerly Puerto Rican space on the East side of the periphery. Even worse, it represents a redevelopment frontier, a potential loss of Puerto Rican control over the space.

Who owns this landmark is not clear-cut, and certainly could not be determined in absolute terms if we add the symbolism of what it means to Puerto Ricans residing in the West Town/Humboldt Park communities and beyond. A landmark like the Paseo Boricua flags are not by any legal standards considered a public good, in which we can then infer that that a lot of people (not necessarily Puerto Ricans) benefit from its existence. We could argue that everyone in the city of Chicago could potentially benefit from Paseo’s existence because they can for example, visit and enjoy the restaurants in the area. If this area generates taxes for the city of Chicago beyond the initial city investment, then the investment could be considered in purely economic terms, efficient and even more beneficial for tax payers.

From the sections above we could see the tensions that exist between claims to legitimacy and claims to property. The case of the Paseo Boricua guided my analysis because it questions the legitimacy of private property for exchange-values by claiming Puerto Rican space for use-values. Paseo has been used by community leaders to communicate that “Paseo belongs to us.” In other words, Puerto Ricans are
claiming their legitimacy in that space, they are saying this is our property even though, legally, it might belong to the public (in the case of the flags they are monuments paid for with public dollars), or to private investors (as in the case with the residences and businesses in the area). Activists have been involved in projects of identity politics as a way of resisting gentrification pressures. We see how, throughout the public discourse presented above, symbols are used in order to communicate to others a single concept—that of legitimate ownership.

But why claiming ownership at all? Having property rights over an object or artifact (even if immaterial) doesn’t just mean being able to call the object yours; it’s mostly about the possibilities of what you can you with the property. For example, owning a building isn't just a privilege because it has monetary value—what is most important is the business you could start inside of it, or the home you could make a habitat that makes it useful. They are claiming ownership because they have a vision about what Paseo Boricua should be.

Puerto Rican leaders from the Puerto Rican Agenda and elsewhere feel that it is their responsibility to ensure a favorable outcome for the community at large (development without displacement). But their thinking is quite opposite to the logic of individual property rights as proposed by the classical liberal tradition of Smith and others. Community leaders are declaring ownership collectively, as Puerto Ricans. The basis of building the flags of steel was to declare a form of ownership that is not really recognized by the state as ownership. Nonetheless, the flags (businesses, non-profits and other establishments in Paseo) proclaim the change it envisions almost immediately—that of collective ownership. More than that, it proposes that this form of collective ownership is legitimate and that the people, not the state, has the power and ability to make it legitimate.
Yet someone like Friedrich Hayek who favors property from a legal framework seems to favor a society that is strictly regulated—even when he argues that he is against a large state. It seems to me that the distinction between the state and the market is most useful to the right wing. Hayek, for example, admonishes the state and heralds a free market existing without it. This is the logic behind neoliberalism which takes the separation between the two as axiomatic; they attack the state and chastise anything they see as a being a hindrance to the freedom of the market. Yet, as noted above, the two aren’t mutually exclusive.

Stemming from the Leninist—or, perhaps, even the American Keynesian—tradition, however, often see the intellectual space between the market and the state as a potential point of departure from the ills of market economy and so they go along with the fallacy of division; often, they even embrace it fanatically. This intellectual division has to be demolished if we are going to have discussions on something that might lead to something other than capitalist society. Otherwise, conservatives will continue to attack the market’s enforcer for failures that should have been attributed to capital in *toto*; including both its market and its state. Meanwhile, liberals will only be able to beg the state for retribution—which they occasionally receive—or, more likely, a better position for themselves or their group within the capitalist society.

The case of Paseo Boricua shows an activist movement that uses urban space (the flags, the private buildings that belong to Puerto Ricans, the public sidewalks that surrounds the private businesses and so on) as an instrument or tool to not only make their voices heard, but declare that space as their own. They do this by claiming what they wanted (collective ownership) with the creation of symbols. In this sense, the idea of Paseo as an instrument of resistance to gentrification, has played a key role in the construction of a new sense of legitimacy.
Some community members have gone as far as to argue that they should be compensated for the damages that gentrification has caused to their community, in monetary terms. They argue that the constitution should legitimate the disposition that has been caused by gentrification.

Heavily influenced by the ideas of John Locke, the founders of the United States ensured that property would be valued and protected intensively by the Constitution. Among the most important section of the Constitution relating property are the property clause, giving Congress the power to regulate United States property, and the takings clause, specifying that property shall not be “taken for public use, without just compensation.” The Supreme Court has determined that an individual may have his/her property taken (with compensation) if doing so will generate public benefit.

These statements from the community raise questions such as: Does freedom to do what a community wishes outside of property by law can supersede in a capitalist society? Should communities be managed for the benefit of those who can pay or for the community members who inhabit this space, those who have genuinely want to see the community to have success and want to remain or those who seek profit? And, if people are displaced does that mean that their displacement should be compensated by the state just as decisions or eminent domain are compensated?

These issues are far too theoretical and speculative to be taken into real consideration here in more depth, what we can say, as far of our legal system goes, is that Puerto Ricans have decided to do something outside of the state by claiming symbolic ownership. But the establishment of the flags was just a first step that should be accompanied by larger claims (such as, getting more units of affordable housing, the establishment of community land trust and co-ops, etc.). Although this might be just the beginning, through the creation of Paseo and its symbols, Puerto
Ricans imagine this cultural heritage to be preserved for the benefit of future generations.
CHAPTER 9 SUMMARY

This chapter shows how the Puerto Rican identity in Chicago is closely tied to “Humboldt Park” the park itself, almost to the point of being identified with the general community area that the Puerto Rican community occupies. Nonetheless, historically parks have been considered public sites for everyone to enjoy, necessary for democracy. In the face of neighborhood change, however, Puerto Ricans have developed language to communicate that “Humboldt Park belongs to us.” In other words, activists claim their ownership of that space; based on a history of belonging and physical occupation, they are saying this is our “property” even thought, legally, it might belong to the state.
Chapter 9
The Park

In the hot month of July, in 1877, more than 500 people attended the formal opening of Humboldt Park. (Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922) 1877) The Chicago Daily Tribune described the day’s activities and events in these terms, “The grounds were tastefully decorated with beds of flowers, gorgeous plants, cascades, waterfalls, rustic benches, pop-bottles, artistic stumps and United States flags stretched as awnings over commonplace beer-tables.” While the exhibitions and features were popular, the park’s debut performance was also criticized. As the park’s trees were still in their infant state, they were unable to fend off the day’s heat with their shade. This was especially problematic for the attendees in the central areas of the park where “the occupants alighted and hunted what few shady spots they could find available, while the band climbed into the stand and played a few” (ibid.).

Nonetheless, merchant booths were crowded with interested throngs of new customers: “A few chartered row-boats and punished themselves upon the glaring waters of the large lake, which was about the only really beautiful feature presented, while others strolled over the grounds” (ibid.). At its inception, Humboldt Park was a forerunner to the massive suburbanization of American cities. It would be decades before the park’s features—as well as those of the surrounding community—could develop to the point that it might be considered or feel like an attractive landscape. Humboldt Park, while certainly an up and coming space, was not quite there yet. However, with its 207 acres of land, Humboldt Park became one of the largest parks in Chicago—after Lincoln Park (1,200 acres), Burnham Park (598 acres), Jackson Park (500 acres), Washington Park (372 acres), Grant Park (319 acres) and Marquette Park (300 acres)—and was certain to assume its place as an oasis within the city.
The impetus for the creation of the Park and its surrounding area was in large part the huge population explosion of the city’s West side after the Great Fire of 1871. The fire reduced about two thousand acres of the city to ruins and took the lives of as many as 300 city residents while leaving nearly a hundred thousand people homeless—almost a third of the city’s population as a whole. Many of these homeless families settled on the West side of Chicago where land was relatively cheap and underdeveloped. Growth was exacerbated as thousands of workers migrated to Chicago to reconstruct the areas that were destroyed in the fire, many of them built families and settled on the West side. As the city of Chicago’s government and its boundaries grew in the decades following the park’s creation, it was annexed by 1872 into the formal body of the city of Chicago (Badillo 2014). In the early years, although the park was open to all Chicago residents, homeowners living in the area benefited most from the annexation as the now flourishing park and its formalized status, considerably increased property values in the area.

In announcing the formal opening of the park in 1877, the Chicago Daily Tribune reported that the park was only about “four miles from the center of the city and is easily accessible to the people.” This term, “the people,” while easily overlooked today, was of incredible importance to the mood of the time. The democratic ideals intimated by this phrase were intended to convey, along with the park’s aforementioned proximity for those living in the, presumably, more crowded city center, the accessible nature of these sorts of public projects. If they wished, working class residents, when they inevitably tired of the crowds and dirt at the city’s core, could escape to the new suburban community and enjoy the wilderness without altogether abandoning their lives or obligations.
News stories of this time often reflected the democratic ideal of the public parks movement. All men, whether urban factory workers or rural agriculturalists, wealthy or poor, were created equal and all people, no matter how ordinary, should have a right to enjoy the benefits of nature. This sentiment was reflected too within the city’s political discourse. The landscape architect of Chicago’s South Side Parks system, Calver Vaux, for example, when referring to the importance of public parks in furthering the U.S. democratic project, noted that with access to these spaces a “man of small means may (author’s emphasis) be almost on the same footing as the millionaire” (Vaux 2011, 50).

Within the academic discourse of the time, public parks came to represent the antithesis of private spaces and served as an important symbol to reflect and legitimate the embedded narratives of American democracy. In the view of academics, through an appreciation of nature and the splendor of monuments, sculptures and museums, citizens would become civilized, assimilated and absorbed into the broader culture. Public monuments, performances in the park and walks by the stunningly beautiful gardens, furthered the social imperative of acculturating immigrant farm workers while acclimating them into the emergent modern industrial system and the implied social structures. Subsequent generations of scholars have noted, with all of the benefits of hindsight, that the movement to cities was nurtured by paternalistic sensibilities of politicians, commentators and experts. Other critics have observed that, despite the rhetoric, access to parks both failed to ameliorate poverty and, oftentimes, pushed the poor away from some of the city’s best spaces, while creating something of a housing subsidy for the wealthy by city and federal governments (Radford 1996). Jane Jacobs, the famed planning critic, famously chastised city planners for arbitrarily adding parks to spaces that could not sustain
them; instead of creating vibrant, renewing spaces, Jacobs felt, planners were creating abandoned spaces that quickly became the operational space for drug-dealing and other illicit activity (Jacobs 1992).

In the late 1880s, urban scholars and other commentators focused their attention on the distance that the urban poor would need to traverse in order to experience the redeeming benefits of the natural environment and the lost opportunities that would certainly ensue if whole classes of urban populations were to be permanently forced into the socially deleterious urban core. Contemporaries, on the other hand, now criticize their predecessors for implementing overly simplified generic abstractions about the redeeming qualities of nature and incorporating untested theories into public policy without appropriate analysis and study. In one sense, we might see the former position as a representation of the modernist ideals of equality, balance, access and democracy. The former position, conversely, might be seen as the post-modern interpretation; critical at its core, the post-modern ideal is focused more acutely on the relative usefulness of parks, or on the economic appeal of such a space for tourism, real estate values, or tax revenues.

Today, urban parks have come to embody the palpable and visceral contradictions and ambiguities embedded in post-modern discord. Nowhere is this phenomenon more visible, than when those parks come into contested political and economic relationships among stakeholders. The parks of old, regardless of the intent of the politicians and planners who commissioned their construction, have become engrained in the patchwork of the urban experience. They are inseparable from the communities they inhabit and the experiences of those who live in the communities. For those who live there, Humboldt Park serves as a monument to such entanglement and struggle.
In the most practical terms, urban parks were designed to get away from overcrowding, pollution and waste. City parks were meant to be places for workers to enjoy a picnic or go for a swim; breathe fresh air and renew their strength. This was certainly the vision of Humboldt Park’s designers. The initial layout of the park was created by the landscape architect William Le Baron Jenney in the 1870s and it became one of his crowning achievements, along with Garfield Park and Douglas Park. Later, in 1895, Jens Jensen was appointed superintendent of Humboldt Park. Jensen, a Danish-American landscape architect, designed the remaining portions of the park during the following decades: The rose garden, the prairie-style river, the field house and the boat house. Just south of the boat house, Jensen created a space for live music concerts and dances in the park’s music pavilion.

The prairie-style movement, made famous by Frank Lloyd Wright, strived to emulate the horizontal lines and earthy colors of the Midwestern landscape. The designs were characterized by low-pitched roofs and overhanging eaves; the idea was to pay homage to Chicago, absent of “development” by creating a rustic and pastoral aesthetic. The prairie-style movement, like its cousin in the arts and crafts movement, abhorred the grime of mass production, industrial capitalism and the imposed homogeneity of the assembly line and instead held the pastoral landscapes and artisan craftsman feeling of the underdeveloped medieval era in reverence. Displaying high quality, handcrafted, wood and stone, buildings like the boat house and music pavilion, Humboldt Park was a perfect representation of pre-industrial Illinois. The prairie-style praised open spaces with pathways, featuring native and indigenous plants and ostracized the formalism of the English and French gardens of the
Victorian type. Slabs of limestone were used to recreate cascades and waterfalls emulating natural rivers and streams.

The organic architecture in Humboldt Park was as far removed from the urban skyscrapers, as could be imagined at the time. In the dominant traditions of landscape architecture of the time, Humboldt Park incorporated curvilinear as opposed to grid patterned pathways which were thought to communicate the rigidity of the city. Instead of making paths which would appear planned and rigid, the emerging landscape architects of the era emulated the organic, by the rambling pathways created by cattle or other animals in nature. The curvilinear routes, nonetheless, provided circulatory conduits to every side and corner of the park and added the pleasurable experience of exploring and traveling through open green fields under natural shade trees and sunlight.

A fact perhaps less attributable to the original architects, is that the park today also tells the story of early immigrant settlers. The park is transected by streets named in the honor of leaders of the ethnic communities that dominated the area’s culture through time and sculptures of notables are stippled across the park’s interior. Previously named North Park, Humboldt Park was renamed in 1969 after the famous Prussian geographer, naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt. In some respects naming the park after a natural scientist reflects much of the same romantic ideals which held the modernistic framework together more than a century ago. The contributions of von Humboldt are not only celebrated in Chicago, but throughout the world. Statues honoring him have been placed in Cuba, Mexico, Berlin and other countries. The park also has a ten foot statue of the explorer which was donated by a German brewer and inaugurated in 1892. In the statue he leans against a terrestrial globe, symbolizing his many journeys while resting on his famous book *Cosmos*; an
iguana straddles the sphere to triumphantly symbolize his time exploring various islands in the Caribbean. Interestingly, von Humboldt never set foot in Puerto Rico—nor Chicago for that matter. Nonetheless, because of the park and its surrounding community, the name became synonymous with Puerto Rican Chicago since the mid-1960s.

Other sculptures erected by the park community’s ethnic groupings can also be found today. Fritz Renter, the German novelist and Leif Ericson the Scandinavian explorer, are both honored in the park. Other sculptures like the statue of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a military hero who fought for Polish independence, was moved to Solidarity Drive near the Adler Planetarium in 1978. Over time, the various ethnic groups inhabiting the community surrounding the park have slowly dispersed into other areas and lost their symbolic control over the park.

As veterans of the second World War—largely working class Poles, Germans, Scandinavians, Italians and Russian Jews—returned to Chicago through the 1940s and 1950s, most took advantage of GI bill benefits and newly created mortgage lending programs to move further into the suburban and exurban areas surrounding the city. Subsequently, property values began to sink in the neighborhood surrounding Humboldt Park and by the 1950s Puerto Rican and other racial minority groups began filling the deteriorating homes. Soon enough, Puerto Ricans began to transform the meaning of the park by renaming the streets to praise their own homeland heroes. Today, street names reflect and honor the Puerto Rican presence in the area with such names as Luis Muñoz Marín, the first Puerto Rican Governor and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, President of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.
By placing markers in the park, Puerto Ricans have been trying to communicate as an informant declared, “we are here and we are here to stay!” The fact that the park still carries a German name and it’s full of German statues does not seem to tell (or yell) to Puerto Ricans that even if markers are left behind they are not representative of the community that exist there today. In other words, one may argue that markers are not ownership and that therefore, markers are not of significance when construing claims to ownership.

Specific details of property are called “claims”. These claims can span about multiple areas, such as who is the rightful owner, what non-owners are allowed and not allowed to do with ones private property, as well as the punishments for violating any rightful claims of the owner. American Jurist Wesley Hohfeld (1964) separated the concept of a “right” into four categories: claim, liberty, immunity and power. To illustrate Wesley Hohfeld’s conceptualization of the relationship between a liberty and a claim I would like to use an example, for the sale of house “x”, both person “q” and person “r” have the liberty to purchase the house. However, after person “q” purchases the house “x”, she alone has a claim to the house, and person “r” no longer has a liberty towards it. As far as power goes, what is important here is that an entity that is able to change someone else's liberties, claims or duties needs to exists—in capitalist societies the state is the only one with this kind of power. An immunity is when other entities do not have power over your liberties, claims, or duties.

I would agree with the aforementioned premise: objects alone are not the subject of the claim. Rather, objects and markers contribute to narratives that indicate that there is a strong enough connection of a group to a place. The connection must be strong enough to allow for the space itself to be perceived by the group and by others outside of that group, as symbolic ownership.
It is important to note that there is a relational aspect here between the Germans and the Puerto Ricans. One may argue that Germans, by leaving behind the park and the markers, transferred their symbolic ownership to Puerto Ricans. To use an analogy here, one may contend that because Germans left a used bench (or t-shirt for that matter) on the park, by leaving behind that object, they passively transferred their control rights (the right to use the object) to the next group of immigrants. This transfer could be perceived as a gift; after all, the Germans were the ones who produced it, used it and then disposed of it. Then, to continue the analogy, Germans bought a new t-shirt or built a new bench somewhere else, where it seemed more comfortable, or perhaps more safe. Maybe the concept of gift is not quite suitable to describe how someone finds something that someone else left behind: after all, the park was built with taxpayer’s money; maybe we can view the act as a rightful appropriation? Whatever the conceptualization, a gift or an appropriation, the new immigrant group (Puerto Ricans) were not all of a sudden stealing, or using the object without the permission (or abandonment) of the immigrant of the past. By leaving the park behind, the old residents granted permission of or abandoned use and thus, ownership to the new residents. Puerto Ricans were then using something that had been handed to them. Like an old t-shirt, or a bench that was falling apart, they cleaned it, restored it, took care of it. In sum, they made it theirs through daily use and laboring, as conceptualized by libertarianism.

I use the following example to illustrate how Puerto Ricans have improved some of the features of the park. Improvements, verbalized as “we are responsible for x or y positive changes,” provides for the agents of change (in this case Puerto Rican leaders) justifications of ownership. To illustrate the above point, I explore briefly the
establishment of the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (NMPRAC) located in the former Park Stables and Receptor building (2459 W Division Street). This site which was abandoned for many years, had become almost a dump inside the park premises. The establishment of NMPRAC is often cited by Puerto Rican leaders as one of the major stakes of the Puerto Rican community inside of the park land.

The Humboldt Park Stables and Receptory building was designed by Architects Frommann & Jebsenin between 1895 and 1896 and it is the oldest building in the park. The architecture resembles a German country house in conjunction with Queen Anne style (Randall 2007). The first time I saw it, I thought of Hansel and Gretel’s visit to the ginger bread house located in the deep, deep, forest. I was surprised to learn that the building housed NMPRAC—the only museum in the United States dedicated to the history, arts and culture of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

Figure 16 — National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture. Source: Puerto Rican Cultural Center.

NMPRAC was founded in part by Puerto Rican educators, artists and community activists, with the purpose of reclaiming and restoring the building and transforming it into a Puerto Rican museum. For many years the buildings had served as storage for
salt, trucks and other equipment of the Park District. The organization started conversations in 1989 with the Park District to locate a museum there. In 1990, the city of Chicago started plans to renovate the building which was left abandoned for a number of years and by 1991 the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places (ibid.). At around that time the city of Chicago expended two million in repairs, a fire in 1992, destroyed 40 percent of the roof. After the fire, the plans for renovating the space stopped temporarily. Nonetheless, Puerto Rican leaders did not give up as the Sun Times report of the incident noted, *Arson Damage Won’t Block Humboldt Hispanic Museum* (Burgos 1992). With the support of the City, NMPRAC raised 3.4 million to renovate the exterior and $3.2 million to renovate the interior. Renovations were completed in two periods, 1998 and 2010, for a total cost of $6.6 million.

On February 8, 2012, NMPRAC was designated by the Chicago Park District as a Museum-in-the-Park and thus, recognized as a valuable cultural asset of the city of Chicago. This was achieved after a multi-month community driven campaign, where more than a 1,000 residents advocated to the Museums-in-the-Park coalition that NMPRAC should be part of such an elite membership (*Lawndale Bilingual Newspaper* 2011). The implication of NMPRAC being named as a Museum-in-the-Park, is very important for the justification of ownership, as the city declared them an entity that is “here to stay,” further symbolized by a 99-year-lease with the Park District. The designation is also tied to a commitment from the city of Chicago to support the institution’s programming (ibid.). This made NMPRAC a recognizable entity in the city and beyond, situating it nationally.

Again, this example shows how ownership could be linked to a community’s effort to make improvements to the building environment. Here we have a building
that although considered a historic gem, was abandoned. While the city owned the building, one can say that no one owned it, in the sense that the city was not really taking care of it. Besides, the city’s ownership made it a public good. NMPRAC came along and claimed ownership over the building by saying that they had a better use of the property than storing sand on rocks in the courtyard. Instead, NMPRAC had an educational purpose of teaching Puerto Ricans and others about Puerto Rican arts and culture. Perhaps, the city would not have given this entitlement to anyone, say they would not have given this right to an Indian, or Asian museum in the area. But the city intentionally or unintentionally agreed to the Puerto Rican’s sense of entitlement over the space, because Puerto Ricans currently lived there and had some power in the community, both politically and in sheer numbers. To put it another way, Puerto Rican leaders at NMPRAC had a legitimate claim.

Now, for a moment I am going to deviate from my topic of improvement, as a condition to claims of ownership, to discuss how Puerto Rican leaders are trying to expand their sense of entitlement over space, into the future. Being declared as a Museum-in-the-Park and given a 99-year-lease clearly helps NMPRAC to make interventions 30, 40, 50 years down the road. Nonetheless, NMPRAC has noted that gentrification may be a “natural” limit to their future claims. Even if they can maintain the lease, the displacement of Puerto Ricans may directly undermine the mission of the institution as years pass by.

By considering the life experiences of El Museo Del Barrio in New York City, the board of NMPRAC can see into the future. At NMPRAC board meetings that I have attended, board members have been critical of “what happened to El Museo Del Barrio,” which was transformed from being Puerto Rican only to include all Latin America’s common heritage. This was the result of the socio-economic changes that
East Harlem experienced. As Puerto Ricans were displaced, the board’s demography changed to reflect the new community. With time the new board decided to change the mission from exclusively Puerto Rican, to Latin American.

Using *El Museo Del Barrio* as a learning experience, NMPRAC’s board through their bylaws want to maintain the core of its board as Puerto Rican. A group of five founders—who know the original mission quite well—will be the only ones able to change the mission. Moreover, in order to change the mission, *all* of them, by consensus would have to agree on the issue. The reasoning behind these stipulations (recently adopted) was to avoid the marginalization of the Puerto Rican community and the political mission of the museum which is to tell the story of the struggle of Puerto Ricans in the United States. By doing this, NMPRAC is also trying to establish a more permanent ownership claim, beyond what the 99-year-lease offers them.

The museum today is recognized by community residents (well beyond NMPRAC’s board) as an important Puerto Rican space in the park and Division Street. As Benjamín, one local resident expressed, “The museum is the Puerto Ricans last stand.” NMPRAC acts as the most powerful marker of “Puertorricaness” in the park, as this resident expressed to me in a simple, but eloquent, even poetic, statement. “The last stand: A battle of a noble hero against all the odds of being able to save his or her life.”

. . .

Original settlers could have never envisioned what constitutes the public in today’s park. There is a wide diversity of users. The public engages in different spatial practices—jogging, dog walking, fishing, so on and so forth. The many recreational areas accommodate the expectations of users of every ethnicity, race and socioeconomic status. Yet, different groups, seem to control different parts of the
park. For example, very racially and ethnically diverse, young professionals, male and female, seem to be found in the tennis courts, while the kickball courts are literally packed with working class Mexican males. A playground, which can be found on the eastern side of the park, is often full and noisy. Kids from each race-ethnic-social group play with their parents and with one another. Only once in a while parents would interact with other parents, or adult guardians. I decided to go into the core of the park, where you see a massive green field interspersed with sizable lakes, rivers and gardens. Facing the pond, I see two non-Hispanic white women, one over 65 years old and a younger woman in her mid 20s, they lay together on a blanket under a tree. They speak a foreign language. Perhaps the granddaughter is spending summer time with granny to polish her ancestor’s language, perhaps Polish. I go up a little hill and then walk up some stairs. As I looked at the interior of the boat house I noticed observers. They, like me, are watching other people fish, or just sit by the lake. As I walk by the baseball diamonds I notice, on one side, dressed in black jerseys, a team of non-Hispanic white middle school kids. On the other side, dressed in red, are the Latino kids (some Mexican, others Puerto Rican as far as I can tell). Large families get together all over the park. I did not see any large gatherings among non-Hispanic whites, but Mexican, Puerto Rican and African American families could be found celebrating birthday parties, barbecues or simply enjoying themselves. Along North Avenue, Mexican males sit by their trucks full with fresh fruits and vegetables for sale. These were working trucks. You can also see paleteros ringing their bells and selling paletas (fruit ice pops) from Michoacán. In the middle of the park, by Sacramento Avenue, I pass a non-Hispanic white young woman in a swimsuit lying in the grass; she is quietly taking a sunbath and reading a book. Besides me, no one is around to bother her with stares. I thought it was a perfect and peaceful place for
anyone to relax. I keep walking south. In the rose garden, I observe a middle aged non-Hispanic artist with long hair. He is not very well dressed, has a large sketch pad and what it seems to be a bag full of art supplies. He mixed his pigments on a palette. It seems he is painting the two bison bronze sculptures created for the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. I later learned that they were designed by Edwards Kemeys, the same artist who did the lions at the Arts Institute of Chicago, that the pair of bison were initially made of plaster and they were originally located in Jackson Park. And that in 1911, they were made of bronze and in 1915 they were moved to their current location. Even thought the bison guard the rose garden today, visitors and tourists do not seem to be interested in coming to the area. I wondered how the painting was coming along as I could not inspect it closely. I walked north again towards the field house. Not far from there a young non-Hispanic white couple in their early 20s, are looking into each other’s eyes, enjoying the romantic landscape. There is a variety of native flowers, milkweed, black-eyed Susan and cardinal, among others. I noticed how the butterflies greet each other in the air, twisting and turning around, in their usual mating ritual. I heard folksy acoustic music, it’s Ben Howard: “Darling you’re with me, always around me. Only love, only love.” The same young man plays the guitar, the young woman, making harmony, has long blond hair and looks like a late 60s, or early 70s movie star featured in a hippie trail. Closer to the field house, a few children with their parents enjoy swimming in the beach. This is a man made lagoon that in 1973 was filled with sand on top of its clay bottom (“For West Siders, Beach Nearly Around Corner” 1995). I remember reading an article concerning the beach. It paraphrased Joe Pecoraro, the Park District’s General Superintendent of Beaches and Pools. He shared his excitement about the new feature in Humboldt Park with the Chicago Tribune journalist who wrote, “Concerned that
inner-city kids had no respite from the heat, save opening fire hydrants, park officials built dozens of swimming pools and decided to use the lagoon for swimming” (ibid.). And suddenly, a kid screamed and then laughed at very high decibels disturbing my news paper reading memories. I made a note on my pad, to find the quote when I had the chance.

At the distance there is only one soul in sight: A man sleeping under a tree. You can always find in the park those who completely lack a private domestic space, the homeless—most of the time they are alone, on a bench, under a tree in the open field, or just walking by, strolling their carts. For the homeless, being able to access public space is a matter of survival. I look again at the homeless man sleeping in the isolated spot. I remember how a Puerto Rican man once told me that during Chicago’s very hot summers back in the 1960s and 1970s people used to sleep in the park. “They would bring their hammocks and everything,” he said to me. Despite the stereotype of unsafely most, including women and children felt safe enough to do this practice repeatedly. “There was no air conditioner in those days, you know,” he added, “those were good times.” I imagined the picture in my head; it was as if he had just played some old song I barely knew, but somehow sounded familiar. I smile at the idea of people enjoying what’s good in life. It makes me sentimental. These days, not even the homeless can sleep at night in the park, as the sign at the entrance clearly states, “The park opens from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.,” suggesting that violators will be sanctioned. According to informants, although this was true also from the 1970s until the late 1990s the park went largely unsupervised and police was permissive of such uses.

After more than a few visits to the park, I notice there are different kinds of temporal users. There are those who use the park as their individual public space for meditation, or they fish, jog or walk by the pond. They think. Think about the office,
their family and friends. Maybe they just listen to music on their iPods, or do not think at all. Then they go home. I would say that, most non-Hispanic white newcomers, arrive and leave the park grounds individually and there is limited social interaction with other users of the park. There is a second group. They are attracted to the park for group, or family recreation, kickball, basketball, or baseball. Others seem to engage in small group activities such as jogging, fishing, etc. This second group is quite diverse. Then, there is a third group. They take the meaning of public space to a new level. They hang out in the park far more than the regular individual, or group user. For this third group, the park becomes their living room, a place to entertain friends and talk about life. This third group is mostly comprised of Puerto Ricans. These Puerto Ricans not only spend most time in the park, but they also occupy very specific spatial coordinates. Without any confusion, the southern side of the park, the intersection where the Puerto Rican flag is located, has been claimed by Puerto Ricans as their turf. This quadrant has become a sort of Puerto Rican district within the park. You can find the same Puerto Ricans there, day or night, mostly middle aged and elderly males. This area is full of interesting Puerto Rican, everyday characters. You can find very similar characters in any town square of the island where it is not uncommon to see old timers playing dominoes, enjoying each other’s company, just talking or taking pleasure in the quiet, watching people go by. Some of the males have brought their boom box and you can always hear them blasting salsa music, their favorite Spanish music, or the news. Some men cruise by on beat up old bikes, some of the men seem to be waiting for work while others seem to be retired, giving away their free time. A large group of men have already gathered near the bus stop. Many of the men are veterans, wearing green caps with their infantry division. One of the guys, I observe, lost both of his legs and is in a wheelchair. I think he was only in his
late forties. I can tell he was the leader of the group. I walk towards him to introduce myself. He introduced me to his friends. All of these guys were first generation Puerto Ricans from towns like Rio Piedras, Yauco, Aibonito, all over the island. I cannot recall a lot of details of the conversation we had—I know they told me stories about working in the farms of Puerto Rico, serving in the army and their girlfriends, wives, sons and daughters—but I cannot really remember any specifics. I was trying to absorb the authentic image of their subculture, one that as a woman, I simply did not belong to.

In this corner of the park, socio cultural practices become a visible part of the everyday life. The ways Puerto Rican old and, not so old men, use public space in Puerto Rico and in Chicago reveal something profound about their social production of space. The street, among Puerto Rican males has always been a symbol that they are out and about. But not only old Puerto Rican males enjoy this corner of the park; on Saturdays, like this one, at noon, you can hear the beat of the bongo drums and young men and women singing and dancing to traditional Puerto Rican bomba music just in front of La Casa Puertorriqueña, the non-profit organization that organizes the annual Puerto Rican Parade. Bomba is the music of slaves, used to communicate, with coded body movements and lyrics, conspiracies to run away from their masters. I become hypnotized by the rhythm of the drums and decide to join them. I hardly notice the hours slip away. The improvised dancing session was over. At this point I am starving, but mostly I am thirsty. I see many small entrepreneurs on the horizon. They make and sell piraguas, ice snow cones shaped like a pyramid and carved from a single giant block of ice. I bought one made of frambuesa syrup topped with tamarind. Now it was time to satisfy my hunger. Any given day of the week you can find carritos (food trucks) parked in the park and pretty much all of them specialize in
Puerto Rican food—some of these are part of an organized group called *Cocineros Unidos de Humboldt Park* (United cooks of Humboldt Park) which started in the 1970s. Delicious *rellenos de papas* (meat filled fried potato), *bacalaitos* (fried cod fritter) and other munchies that are high in fat and sold at low prices. Mmmmm, I think, as I head towards the one closest to me. I order the least fattening thing on the menu and sat on a picnic table to drink my diet coke and eat my *pincho*, a Puerto Rican chicken kabob, with bread and BBQ sauce. As I tear off my piece of bread and look at my surroundings again, I think to myself: What a moment of intense beauty! By the time I finished eating, I have been in an imaginary voyage to the island a couple of times and it was time to return to Chicago.

For many Puerto Ricans, the park is a glimpse into the Puerto Rican island that they have never seen. Daniel, a focus group participant explains to me the feeling,

> About the park…growing up in Chicago, I never went to Puerto Rico, so growing up in Humboldt Park during the Puerto Rican Parade, it felt like I was in Puerto Rico but I wasn’t. Cause’ of all the culture that was going on and all the fun stuff that’s happening just brought that whole Puerto Rico feeling into me.

A snapshot of Puerto Rico, the feeling of finding something you thought you lost. I partly understand Daniel. Our only difference is that for me the island is a familiar place: Home. Daniel, on the other hand, is completely imagining the island through Humboldt Park’s representation. There is certainly a difference between imaginative geographies and real geographies. Nonetheless, being from “here” or from “there” did not really matter in the creation of that feeling of belonging. This quote suggests that Puerto Rico, as a community is not bound to a geographical space, but it consists of a symbolic set of memories some of them relived in the park.

The park is part of the everyday life of many Puerto Ricans in the area and even beyond. Community members view the park as a “jewel.” Others have called it a “diamond in the city’s rock.” I conducted a 238 participant survey for the Puerto
Rican Agenda. This survey consists of mostly Puerto Ricans attending the Puerto Rican festival, De Bandera a Bandera (From Flag to Flag) held in Paseo Boricua. When people were asked, “What are your favorite places in Humboldt Park?” far more people found the park itself to be the most critical and enduring social institution, more than Paseo Boricua or Division Street and more than the Institute for Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (NMPRAC), La Casa Puertorriqueña or any other Puerto Rican institution.

![Word Cloud of Favorite Places in the Park](image)

**Figure 17.** —**Favorite places in the park.** Source: Author’s survey.

The park among people’s minds is associated with memorable events and places. As the word cloud shows above some people would name their favorite places in the park, which tended to be related with bodies of water, like the lake or lagoons, the beach, the field house and the boat house. A fisherman originally from Cabo Rojo told me that Puerto Ricans were “born for the ocean.” I had very similar conversations with fishermen in Vieques. For them, the ocean was a site of production and consumption, but most importantly of reproduction—as all men fed
their families with the fish they caught. The Navy in the 1940s, after acquiring by eminent domain 2/3 of the island, told the men and their families that they could not fish any longer in naval waters. At the time, men on the island worked in the sugar plantation, fished, farmed and collected the abundant fruits on the island in order to provide for themselves and their families. All men were in one way or another, fishermen. When the Navy deprived them of this important portion of their livelihood, their fears were well founded. These men were given a real choice, they would either fish on naval lands illegally, or they would starve. They decided to fish illegally. The simple act of fishing like they have done for generations, from one day to the other, became an act of civil disobedience.

As a hillside girl, the ocean did not have the same meaning for me than for this fisherman. I did not even know how to swim before moving to the United States. I tried it for the first time in the safety of a pool, without my protective mother screaming “cuidado!” (be careful!). Yet, I really enjoy the ocean view and the lake here in Chicago somehow reminds me of the familiar and reassuring baby blue. For me the oceans and bodies of water are somehow a familiar and recognizable territory. Puerto Ricans in Humboldt Park by declaring their favorite spots in the park—the lake or lagoons, the beach, the field house and the boat house—were reinventing Puerto Rico’s ocean, rivers and streams.

Another popular place that people mentioned on the survey, as shown in the word cloud, was the flower garden. Another gentleman told me that the park reminded him of the green countryside of Puerto Rico. He contrasted the greenness of the park with the asphalt of the rest of the city. He explained,

The first thing I noticed when I moved from New York to Humboldt Park was the beautiful landscape, with lots of vegetation. There were so many trees, lots of green and flowers. I thought to myself: I am in Puerto Rico! Do you know how wonderful it was to see green? Where I lived before there was
no green. I worked in an industry, same as in New York, but here, I found it prettier...less congested, I guess. It's really so peaceful. Perhaps the only thing missing are the mountains and horseback riding!

This quote reveals that nature, as envisioned by proponents of the parks movement, could be an antidote to the industrial and noisy life of the city. In addition, the interviewee speaks of the boundaries between country (the greenery) and city (the asphalt).

When you ask a Puerto Rican about the boundaries of Humboldt Park they are very likely to choose North Avenue as the north boundary, Chicago at the south, Western at the east and Kedzie at the west. One hundred percent of the time they would not use the boundaries established by the 77 official community areas of Chicago. This is just to say that when Puerto Ricans are referring to, Humboldt Park, they are referring to the actual park and the area that surrounds it. This spatial definition describes very clearly the sort of space the park is in the minds of Puerto Rican Chicago and it reinforces their attachment to the neighborhood. The park is seen not just as an amenity for residents who lived in the area, but as an important element of cultural reproduction. It helps define a sort of Puerto Rican geography. Puerto Ricans do not see nature as a commodity or spectacle for consumption but as part of culture and identity, a way of life. Nonetheless, most Puerto Ricans do not believe that the park is exclusively for Puerto Ricans. As Benjamin a community member explained in a focus group, “I think the park is the focal point, that’s the key to this area. And, one thing, you don’t have to be Puerto Rican just to enter the park.”

This quote shows how even when the park is key to the socio cultural reproduction of Puerto Ricans, the space is open to others. In fact, I think that Benjamín thought, if I understood him well, that others were not only welcome to enjoy all the park amenities, but also explore their Puerto Rican neighbor’s food, dance and music.
Other Puerto Ricans question the nature of the new public using the park.

Esequiel explicitly contrasted the new and the old public. He states,

All new residents who have moved to this area in the past two years are white and, it shows, the change is apparent. Instead of seeing kids in the morning, I see some people, a woman or a man, with a dog. Before, it was a man or a woman taking the kids to school and now I see these new residents with dogs. And I say that undoubtedly 100 percent of these new residents are white or white mothers with strollers, walking the neighborhood. This is something you could not have seen before, four years ago, much less when we started moving here.

Puerto Ricans, like Esequiel, who claim their right to the community and therefore, the park, interpret the changes in park users as reflections of threatening change. The following passage, from Esequiel, illustrates the melancholic awareness of observing that Puerto Ricans are disappearing from the park landscape.

Humboldt Park is the second largest park in the city of Chicago. We will lose it as part of the Puerto Rican community. Go to the park so you can see how the user’s demography has changed. As you know 10 years ago there was not a family that was not Puerto Rican or African American getting into that beach. You know who fights now to keep the beach open? The white people! They say, “Oh no, the beach cannot be closed.” I say, “Why? It is just a cesspool of feces for dogs.” I see them floating! I’ll never let my children or my wife get into that beach. But I tell you this so you can see that this is urgent. Whites see the beauty of what we have here.

If we make links between the previous passage from Esequiel and this one, we also see interesting connections regarding dogs which are used as a way to characterize the non-Hispanic white gentrifiers and the relative values of this new population. There are tensions between families with children and couples or single individuals with dogs. Newcomers, instead of caring for children care for dogs. In fact, dissecting Esequiel’s quote, “they try to protect the beach not for their children, but for their dogs”. The assumption that is explicit here is that young professionals are deciding to marry later in life because they are working towards lifting their career, before they decide to have children. Esequiel does not identify himself with this culture. He finds an opportunity to pass judgment on their lifestyles. Esequiel acknowledges that the beach contributes to the “beauty” of the park and he points out that white gentrifiers
are fighting to maintain its “beauty”. Nonetheless, he also calls the beach a “cesspool of feces for dogs.” While in other circumstances Esequiel might have said that he loves the beach and it should be maintained and open to the public, in this instance, Esequiel sees it as a point of contention between him (a Puerto Rican) and the white newcomers. Newcomers are claiming the right to the beach, so Esequiel realizes himself as a subject, that could be removed from the space. Therefore, he prefers to self-alienate himself from defending the existence of the beach—and in the process he also alienates other Puerto Ricans and African Americans—rather than losing altogether the cultural essence of the park to the monolithic wave of newcomers.

In this quote, it is interesting how Esequiel depicts the non-Hispanic white gentrifiers as uncivilized. As evidence he explains that they allow their dogs to do their duties in the beach while knowing that children go there to play. He sees this as an improper practice and it hurts him personally because his wife and his children might otherwise enjoy swimming in the beach. In other words, while it might be common sense that non-Hispanic white gentrifiers are the providers of civilization, according to this passage, they are depriving the natives of it. At the end of this quote Esequiel declares, “Whites see the beauty of what we have here,” drawing the difference between Latinos, Puerto Ricans and African Americans not seeing the beauty of the park and non-Hispanic whites are able to not only see it, but also defend it. Esequiel knows that his community appreciates its beauty, but in the same breath somewhat contradicting his previous statement, he stated that they did not because he was frustrated with them choosing to move away. Esequiel’s lament to his community is to decide to stay.
The growing influence of newcomers is documented alongside with their attempts to regulate the Puerto Rican small businesses in the park. Esequiel shares a story that illustrates this point,

The Humboldt Park cooks have been here for 35 years. There was a constituent of Ward 26, who is now a former constituent; this lady obviously has a lot of time on her hands; she is white and her husband is Latino. He grew up on the South Side. But he doesn’t speak a peep of Spanish and obviously he identifies much more with the white culture of his wife. She has been paying close attention to the Latin American Restaurant food truck. She constantly sends emails to the company that handles the park’s district concessions, which is a private company. She continuously goes with her husband to the Park District board meetings. Her complaints are about the noise from the electric generators. For years the cooks have tried to bring energy there, but the Park District has denied their petitions. But now, finally, we will succeed, because I’ve been over them to do so. Not to shut her up, but because it is much cheaper for the cooks. The other thing she complains about is that they do not have menus outside displaying prices like it should be. As if one did not know that you can eat an *alcapurria*. The other thing that she complaints about is that the yard is ugly. And, it is ugly! But when she came and bought property here, the ugly patio was already there. And now that she is in Humboldt Park, she wants to change it. That was already there when she moved here. That’s the dynamic. That’s what I want to show you. This is what motivates her. And there are many others behind her, but they do not say anything. They support her implicitly. These are very racist tones and I have no tolerance for that. I spoke directly to her and her husband because they [referring to the cooks] have been here 35 years and I will make sure they stay here 35 more years. I also said to them “I wonder how you did not hear that noise when they move here because you live in Washtenaw and the 14th block and the truck is in California and Illinois, how could not hear that noise at the house. This is an example of what will happen here. It is up to us. It is up to us! Unless we start in our organizations to encourage our members to buy homes here.”

There are many interesting points in this passage. At the beginning of the passage Esequiel explains how the husband of this woman is not Latino enough. He points out to three reasons: He grew up in the South Side (as opposed to the West Side), he does not speak Spanish and most importantly, he supports his wife’s position. After listening to Esequiel for several hours, I think that he would qualify as a “true Latino” or “Latino enough” as someone who supported a very specific set of values such as working to advance the social, economic, political and civil rights of Latinos.

According to Esequiel this man, although Latino, identifies himself more with the non-Hispanic white culture of his wife. By “white culture” Esequiel probably meant
that this woman was imposing her elite values based on economics, consumption and commodification onto these other groups of people. Esequiel was denouncing this woman’s white superiority and therefore, racism. There are some significant concepts of superiority operating in this passage. For example, it is inferred that Puerto Ricans are technologically inferior, as they do not seem to get electricity and use quiet machinery. Moreover, their businesses are incapable of fulfilling the demands of white or American markets. This is evidenced by the cooks refusing to put the menu and prices out for everyone to see. In addition, the eating area is “ugly” and therefore, it’s not living to its full potential. This woman’s suggestions, if they were to be implemented, would not only result in a more (white) aesthetically appealing park, but the food truck would be more lucrative. But what this woman doesn’t understand is that this Puerto Rican business tends to be very functional in nature, with little concern for aesthetics. They provide a service in exchange for subsistence, but that’s it. They already have clients that know what to order and how much it is going to cost and they are ‘ok’ with not extending the market to a new clientele. In this story, this woman, interestingly, acts as a sort of a scout for capitalist improvement. She uses her white privilege by showing up at Park District meetings and organizing others around specific Puerto Rican places in the park. For her, the food trucks should become more progressive, and this could only be accomplished through active intervention, even insertion, of white or American culture into Puerto Rican culture. Another interesting factor is that Esequiel acknowledges that their patio is ugly and that they should have the menu outside. The problem for him is that the sense of cultural and visual difference keenly felt by this woman results in her rejecting quite openly, his culture and his people. It’s interesting that Esequiel emphasizes wanting to change the area as the result of having a stake on the property. This woman wanted to change the place
once she moved there, even thought she knew in advance what she bought. But now that she is an owner, she wants to change the character of the neighborhood. Esequiel indicates that she is not alone and that others are organizing with her, although more quietly, around making the neighborhood more “white”—to use Esequiel’s conceptualization. This tendency of gentrifiers to change the neighborhoods where they move into, helps to establish Humboldt Park as a place without history and thus without cultural change in the newcomers imagery. The constant attack on the Latin American Restaurant food truck could have well in fact resulted in the business being closed altogether due to noise disturbance, or other nuisances. Another informant stated that if the Latin American Restaurant had to close their food truck, they would also need to close the restaurant located in Paseo Boricua, as the truck was helping the owner to stay afloat. Esequiel finishes his thought by stating Latino and Puerto Rican organizations should encourage their members to buy homes in the community and that this is the only way that these attacks will stop. This sentiment is a ubiquitous aspect of Esequiel earlier narratives. He emphasizes what the park has to offer for a Latino and Puerto Rican middle class, a sort of cosmopolitan urbanity. Esequiel doesn’t identify middle class Puerto Ricans and other Latinos as gentrifying threats, as they already accept the culture of the place they feel affinity for. Arlene Dávila, in Barrio Dreams (2004) explains how long-established residents seem trapped in a gentrification paradox, “the purchase of place is presented as the only alternative to lasting power, even the feasibility of such as a dream is quickly fading” (28).

Who constitutes the public is always contested. Benjamin told me a story of who spoiled the park’s enjoyment. The story concerned another Puerto Rican. He explained,

Eight years ago I went fishing there and this idiot… Puerto Rican, was drinking and had taken a 150 pound pit bull with him and he turned it loose.
And I was fishing. I was the only one who was stupid to stay behind, so he
turned the dog loose. This guy is all happy and drunk and he came asked me,
"Hey can I try that" [referring to fishing supplies] and I tried to give it to him
and the dog attacked me and bit me on the leg here [pointing to his calf]. And
the guy is laughing. This happened four times! If I had a gun I’d shot him and
the dog, but I had to drag my feet to the emergency room. And Saint Mary
charged me $1,200 for their services. And the guy took off. You couldn’t
find a policeman there.

Benjamín, toward the end of his story put such horror in the proper perspective by
adding, “You see the drunks, the crack heads and all that. This could be such a
beautiful park, such a beautiful park. I love that park.” This story fascinated me,
because it has to do with the clash of cultures. There are clashes of cultures between
Puerto Ricans and other ethnic groups, but certainly even among Puerto Ricans
themselves. Benjamín made clear who in his opinion should not declare their right to
the park space, the “drunks and crack heads” on the corners.

The park at times became a marginal space. For example, weeks ago in the
Puerto Rican corner I described above, there were two outreach busses: One was a
food pantry on wheels (sponsored by the Night Ministry) and another one was a free
HIV test and drug counseling center. More than 40 people were lined up to receive
food from the food pantry on wheels that was parked on the corner of Division and
California. The crowd was very racially and ethnically diverse, including a number of
non-Hispanic whites. Church volunteers were handing bags of groceries with canned
foods, some produce and bread. There were many families with kids. The other truck
was offering free, anonymous HIV testing. In addition, they were exchanging used
needles for sterile ones; this is a strategy that has been proven to be quite effective in
preventing HIV. There were less than 10 people on this side of the curb. The vast
majority on this corner were Puerto Rican. I heard one of the guys calling a friend
over the phone so he could also take advantage of the nice deals.
Not long ago, in 2006, the Park District as part of the Safe Park Zones legislation, installed billboards in the park trying to keep addicts and criminal activity off the park. The sign reads, “Warning. Safe Park Zone. You have entered a safe park zone: Criminal penalties are severely increased for gang recruitment activity and possession use or sale of drugs and weapons.” The fines in Safe Park Zones are higher than outside of the area. Blog writers like Joe Zekas of Yo Chicago, suggest that signs like this are only placed in areas where crime is a problem. In his article, “How to tell you’re in an unsafe area,” Zekas (2012) undermined one of the homebuyers that visited his blog for tips on how to chose a neighborhood to buy in. Zekas was accused by other blog users of being a racist. These different narratives taken together show how conflicting ideas about the park are common: Is it dangerous and suitable only for criminality, or it is a gorgeous natural resource? The paradox is that despite the conflicting viewpoints, it plays a significant role in selling the area to the consumer oriented Yuppie society.

Figure 18 — Safe Park Zone Sign. Picture taken by author.

It is important to note that lower-income occupants and new immigrants gave the park and the neighborhood a second lease on life to an abandoned and completely
disinvested area. Newcomers, therefore, capitalize in a good whose value has been realized by the prior occupants. Along the way, the city pretty much abandoned the park. In the 1970s, the park was in bad shape with unkept grass and fields; the lagoon was filthy and filled with garbage and abandoned cars. Still, Puerto Rican residents made the park theirs, they picnicked with their families, played baseball, frisbees, and so forth; it was their park, no matter how it was neglected by public authorities. The city of Chicago Park District resisted the establishment of Puerto Rican symbols such as the Pedro Albizu statue and the police harassed Puerto Ricans continuously in the park; thus the park is a full symbol of their struggle to stay put.

PRINCIPLES OF OWNERSHIP

Can Puerto Ricans “own” the park? British Lawyer Honoré’s (2000) describes 11 necessities to obtaining ownership of a property. These 11 traits include: (1) Possession or the right from excluding others from your belongings, (2) Use of the resource as the possessors see fit, (3) Management of how the object may be used, (4) Income or the ability of generating monetary value, (5) Capital or the right to consume, modify or destroy the object, (6) Security or the responsibility of taking care of the belonging, (7) Inheritance or the right to give the belonging to someone else, (8) Indeterminate length of ownership which stands against the idea of renting or leasing for a short period of time, (9) A duty not to use the property in harmful ways to others, (10) Liability which means that the resource may be taken in lieu of a debt payment; for example, if someone owes taxes, (11) Residual nature of unclaimed property that is the possibility of the object returning to its original owner.

The aforementioned case shows how Puerto Ricans are declaring possession of the park by using the park constantly, making it secure and managing how it will be
used. They also claim their ability to generate monetary value or income of the park through selling foods and beverages on a daily basis and in special occasions such as, during the Puerto Rican Parade. They claim the park as a patrimony for all Puerto Ricans for generations to come, which is quite similar to inheritance claims. And although gentrification is a treat for them to make claims in a long-term basis, they constantly fight to be able to stay. Most of the elements that are needed to demonstrate ownership are revealed by analyzing how Puerto Ricans engage with the park—according to Honoré’s most individuals do not fulfill all 11 attributes to obtaining ownership of a property and our legal system still considers them to be in possession of the object in question. Then, why Puerto Ricans still do not “own” the park? The simple answer is because based on traditions that are implemented by the legal system; Humboldt Park is a public park, not a communal park.

KINDS OF PROPERTY: PRIVATE, PUBLIC AND COMMUNAL

We might conceptualize three types of property: private, public and communal. Private property refers to ownership by an individual or a corporation. Public property defines resources whose uses has a specific purpose that benefits society like a park or the U.S. post office—these are entities usually own by the state and used by the public. Communal properties are resources for members of a specific group such as a country club, a gym, a housing co-op, for example.

In order to get the highest level of benefit from all property, utilitarian arguments do not conclude that all property must be private. In practical terms the mix of private and public property may differ in its effectiveness depending on particular circumstances and traditions as well as the types of resources to be owned.

A socialist view of views private property as a tool to discriminate classes from one another, as those who own property will inevitable own the people who do not,
displace them and so forth. Reformist critics such as Henry George and John Rawls show that private property cannot be beneficial to society if the practice consistently yields un-egalitarian results. Private property creates a divide between those who have and have not. The latter group is always disproportionally larger, limiting their collective productivity. Social justice activists advocate making property ownership more accessible by reforming tax policies.

Both Ludwig Von Mises and Hayek argue that a fully functioning socialist economy could not achieve any sort of efficient operation without the incentives that operate in a private property system. Furthermore, those from the Keynesian tradition argue that market economy is compatible with taxation policies that seek the redistribution of wealth or that attempt to ensure some economic threshold below which no one will fall.

Honoré's 11 principles apply just as much to private, public or communal ownership as to private. There is a vast spectrum to the types of properties someone can own—from physical goods to abstract things such as stocks, as well as the ownership of ideas through copyright. Among the most fundamental rights is to one's own body, this ownership can still be argued to be limited to all 11 traits. This fundamental ownership of self causes a question to arise: If Puerto Ricans are mixing their labor and their being in the park more than society as a whole, does that means that they should be able as a community proclaim their rights of ownership?

**Occupancy, Labor and Natural Rights**

In regards to occupancy of a particular property, the general consensus is accepting the “finders keepers” philosophy: If one creates, discovers or notices that which others have not, then it is one’s own to keep. John Locke expands on this idea as he studies the exact actions one needs to take before having the right of private
ownership. In *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke combines self-ownership with an individuals’ right to their labor. When one “mixes” labor with some unknown resource, then one’s property in the self is extended to that material resource and one acquires, thereby, a property in that resource that excludes any other person. Locke places a significant proviso on this account: one may acquire property only so long as one leaves “enough and as good” for others. This proviso refers not to appropriation of everyone's resources as common to all, but rather means to signify how the value of one’s property should be distributed or traded with others.

If we agree with Locke’s theory of value, then we come to the conclusion that Puerto Ricans do own the park, after their many years of trying to improve it and leading a number of initiatives where they demanded government officials to pay attention to it along with the many needs of the community. At the most basic level, we might argue that Puerto Ricans through their laboring have invested in the park, impregnating it with meaning, through stories of ownership and by keeping alive their historical memory in the landscape. This way of seeing, according to Locke and Honoré’s 11 principles is an equally significant form of ownership. The caveat here is that even though Puerto Ricans own the park on the basis of their labor, they should also share it with others who are willing to put their labor into it along with follow the 11 principles of ownership. Nonetheless, it is the logic of capitalism, imposed by the state, the one that justifies not sharing the park and instead, facilitates the removal of a group based simply on their inability to pay. As we have seen, then, ownership through labor, occupation and natural rights stands in competing position to those who can simply pay for it. This worldview is what Puerto Ricans in Humboldt Park are challenging.
CHAPTER 10 SUMMARY

The No se Vende (Not for Sale) grassroots campaign claims that Puerto Ricans, even those who are renters, are the legitimate owners of Humboldt Park. In this assertion, legitimacy and ownership are one and the same, regardless of the legal status of “homeowner.” Not for Sale then contradicts the original meaning that inspired the legal code to begin with, property that can be bought and sold, which is not based on “use” values. The state’s sense of ownership, to some extent, has lost its standing in the eyes of these activists who have decided to claim their rights through symbology. In this sense, the idea of Puerto Ricans renting in Humboldt Park or simply deciding to stay has become an instrumental right of resistance to the perceived oppression and exclusion. The campaign has played a key role in the construction of a new sense of legitimacy in the recent housing struggles.
Chapter 10
No Se Vende

Since 2004 many young Puerto Ricans have been resisting gentrification through the “Humboldt Park No Se Vende” (Don’t Sell Humboldt Park) Campaign. The youth at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) came up with the idea for this campaign which was part of an overall plan to radically change the community. The plan went from electoral politics, to grass roots community organizing. A primary understanding of this manifesto was the concept of democracy, that community members should take part in the political process. With that idea, young people started going out and knocking on doors. At the time, Billy Ocasio was the alderman of the 26th Ward. These young organizers would make the voices of the community heard at the Alderman’s office. Organizers would use a survey request forms to write down the concerns of residents in the area. For example, if someone needed a tree to be cut down or some trash to be picked up, PRCC’s organizers would fill out a form and then drop it by the Alderman’s office. In this way, the campaign was able to secure all community members city services through the Alderman’s office. PRCC’s youth also engaged in other initiatives; for example, they would help people find an apartment, fill out the appropriate forms, and so on. Organizers would also gather other information and leave reading material for residents to learn about various programs and opportunities sponsored by the city, non-profit and religious organizations. Although the campaign started with a fairly simple system, as it evolved over time, organizers were able to develop a more complex system. For example, they appointed captains divided by precincts. Activists were out in the streets seven days a week and covered a lot of ground. Neighbors and residents were accustomed to seeing the same organizer over and over again and this strategy helped
increase the level of trust between organizers and residents. Activists also sought to influence electoral politics. They registered people to vote and told them where to go to vote if they did not know where voting polls were located. In addition, organizers sometimes gave advice regarding the candidates that were better for the community from a grassroots perspective. Oftentimes, this meant voting for the candidates more in alliance with the identity politics project: Puerto Rican and Latino candidates, as opposed to those of white European descendant.

No Se Vende became part of the general organizing tool box of this participatory democracy and social justice project. The campaign declared an emergency against speculation and property sales in the Puerto Rican community. Using the door to door canvassing method, young activists told residents about the consequences of selling. The campaign started because speculators were targeting elderly people, asking them to sell and cash in their properties. They were, of course, buying low and selling high. Often elderly homeowners did not realize the rising value of their properties and fell prey to unscrupulous realtors. Activists noticed that the elderly tended to be more trusting and therefore, this group was particularly vulnerable to the offers of speculators. The No Se Vende campaign, with the name in Spanish, was then a campaign for insiders and especially for the elderly. It was about reaching out to Puerto Ricans, telling them not to sell; it was not meant to be antagonistic to the realtors or to give newcomers the message that they were not welcome in the neighborhood. At first, it was more about increasing awareness about the consequences of selling. The campaign also urged homeowners to not think individualistically, but to think communally. Some homeowners do not realize that when they sell their individual home or property, they are selling more than that, they are selling the community’s ability to stay within that neighborhood all together.
Many community members agreed with what the activists were saying, while many others perceived them as agitators.

After Billy Ocasio left office in 2009 the door to door campaign died out and No Se Vende became more market oriented. Activists are currently concentrating on: (1) placing signs throughout all of Paseo Boricua, wearing T-shirts, posting ads in newspapers, having a presence at festivals and other community events, in addition to maintaining a Facebook page where people could voice their support, stories and news; (2) advertising apartments and homes for rent or sale among Puerto Ricans. The most recent slogans employed have been: “Boricua, return to our beautiful neighborhood” and “Oye Boricua, rent an apartment, buy a building, open a business, get involved!” A slogan in 2011 used the Occupy movement to encourage Puerto Ricans everywhere and anywhere to “Occupy Humboldt Park and return to the barrio.” In order to achieve the goal of keeping Puerto Ricans in the Barrio, or attract new Puerto Ricans to it, the campaign organizers dedicate their time and energy to put together a list of apartments and homes available for rent or sale.

All of these slogans are presented in English and Spanish. Therefore, the message is directed to both insiders and outsiders, as well as to second and third generation Puerto Ricans. One of the organizers commented that although at first the message was only for Puerto Ricans, in time it also became about telling non-Hispanic whites to stay away. In a casual conversation, a non-Hispanic white young male that used to live in Humboldt Park, told me that he did not like to go to Paseo Boricua precisely because he saw the signs displaying, No Se Vende and they made him feel unwelcomed. Yet, in the same breath he said that he was just a graduate student and a renter and that he thought that the sign was not meant for him. What he meant is that the sign was trying to dissuade non-Hispanic whites from becoming homeowners in a
community visibly declared as Puerto Rican, but it did not say anything about non-Puerto Rican renters. I think this is an interesting question for both non-Hispanic whites and Puerto Ricans. What about renters? Is No Se Vende also directed at them? I asked this question to Julia one of the current managers of No Se Vende, but phrased it in a different way. I shared with her that ACS data from 2006-2010 reported that only about 36 percent of Puerto Ricans in the Puerto Rican Influence Area are homeowners (Cintrón, Toro-Morn, García Zambrana, & Scott, 2012). I compared this number to the No Se Vende campaign that I previously observed in Vieques, where 98 percent of the people on the island were homeowners. That being said, what does this mean for the campaign in Humboldt Park where the majority of Puerto Ricans are renters and not homeowners? Without any hesitation, Julia told me that the campaign was for all Puerto Ricans, homeowners and renters. The idea is to encourage people to stay in the community and tell others they, “… just can’t come in here, destroy and rebuild.” Even if Puerto Rican renters move from apartment to apartment within the community, what matters the most to organizers of No Se Vende, is to maintain the Puerto Rican presence. Julia told me that the rental market is changing substantially due to gentrification. It is becoming more formalized; for example, landlords are requesting their tenants sign leases, provide references and conduct a background and a credit check. They are also requesting a deposit, moving and pet fees. Julia told me the story of a couple that decided not to rent due to the many barriers that they encountered,

I know that there was an apartment that we [No Se Vende] listed. And someone called us back and they were really upset because they were very much cheated by the company. So they went to the place, there was no mention of any fees for their dogs and for their animal. So they went and the woman’s husband was handicapped. He walked with a cane. He was young though like in his 40s, but he used a cane. And the Puerto Rican couple went over there and the manager gave him the look and they told him that there was a moving fee even though it wasn’t advertised. The manager told them that they would have to pay an extra fee for their dog they were trying to get
the deposit and then they yelled “when can you get this done?” She just told me that the manager just gave him the look. The manager required so many things from them to be able to move in that they decided not to move in. This is just working class people. Then there’s a white professional couple that I know that they’ve seen the beautiful apartment. This one lady was an artist and it was a duplex. She said, “I want this. I can have my studio here. I want it, I want it!”

Another hidden story in this quote is that landlords and management companies are becoming more selective about who they rent to. The previous quote suggests that having a disability seemed risky to the owner for whatever reason, being in terms of assuming a fixed income, or a future liability due to injury. Julia also shared with me a personal story of how she was turned down due to family size. When she called for information regarding an apartment for rent, the landlord/manager asked her how many people would be housed in an apartment and when she responded “three,” the lady replied, “Three? Oh yeah, it’s too small” Julia replied “hold on can I go and see it? Let me judge, let me go see and let me determine if it’s too small for me or not.” All the tactics that landlords are using now, they did not use years ago, which speaks of the formalization and homogenization of the market. More often than not renters who have been discriminated do not report these incidences to the Commission of Human Relations or to the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity because they simply do not now about it or do not wish to engage in a process that requires time and effort from their part. As informants indicated they simply could go to another landlord.

The other element is that housing opportunities were advertised locally by placing signs outside the apartment, or the home for rent. The only way to learn about these housing opportunities was to already live in the neighborhood. For example, you will see the sign just by walking by, were referred by friends or family, or purposely deciding that this was a community that you wanted to live in and found the property by touring the neighborhood. Landlords are becoming more savvy and
now advertise using Craigslist, or other rental websites which allows them to reach a much broader audience. This audience might come from anywhere in Chicago, or even out of state. Local residents without using Craigslist, might not even learn that the property next to them is for rent. Julia also pointed out that landlords are increasingly using realty companies such as Realty Professionals Group LLC, DMG Realty Group, SGJ Property Management, Inc. and many others, to advertise and find a reliable renter for landlords. These companies tend to have open houses, or several appointments at the same time. Julia tells the story of how Puerto Ricans are filtered out from these new practices:

There was about three people who went there to see the apartment. She said [the Puerto Rican prospective renter] I’ve got a check here I can give you for the first month’s rent right now. They didn’t quite have like the $3,000 to be able to pay for the rent and the person was right there, but they were like ‘ok.’ But, you know, they had their background check and everything. And so they went and they are like ‘okay.’ But then there was someone else there that was like “I’ll give you more for it”. It was like okay let me think about it. But then my friend came back and told them, I almost feel like there were people there just to say, “I’ll give you more,” just to discourage other people from buying [renting]. But she was really upset, she said, “I did everything. I went over there and I even went to talk to the manager myself when there was nobody else, made a separate appointment. So they tried to convince the person [the high bidder] to kind of give her the apartment and he did it.

Although this story had a happy ending for Julia’s ally, what Julia is trying to communicate is that there is a lot of competition to get into an apartment in comparison to previous years. She pointed out that only the people who are willing to go through the hurdles, are able to find a desirable apartment. No Se Vende helps renters with the process of renting an apartment, by calling landlords, filling out an application on their behalf and any other related activities.

Bohío Housing Services is a new initiative of PRCC that started in Fall of 2012 to assist renters and homeowners at risk of not being able to make their monthly payments, or who did not have enough savings towards a rental deposit. PRCC was granted about $25,000 for the year, to be able to assist residents experiencing a
housing emergency, such as a foreclosure, or a personal situation like illness or death of family members. Only those 60 percent or below the area median income (AMI) were able to qualify. Although, initially Bohio Housing Services intended to assist homeowners at risk of missing a mortgage payment, the majority of the people receiving assistance were renters. Among renters, the program wanted to help renters (especially of Puerto Rican descent) living outside of Humboldt Park with their deposit, to encourage them to move into the neighborhood. Nonetheless, the vast majority of people who are receiving the assistance are renters who already live in Humboldt Park.

There is a link between homeowners and renters. No Se Vende makes contacts with Puerto Rican owners who have properties for rent. They help them to find renters by advertising in La Voz newspaper (from PRCC) free of change, as well as the contact email list serve. The campaign also finds properties that are for sale around the neighborhood and tries to advertise them to Puerto Ricans before others find out about them. Julia went on to talk to me about a recent practice that is keeping Puerto Ricans in the community and able to bid on properties that are on the market. Julia states, “Due to the foreclosures many of the properties owned by banks have gone on the short sale list and many outside realtors are trying to sell these homes, right? What they do is they join forces with realtors to try and sell homes. Homes have been going for $80k and $90k.” Many Puerto Ricans have been trying to get these deals. They are watching homes being rehabbed on their block and they have been patiently waiting to see, when they put the for sale sign outside, if they will be called immediately. Julia explains,

But then when they’re up, they make a bid, they’re not called, they’re not contacted. And then within 24-hours, I was told, that the home is under contract And it took about 15 minutes to actually go up. And there’s a lot more. So I was talking to the guy that works in Yalcom, one of the owner’s
kids and he told me there was a house they were rehabbing. His girlfriend says, “I want it, I want it, I want it. We’ll see how much it’s going to be, right?” He said the sign went up. He gave me the number. I’m going to call. In 15 minutes, they said I am sorry it’s on contract. Fifteen minutes! The sign had just gone up when they called. When he called, it’s like you need the number let me know. And it was already sold, on contract. And he said it’s a white, they told me. The realtors are not Puerto Ricans or Latinos because even realtors are coming to complain to Maldonado [Alderman of the 26th ward]. They’re like, “listen I have in mind how to work with your people to be able to sell. I have customers and potential buyers that I can send this to. But I’m not getting access to this information. When I share this information they would be able to send it out to their networks, that people are trying to live here that are Latinos.” So what was happening is that here you have the banks collaborating with the real estate companies and there’s an outreach to their networks of people, which are mostly white because that’s what we’re seeing. Mostly white people find these properties. So it’s affordable properties for them. Not for us. And if we don’t have access to them, we don’t have any control, or right over who buys. I mean how is it that in 15 minutes the apartment is already under contract. How is that possible? You know. So that’s almost like you have already sent this information to your networks of people, before you put them on the multiple listing service which is by law when, let’s say if the house is ready to be sold, you have three days to put it on the market. Up to three days you put it on the market and officially advertise it. So in those three days, or maybe days before then, this information is being sent out to those [people] banking list, to the banks networks, and to the realtor’s networks. Their networks of mostly white people. That’s who’s buying the properties. And so that’s another part of gentrification. I mean that’s where it’s getting to. You know, they had access to these homes that are cheap and we do not.

In a free market everyone should be able to rent, buy and sell property. No Se Vende is a direct rejection to property rights exercised in these ways. Property defines a relationship between the person and objects—which might be concrete like an apartment building or it may be any abstract. The person who owned the property is known as legal person who can be individuals, a corporation of any kind, including the state. The state is the one who gives both individuals and corporations the right to own property as well as the ability to trade to buy and sell the objects in the market place. All these privileges occur under the legal process. These kinds of rights also increase profit under ownership. Capitalist society makes it possible to derive profit from the property—this has impact on economic, legal and political system. The concept of justice and power system of society is affected by the manner in which the property is recognized and method of property distribution and redistribution.
According to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, all property is theft and it is the state the one that constructs this private property. The state is therefore, the entity that either gives or denies people equal access to the resources that people need to live and exist in this world. Similarly, it also denies people from possession and use, so it compromises people’s freedom even when they are supposed to be legally equal.

There are multiple types of property rights that exist; there are natural rights and legal rights. Natural rights which are rights that commonsensically existed from the beginning of time, outside of any legal system. A common sort of justification for rights under the legal system and under the state seeks to show that this kind of property is preferable to natural rights. Since the time of the Ancient Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plato had very opposing views on private property. While Plato, in the Republic, saw beauty in the unity of communal condition, guarding in contradiction of the emergence of private interest fueled corruption; Aristotle believed private property would encourage the virtues of responsibility, friendship and self-control.

Puerto Ricans in Humboldt Park are claiming a natural right to property. Although in a legal way Puerto Ricans do not own the neighborhood, they own it in the sense that they have lived in the neighborhood for a long period of time and have created memories in the space. The No Se Vende campaign is not about individually owned property within the community, or even legal rights, it is about the community itself and owning everything in that community including homes, businesses, schools and so on. Puerto Rican activists recognize that this is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks they have encountered, keeping their territory. In claiming Humboldt
Park as Puerto Rican, Agenda members recognize that space is not neutral but political and they are committed to reproducing the space as Puerto Rican.
CHAPTER 11 SUMMARY

Entertainment for exchange-values has been the crux of urban neoliberalism—an strategy that is often not questioned in our society by those who favor the status quo. This particular chapter explores the tensions between the community and outsiders. The Riot Fest, would be guiding my analysis because it questions the state’s practice of facilitating access to others—while denying recognition to long-term residents.
Chapter 11

Riot Fest

The first time I heard about Riot Fest was at a Puerto Rican Agenda meeting. At the meeting I could not understand how a punk rock festival in the park threatened Puertorricanness. The topic took me back to my early 20s, when I came to enjoy punk rock. Punk rock was for me, an introduction to American revolutionary politics. One of the first lines that I ever memorized in the English language and sang along was from the punk rock band Rancid. They described homeless individuals squatting and their relationship with private property owners and the state:

Do not bill them, abandoned buildings
It’s nice to sleep when you’ve got a ceiling
Neighborhood watch said, we gotta put a stop yeah
Can’t have people living for free, call the cops yeah

Rancid, Sublime, Bad Religion, all these bands, expressed sociopolitical messages that rejected the homogenizing force of capitalism and the hegemonic nature of the U.S. empire around the world; a movement that as a young Christian Puerto Rican, who just moved to the U.S., I was completely oblivious of. In the 1990s, this is how many scholars, to a small extent including myself, became politicized and developed a passion for supporting class-struggles that we or our parents never experienced. Many (not certainly all) punk rockers could only vaguely relate to the working class; their parents were most likely middle-class, white and suburban. Mom was not home, thanks to the feminist revolution, so they grew up in boredom—in alienation from their neighbors, extended family, the city itself and anything public (public schools, public parks and so on). In reaction, young punks committed to an alternative way of life and political proclamations and would voluntarily become the underclass, white-
negroes, as some called them. They were underachieving in school on purpose; alienating themselves from everything corporate that appealed to a zombie-like consumer culture. Punk was anti-establishment and to some extend, also anti-racist, but it did not take this second premise too far. The movement was individualistically-based on personal, not collective agency. Although conversations of race and ethnicity were not at the forefront of the punkers, I did not find this a compelling reason to outright reject the festival that was being proposed.

At the meeting it was alleged that the name of the festival (riot) was an insult to the Puerto Rican people and the actual riots that happened in the community in the late 1960s and 1970s. Many members of the Puerto Rican Agenda were looking with a lens that mostly saw a cultural movement based on music and fashion, not a revolutionary politics, that based its existence on the actual struggles of minority communities. I heard several people from the community claiming that the Riot Fest used the title “riot” on purpose—choosing Humboldt Park to commemorate the riots that took place in the same location 30, 40 years earlier in order to usurp the history of the community and ironically make financial gains. Later on, I found out that the festival had the same name for eight years, when Mike Petryshyn, the 34 year old who gave birth to the festival, could not have imagined that the event would become the United States premiere punk festival and so large that they could not fit any longer in the Congress Theatre and other small indoors concert halls. According to various interviews with event organizers, space constraints, turned Riot Fest into the first non-Puerto Rican festival to be hosted in Humboldt Park. Regardless, of the use of the word riot, some members of the Puerto Rican community saw this event as providing a space for a white minority, in opposition to Latinidad and Puerto Rican national identities.
The Puerto Rican community was conscious of the fact that many times these kinds of events could contribute to gentrification. As I learned while browsing the book, *So You Think You’re A Hipster?*, the punk rock scene was lumped together with the hipster culture, along with many other types of hipsters including the fashion editor, the trust fund artist, the dumpster-diving eco-warrior, among many other subgroups dumped into the ever growing hipster bucket. Punks, along with other hipsters, were notoriously known for their inability to pay high rents and move instead into culturally diverse neighborhoods they can actually afford. They operated as a very powerful, trendy social force. The venue, Humboldt Park, was described in one of the blogs through which the Riot Fest was promoted as, “an emerging neighborhood, flanked by its leafy namesake park and a nearby rose garden. The epicenter of the Chicago Puerto Rican presence,” the blogger insisted the readers “make sure to visit the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (NMPRAC), the only Puerto Rican history and culture museum in the country” (“Humboldt Park Riot Fest and Carnival Chicago” 2013). The blogger also appealed to foodies, “If you’re an adventurous eater, be sure to try the funky, themed eateries popping up in this vibrant area—ranging from a speakeasy, to reinterpretations of the taco to Puerto Rican street grub” (ibid.). This blogger promoted the Puerto Rican culture, food and even NMPRAC as contributing to the vibrancy of the space.

This is, in part, the image that Paseo Boricua would like to cultivate; Humboldt Park making a name for itself, becoming a recognized icon of attractive Puertorricaness. Still other punkers while recognizing that the area has become safer and better, rejected outright Humboldt Park’s new found modish reputation. As one festival goer stated,

Humboldt Park has actually gotten much better in recent years with an influx of 20 something’s even moving into that area. It can still be sketchy and is
considered a Puerto Rican neighborhood (take what you will from that), but no one should be scared about traveling there. Taking the bus/train will be fine. Just take normal travel precautions like you would in any other city. Plus, with the festival and tens of thousands attending, danger shouldn’t be a concern. I wouldn’t stay in Humboldt though, but only because there are much cooler neighborhoods in Chicago to hang around (“Riot Fest 2013 - Chicago” 2013).

The safeness and coolness of the neighborhood was endlessly debated by punkers at various blogs and websites—meanwhile, members of the Puerto Rican Agenda, at more than a few meetings, discussed with nervousness and even dismay how the Riot Fest could negatively impact the Puerto Rican community.

One of the major complaints about the Park District and the 14th Police District approving the Riot Fest, revolved around the community being overlooked by the organizers (“Community Comes Together for Police Commander Flores’ Removal and Opposition to ‘Riot Fest’” 2012). Community organizers from PRCC, NMPRAC, La Casa Puertorriqueña, among others and elected officials, expressed concerns regarding the absence of advertisements in Spanish and the sharing of plans such as, those involving security, parking, among other issues. Many community residents protested against the punk culture overall and were worried about attracting drug dealers and gangbangers that would help the crowd to get high (Salgado Jr. 2012b). In addition, because the Riot Fest was granted a liquor license, many community members were concerned about drunken violence (ibid.). Organizers of the Puerto Rican Parade, among other Puerto Rican leaders, announced that if this festival was allowed to have alcohol, then Fiestas Puertorriqueñas, a festival that has been celebrated on West Division Street, a Humboldt Park thoroughfare, since 1978, should also be allowed to have alcohol.

Most of the public forums on the event were held by the Humboldt Park Advisory Council (HPAC) who decided to work with the organizers to make sure the community benefited (“Humboldt Park Advisory Council: Bloomingdale Trail
Community Meeting & Riot Fest in Humboldt Park” 2012). The fest contracted the janitorial services of United Neighborhood Association and also had a hiring event at NMPRAC where they targeted young people to work as staff for the festival (“Humboldt Park Advisory Council: Riot Fest Jobs Event” 2012). In addition, many community organizations used the event as a fundraiser opportunity (“Humboldt Park Advisory Council: Upcoming Events in Humboldt Park and Riot Fest” 2012). The Riot Fest declared on their Facebook page that, “one of our missions here at Riot Fest is to help bring instruments, instruction and music to the children of the Humboldt Park neighborhood” (“Riot Fest” 2014). They asked their supporters to donate musical instruments and equipment for a Latin Jazz program to be hosted at the Boat House for the local youth. As an exchange, the fest would give to their donors VIP tickets valued in about $250 each. In addition, in 2013, the Riot Fest organizers rented NMPRAC during the weekend, as their venue, to hold a kickoff party and as a hidden hang-out space during the festivities. They paid $20,000 to NMPRAC, who was glad to take their money and put it to good use.

Besides these formal ways of benefiting the community, some residents in the neighborhood relied on more informal means and sold street parking for $10. This is a practice that is quite popular in Puerto Rico at many festivals and I am sure is also popular in certain neighborhoods in the U.S. As a child, I always remembered this practice. My dad would arrive with his car to a festival and a local person would show him the way to an empty vacant lot whose entrance had a corrugated cardboard that would read “$5.” The big events would take place in vacant lots, while the smaller ones would sell parking spaces in the public streets. When my family stepped out of our car, a man would announce that they would watch our car. When we were traveling around the island from our small town of San Germán (where my family is
from) to another area (that we didn’t know and potentially mistrust), $5 is a great deal
taking into considerations that an actual human being would be watching your car.
You knew that they would make sure that no one tried to steal it, or break your
windows trying to get your new stereo out. Visitors at the Riot Fest reported to be
happy to pay for the service.

In September of 2012, for two days straight, the residents of Humboldt Park,
including nice grandmas sitting on their balconies, saw about 60,000 punk rockers
walk by (“Riot Fest Organizers Plan to Hold All Three Days at Humboldt Park”
2013). Many of them were walking up and down the residential streets where they
parked the cars that would take them back to the suburbs they came from (whereas in
Chicago, Massachusetts, Maine and even as far as California). Even though the fest
was quite large, with women wearing fishnets and men showing off their green, red
and blue Mohawks could be intimidating, no criminal incidents or noise complaints
took place according to the police. HPAC declared the festival a “success” and
thanked publicly the Riot Fest organizers for an event that “cast the park in a positive
light.”

Months after the first Riot Fest took place in Humboldt Park, on May 22, 2013, I
received an email in my inbox with the heading “Racist Newcomers Unite to Deny
Puerto Rican Parade Beer Garden.” The email said that “several right-wing Puerto
Ricans in cahoots with racist newcomers to Humboldt Park and against progressive
sectors of our community,” showed up at the HPAC “to deny the Puerto Rican Parade
a license for one beer garden.” The neighborhood group the email was referring to
was the East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association who is in opposition to the
Puerto Rican Parade Committee’s getting its liquor license. About a hundred East
Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association supporters showed up to the monthly
Humboldt Park Advisory Council meeting to express their opposition to the Puerto Rican Festival Garden; they argued, among other reasons, that the festival has seen an escalation in crime in the last decade around the park.

A person, who attended the aforementioned meeting and a supporter of the Puerto Rican Festival having a beer garden, gave the following account:

It was really sad and I was heartbroken. So you had a group of racist white people saying you know, pretty much, that these people [referring to the Puerto Ricans] can’t handle alcohol, they already have a lot of problems in this festival and I imagine with alcohol that's going to double, triple the problem. That was their take. They were against us having the beer garden.

But not only non-Hispanic whites from the East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association testified, some Puerto Ricans members of the organization also testified against the beer garden; one of them said something along the lines of, “my people have a lot of problems and if my people start drinking, there’s going to be lots of problems.” The interviewee further explains,

White people were smiling and saying “Uh hu” to the man chants. I called the man “Vende Patria” (Homeland seller)...So, you’re Puerto Rican and so when you’re speaking in general terms about Puerto Ricans, you’re talking about yourself and people that you know.

The interviewee explained that these Puerto Ricans were in opposition to the parade’s president and this is why they sided with the East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association, which is mostly composed of non-Hispanic white residents. As evidence of racial discrimination, in the email mentioned above, the Puerto Rican Parade was directly compared to Riot Fest—that was allowed to have not only one, but four beer gardens! The email had a call to action consisting of a flood of email and/or call directly to Gregory Steadman, local liquor control commissioner for the city of Chicago, to complain for “responding to racist pressures,” and denying the Puerto Rican Festival its liquor license. Another organization, the Latinos Unidos Coalition, asked their supporters to sign a petition urging Governor Patrick Quinn and other city
agencies and officials to deny Riot Fest a liquor license for their event (“Chicago Park District; Alderman Maldonado: Deny Riot Fest a Liquor License” 2014). One of the supporters of the petition declared, “wake up Boricua the plan of the city of Chicago is to eliminate the Puerto Rican Fest with Riot Fest.” Commissioner Gregory Steadman told DNA Info Chicago, a neighborhood news source, that he could not have denied the liquor license because the Puerto Rican Parade Committee had not even started the application process (“Puerto Rican Festival Beer Garden Stirs Up Emotions, Some Cry Racism” 2013). He added that it is normal for organizations to submit applications a couple of weeks before the event. Steadman argued that at the HPAC meeting, he simply outlined the requirements to get a special event liquor license in the city of Chicago, which basically are: A well structured security plan, a support letter from the Chicago Police District Commander’s and the Alderman of the district at least 45 days before the event, in addition to paying for a liability insurance policy in the amount of $1,000,000 per occurrence (“2012 Special Event Permit Application Package” 2012). He added that the only reason extra scrutiny may be given to the Puerto Rican Parade Committee, once they apply, would be because they have never had one in the past. Amy Vega president of HPAC, added that the Puerto Rican Parade Committee has never applied for a liquor license and that if they applied they should be able to get it as they had a very reasonable security plan in place, including police check-out points and an eight foot fenced in beer garden. The Riot Fest has been the only festival to be granted a liquor license in Humboldt Park—this being one of the reasons that many believe that a double standard seems to exist, as this is also the only non-Puerto Rican festival that has ever taken place there in recent community history. Several members of the Puerto Rican Parade committee, as well as other Puerto Rican community leaders, confirmed that they have applied for
decades for a liquor license, only to be denied. This year, after members of PRCC, NMPRAC, La Casa Puertorriqueña, along with other organizations denounced racism, they were able to get a beer garden, which establishes a precedence of what to expect in the future. An interviewee added to the story:

We’ve been applying for decades, but they’ve always rejected us. Now these white people will come in, had their kind of rock festival here and you give them five beer gardens? It’s not as if somebody said, “Well…don’t you guys have an anti-underage drinking campaign?” First of all it’s anti-underage drinking campaign. It’s not about saying, “Hey we want to drink beer too!” either. It’s not about that, the purpose of those beer gardens is really about making money. It’s about how to make a profit or at least, recouping some of the money that you have already spent, by holding the festival. And so you know, I said, “I’m going to go and support the beer garden.” I went to the festival, but I don’t even know where it was at. Nonetheless, we’ve got it, you know. I was like, did we get up the beer garden and they were like ‘yeah.’ I didn’t even know where it was. But they’ve got it!…they gave one to them, because it’s a white organization or whatever. White company, you know. So why is it that they got it and we didn’t? And then we got it. Then I said it’s not a big deal, but I think it’s only fair.

This debate must be placed in the context of a community that has experienced institutionalized racism through legal and other ideological structures, that have maintained a system of inequality. In communities like Humboldt Park, the fight for equality is constant and it manifests itself in all kinds of strange ways, from urging Chicago Public Schools to not close campuses, even thought they are more than half empty and failing (DNAinfo Chicago 2013), to advocating that both festivals should be given liquor licenses, or both should be denied it, but that no double standard should be allowed to exist.

The Greek perspective, including Aristotle and Plato, looked at property not in and of itself but as a means to obtaining rights—both tangible rights such as food and housing but also intangible rights like freedom. Again according to Locke’s conceptualization of self-ownership each person owns their own body (they are free, not slaves) and therefore, what ever are the fruits of their labor—which at this time
referred to whatever a person grew in their plot of land. This analysis views property as synonymous to freedom as opposed to simply a means to get freedom.

Deriving from Lock as well as the Greek perspective, Thomas Jefferson argue that without property, many of the traits that make a great society could not happen, these traits include the freedom to speak and the ability of public assembly. The case of Puerto Ricans in Chicago shows that freedom of speech and assembly is exercised by Puerto Ricans precisely because they see themselves as owners of the space. And, to some the extent, the state acknowledges them as owners by acquiescing to their demands. Puerto Ricans know that they have the power to mobilize, make their voices heard and, in a number of occasions, obtain the outcome they were hoping for. Through ownership of the property, one attains the rights to self-determination and this is what Puerto Ricans are trying to exercise in Humboldt Park.
CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The term modernity refers to the process of leaving behind traditional communities in order to embrace a new way of life. In capitalist society wanting development or concerning oneself with exchange values is then seen as superior to other forms of being to the extent that other ways of being do not seem even worth preserving. But groups differ on what they consider legitimate claims of property. Those who can afford to buy property are legitimated by the capitalist state, whereas those who are poor derive the meaning of property from symbols, being material or immaterial. This concluding chapter uses the concept of modernity to understand the concepts of development and change in greater depth.
Conclusion

“While laissez-faire economy was the product of deliberate State action, subsequent restrictions on laissez-faire started in a spontaneous way. Laissez-faire was planned; planning was not.”

Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation, (Polanyi 2001, 147)

Humboldt Park and Paseo Boricua within it, is a highly contested space. Puerto Ricans contest Mexican, African Americans and non-Hispanic white gentrifiers and vice-versa. Internally, Puerto Rican activists have different ideas of what might constitute development and how such a lofty goal might be achieved. There are intense struggles over space, identity and even the legitimacy of the tools that activists and others use to maintain Humboldt Park and Paseo Boricua as Chicago’s Puerto Rican territory.

As might be expected, the constant looming threat of displacement also generates a sort of paranoia that even those things that have worked, will be destroyed by those outside of the community, while the community itself will once again be left homeless. The rumor of the flags coming down, for example, as one scholar put it,

Whether real or not, represents the anxiety that is inscribed onto the space…These issues are real for many, including myself, because Puerto Ricans have experienced a historical pattern of exclusion, displacement and gentrification. The actual physicality of the flags may seem in theory undeniable. In other words, how do you remove steel flags? However, the reality is that buildings with a lot more history and significance to Chicago have been demolished and erased from the architectural history of the city. That they can be removed is a possibility—all it takes is the strike of a pen of a determined city manager.

The sustainability of the Puerto Rican identity in Humboldt Park remains in a constant state of ambiguity and uncertainty. Territories do change their meanings; cities are produced and reproduced spatially; they are structured and restructured through everyday routines: This is the never ending process of capitalist urbanization and will likely remain in a state of flux and contestation for the foreseeable future. But these changes, however inevitable, need not resolve themselves in the continuous
process of displacement of one social class, or one identity, or one race, at the benefit of another and, ultimately, of capital. As one Puerto Rican activist, Ada, noted, “We must still be vigilant because as we know from experience the ideas and interests of the powerful resurface and they have all the time in the world. I know we all admire Paseo Boricua and want to defend it.”

Paseo Boricua, the flags, NMPRAC and all the Puerto Rican images, iconography, act as tools of contestation and the expression of rights which allow Puerto Ricans to create a sense of belonging and fortify their community against gentrification. Activists believe that these symbols must be protected at all cost from gentrification, in order to maintain the social networks that make the community and allow Puerto Ricans to maintain their cultural identity in this particular and historical space.

To put this in other words, contestation over a space, in this case, due to the continuous pressures of gentrification, creates a differential space that disrupts the abstract logic of capital and private property rights, by inspiring an ethic of the social commons. This inspires a “right to occupy,” as opposed to the commonsensical propositions of capital and private property in their “right to exclude”.

The concept of private property derives from the capitalist mode of production and it consists of specific property forms, relation and rights. For a private property system to exist there is requirement of human justification, meaning that property exist for a reason. Man owns himself and thus it cannot be a slave. Man, therefore own his own labor and so on. There should be an ethical justification to its logic.

A common grievance towards property rights can best be summed up by the words of Morris R. Cohen (1927) how once said that “the essence of private property is always the right to exclude others.” Although many have tried to extend this
assertion to claim that having property means having power of others, both liberals and republicans in the United States support capitalism by arguing that private property increases the quality of life for all, due to its incentives to produce goods and services.

Therefore, symbolic practices are often overlooked by a strictly materialist analysis, because economic logic devalues what it cannot measure. The commons—that is, the spaces and formations held in common; style, etiquette, mores, are all examples of commonly owned “property;” they produce and reproduce identities and knowledge and reclaim social space in ways that sometimes contradict the logic of capital and private property.

The concept of the commons is anathema to private property. While communism and socialism stand in opposition to capitalism advocates the abolition of private ownership—they still, do not advocate for the full abolition of private property. In socialism the ownership is in the form of state, while in communism the ownership based on a group or community.

With the fall of purportedly communist and socialist governments throughout the late-1900s, a widespread acceptance that capitalism has and will continue to lead humans into a better society has become a given, not only perceived as the best option for governmental structure, but the only option (Hodgson 1998). Capitalism has transformed community life and deepened the dependence on alienated forms of labor and market subordination to such a degree that basic needs are only to be brought into the family and community through the market. Rhetorically, these transformations are understood as embracing modernity and rejecting the backwards and antiquated traditionalism embodied in groupings, such as the family and the community.
Modernism is believed to lead entrepreneurial individuals to succeed in a highly competitive environment, even if it means discarding one’s roots.

Paseo Boricua stands in opposition to high-end Wicker Park establishments that include trendy stores, sidewalk bars, restaurants and cafes. According to community leaders, the new image as a Puerto Rican landscape opens the door to acts of accumulation by dispossession, by urban pioneers. Marixsa Alicea (2001), in her essay *Cuando nosotros vivíamos...Stories of Displacement and Settlement in Puerto Rican Chicago*, cites a newspaper article titled, “Two modern pioneers tame a bit of the urban wilderness,” to make the point that the language of gentrification conceptualizes the upcoming middle class as conquerors of some sort of urban wilderness. The 1974 Chicago Tribune article quoted John and May Boumenot, the urban pioneers, “their Chicago neighborhood isn’t for everyone—winos congregate on corners, kids break bottles and windows, dogs roam in packs, garbage overflows containers and litter clutters streets.” The reporter added to John and May’s insights, “[they] are finding it is possible to lead a relatively genteel life in the neighborhood known as Wicker Park.”

There are strong parallels here with the work of Anna Tsing in her book, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, with respect to how the landscape, even in its so-called “wilderness,” is never empty, that in fact our naming of it as “wilderness” is already an appropriation of it into particular logics and here we see the same with respect to the language of the urban pioneer, as it carves out an “undiscovered” and rather “wild” urban frontier for development out of a community area where people already live.

This is how neoliberal ideals impose hegemonic cultural values and worldviews on different cultures that they call high modernism and development. For example,
Tsing (2004) explains how outsiders viewed the Meratus that lived in Kalimantan forest: “We see only degraded spaces: Weeds and hillbillies” (175). The outsiders dehumanized the Meratus, understanding them as savage, uncivilized people that live in the jungle or frontier. They call them “poor,” even though they get everything they need to reproduce themselves from the forest and are not part of a class society.

The world-systems literature, on the other hand, would tell us that there is a core and a periphery and that this is not done in the name of modernity, but in the name of capital accumulation. The case of the Meratus Dayak of Kalimantan becomes a rather generalizable case that helps us to understand how capitalism spreads—by enclosing and commodifying land and resources—not only at the local and national levels, but also at the global scale. Although these Paseo blocks were signs of failed material investments, by comparing Puerto Ricans to the Meratus who lived on unproductive land from the capitalist point of view, I wanted to point out that both these communities already have rich cultural values invested in them.

Along these lines, this analysis has sought thus far to contextualize the political economy structuring discourses within the Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park and further, to document those discourses themselves. This section documents the familiar narratives of those representing dominant motifs outside of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community. In this case, the relationship between the market and the community is most visibly contestable within the housing market and can be represented best by the discourses within the real estate sector of the city’s housing market. The following section revolves around the ideas of a successful Puerto Rican realtor, to whom we will assign the pseudonym of Beatriz, and seeks to shed light on the ambiguities and contradictions existing between and within the Puerto Rican community.
I met Beatriz years ago, as my realtor, when I first moved to Chicago. She picked me up in her silver convertible. I still remember how she looked; she was wearing a modern grey women’s suit with a skirt and a blazer, black tie, black shoes. Her nails, hair and makeup were absolutely perfect. She was dressed as a dealmaker. As my realtor, she showed me several condos for rent around UIC, the Loop and lastly, the Gold Coast, where I ended up renting for the first few years of my PhD program. She told me that she was showing me around as a “favor,” because she knew that one day I would buy a home and she wanted me to remember her that day—she said this with her red lipped smile. Beatriz takes as clients, a lot of first time buyers from the city of Chicago or its suburbs, along with many clients who have moved to Chicago from California and New York. Like she did with me, she took them for a ride in her convertible for a look into the modern American metropolis. Most of her clients are first time home buyers; but the market in 2009 hit bottom, so she was showing me condos that nobody was buying. Even though the real estate market had collapsed, Beatriz’ voice was not a postmodern one, filled with skepticism, for she truly believed that capitalism would bring a better future.

Although one might argue that the main advantage in capitalist society is in the organization of the means of production, distribution and exchange of various commodities (things that are to be bought and sold in the market place). One of the major flaws of the capitalist system is that the vast majority of people do not have access to the means of production—therefore, they are forced to sell their labor power and take part in the market to be able to earn the wages they need to buy the goods they need and reproduce their lives, including paying for rents and housing. Lacking the means of production results in alienation.
All my conversations with Beatriz were in Spanish, which she spoke perfectly as a second generation Puerto Rican, connected to the great migration flow of the 1950s. Although Beatriz conducts business all over Chicago, most of her clients are non-Hispanic whites and she has a luxurious office in Old Town working for a major, internationally recognized realty company. She is a Chicago born Puerto Rican, raised in Humboldt Park. But even though she is from El Barrio, she questions why the neighborhood should be preserved as Puerto Rican, as the following passage illustrates:

Keeping any ethnic group in a neighborhood just for the sake of keeping them in an ethnic neighborhood so that they could have a specific identity…I don’t think that I am in favor of that. I don’t see a pro to it. Just because it is a Puerto Rican neighborhood, it should always remain a Puerto Rican neighborhood? When you say “yeah,” [pointing to me] but the question is why?

I thought that this was an important question: Why we should keep this space Puerto Rican? Why claiming ownership over that space? For her, identity politics, specifically the project of maintaining a social space for Puerto Ricans, didn’t have social, economic or political legitimacy. Politicizing Puertorricaness was to stand in the way of much needed acculturation. She was proof that acculturation could be achieved. She was a successful realtor, married to a non-Hispanic white gentleman, also a professional and they were homeowners living on the North Side of Chicago. By being personally responsible and by integrating and alienating herself from Puertorricaness she was able to improve her life. She sees herself as part of the mainstream and does not identify herself as a minority, but as part of a growing middle class in the city that has been able to bring the free flow of capital into the inner-city, combined with the gentrification factor. Beatriz grew up in El Barrio to a mother who is a homeowner. One of her sisters is a market rate renter and another one is a low-income renter living in an affordable housing unit. Her mother and her two
sisters still live in Humboldt Park; yet, she finds problematic the idea of maintaining
the space as Puerto Rican. Keeping the area Puerto Rican would mean to reject the
dramatic changes going in the direction of progress. Beatriz explained to me how the
area was gentrifying and how middle class Puerto Rican families moving to other
areas, like Jefferson Park, were making a rational decision by choosing to leave
Humboldt Park. First, because the area had a lot of criminality and, second because
homeowners were able to cash in on their homes. In Beatriz’ own words, “It could be
for safety reasons that they are moving out the Humboldt Park neighborhood. It could
also be because they are selling their homes now because they’re getting more money
for them because the area is being gentrified.” Beatriz continues,

I know that the housing within those areas is going up and down, up and
down. Each street you’re going to find a very small populace of single family
homes owners that take pride in their family homes and they do something
about it. Then you’re going to find other blocks with rundown buildings,
where they ended doing construction and renovations. As they go, from the
North to Division to Bloomingdale, like the whole Bloomingdale strip, from
Western all the way to California. You’ll see. There is a lot of new
construction around there.

Beatriz in this quote, like in the previous one, brings up the notion of “personal
responsibility,” by stating that some families take care of their homes and take pride
in being homeowners, while other ones might not. She repeated the perspective which
dominates the public discourse on how a neighborhood that is poor is also perceived,
based on reality or exaggeration, as criminal—as the following statement from
Beatriz made clear,

Humboldt Park still has a negative stigma…I don’t know that it is saleable,
or if you can sell something like that [referring to Puerto Rican identity]. I
used to live in Humboldt Park. I don’t have a problem living in Humboldt
Park and I see no problem living in the Humboldt Park. I go to Humboldt
Park. I go there to dine; I go there for the festivities. My family lives in
Humboldt Park. But do I hang out inside the Humboldt Park? I try to stay
away. It’s not for me, a stigma. It’s actually what I see. To get rid of that
[referring to crime] I am in favor of it [referring to gentrification].
According to Beatriz gentrification can remedy the ills of crime and disinvestment—while on the other hand, the Puerto Rican identity project has a difficult time closing the perceived economic gap between the haves and have-nots. We discussed another factor that might hinder investment opportunities in the area: the scatter sites of public housing and affordable housing developments. Beatriz discusses how some of her clients were willing to take the risk of investing near public and affordable housing. She also discussed how some of the affordable housing is much more hidden, such as townhomes as opposed to large apartments. This is pointed out as one of the reasons that investment is still possible in the area, as the marginalized segments of the population are not as visible. Beatriz adds,

I have friends who rent low-income housing from Bickerdike. When I think of Bickerdike, I don’t have a very positive or a very negative image but when I think of Bickerdike, I immediately think about low-income. That’s my immediate reaction. That’s all they do, positive or negative, it depends on what my client is looking for. And they [Bickerdike] change the way they do [build housing], like big town homes [as opposed to apartments]. Yeah, it’s one building with two apartments, 6-unit buildings and converts it to low-income. She [her friend] lives in there like at least for 15 years now. Yeah you just have to contain everybody in that area. And what you’re getting at? You take a big building you put everyone in one area, I find that offensive.

Something that comes to light in this quote is that poor people are contained into pockets of poverty and that this does very little for them. She points out that her friend has been living in affordable housing for 15 years and that she is not really moving up to the middle class ranks. She might not have any possibility for further economic growth and personal development. Beatriz blames Bickerdike for actively containing her Puerto Rican friend and the overall community into that space. Spreading out the poor or perhaps even letting them move on from dependency, on the other hand, might make things happen by creating a possibility, even if remote, for generating wealth. Beatriz articulates that institutions like Bickerdike, aiming to gain control over relations that do not favor laissez-faire economics are doing more
harm than good because they are not allowing a certain type of development (the one that results in the elimination of the poor pockets of the neighborhood). She asserts that the third sector’s involvement specifically, regarding the provision of affordable housing, is standing in the way of the potential benefits of capitalism.

When I asked Beatriz what will happen to the Puerto Ricans that depend on affordable housing, she commented,

That is a very good question. What will happen to Puerto Ricans? I honestly don’t know. But then, how does that affect the rest of the neighborhood? If they’re looking for homes [to buy or rent outside of Bickerdike], but they don’t…we [she and her clients] have to pass on recent good deals, my clients are Caucasians.

She went on to tell me about a good deal on the Gold Coast where a client of hers had the chance to buy a development that has a contract with the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA),

It matches everything that my client is looking for, it matched all of my client’s criteria. But the complex has a total of 167 units, 38 of those were leased out to CHA. The fact that they are leased up, we don’t know how long that lease that is on CHA, it may be for 99 years. But I recommended that they do buy because there is a new Target [Superstore] going on there. All those homes that are there, they took a big hit because of CHA. Because they bring in low-incomes, their values go down. They were selling at two hundred to three hundred thousand, with two and three bedrooms, town houses with garage parking. Umm they’re losing a lot of money because of that.

Although talking about the new condos and town homes that resulted from HOPE IV, where Cabrini-Green once stood is out of the scope of this section, this quote gives us a window into how Beatriz, a realtor, sees the world. To reach progress, it is essential to get rid of those who are part of the underclass, if necessary. She values the dignity and choice of the “good” class through the market system. For her poverty cannot be alleviated, only moved around. Development and progress, therefore, in her eyes have little do to with addressing the housing needs of the poor and instead, she continues, the long standing tradition of rationalizing the resettlement of high priced land in the inner city, so that it might again serve to facilitate the expansion of capital and the
continuance of subsidy structures for middle class and professional groups makes all the sense of the world. Throughout this quote, Beatriz is proposing that gentrification, is not just an end, but a means to an end. Without such progress, this space in the city would be doomed to a very bleak future in comparison.

Beatriz observes that community groups and small entrepreneurs play a major role in constructing visions of social change. Although they have been able to make some improvements, they have not been able to eliminate the barriers that would result in the flow of capital into a racialized space. As Beatriz continues,

It’s an idealistic idea [referring to maintaining Puerto Ricans in the space]. As long as I can remember, it [Paseo Boricua] has made progress. They’ve been trying to change the image of Division. I think they’re really doing a very good job. Starting on Western, we got a medical clinic on one side, we’ve got a church and couple of restaurants on the other side, small Mexican restaurant on that side, Chinese restaurant on the North side and then you’ve got the Spanish coalition there. Those window fronts are scary; the façade of that part of Western is scary looking. So you have to begin with what everybody sees. That’s everybody’s reaction. That needs to be cleaned up before people can see it. There is actually a real problem there. Some restaurants have opened and closed as quickly as they opened. That doesn’t say that there is progress going on. But when you got an art gallery, art gallery video production slash, at 2444 west Division right next to Nelly’s. So, Nelly’s, I’ve seen that business change. That used to be an optical place. I know this because a friend of mine owned that building. He passed away and [his family] sold it. That was an optical shop.

In Beatriz’ view, development, if used effectively, can spread out greater opportunities to create wealth. However, this would mean improving the aesthetics and creating the atmosphere that others would want to consume and perhaps invest in. But development would not be possible without public involvement. The city has tried to encourage investment in the area by providing incentives; for example, they would pay 50 percent of local merchants façade upgrading. Public investment sends signals to the private sector. In my opinion, Paseo Boricua also sends its own signal to potential newcomers. Beatriz repeated the question I asked her, “Why do they [referring to the gentrifiers] go that way [on North Avenue] instead of closer to Division [where Paseo Boricua is]? She paused and then commented,
I think they couldn’t [go to Paseo], they’ve got more commerce going around Division [on Wicker Park], Armitage, Milwaukee, Western, we’ve got a lot more commerce and we got a lot more of restaurants that have become more trendy like Thai restaurants. Even the Mexican restaurants, in Armitage and Western, even they’ve got more turn around and there is another restaurant right next to it where they turn around and they’ve got something, they upgraded their look. That brings people. Commerce is key. It’s got to look good and feel right in the neighborhood and Division [referring to Paseo] doesn’t have that.

I asked her if some of her clients brought up in their conversation Paseo Boricua.

Beatriz emphasized that,

Not yet, there is…people don’t want to say that they would like to go…you know. There is a handful, to put it in that way, people would usually ask if you know where there is a nice restaurant, where do you advise them to go, where to go on Division [Paseo], where to go to Puerto Rican restaurants.

She maintains,

When you say Humboldt Park, Division Street, everybody has wrong connotations, it has a Puerto Rican neighborhood in the Humboldt Park, like a gang. Something that would help Paseo Boricua is…there was a talk at one time about calling it Chinatown, Greektown and all that…Puerto Rico town. In calling it, people would say, oh we could go and that there is a new tourist attraction in “town” but, I think the locals won’t think like that.

Town would be inviting to tourists, while Paseo Boricua is antagonistic. According to this logic which was brought up in several interviews, because the name of the area (Paseo Boricua) is in Spanish, outsiders cannot pronounce it and therefore, do not feel welcomed. Based on that interpretation, Paseo as a concept is not expanding to a broader audience and therefore is maintaining geographic borders by keeping people from different ethnicities and different cultures out. On the other hand, the disappearance of Paseo as a geographic and cultural border (if also removing the image that Puerto Rican equates to gangs), would benefit most citizens, while only causing a disaster for the people who insist on Puertorricaness. According to Beatriz, progress is not taking place in Paseo. Beatriz believes that the Puerto Rican leadership behind Paseo Boricua, is not doing enough to reverse the poor image of the commercial strip. In her eyes the Puerto Rican leaders have not tackled the challenge.
of vacant properties and generating real consumer value, not just for a few Puerto Ricans that come to visit, but for all consumers throughout the city of Chicago. Paseo is not delivering what it promised: entrepreneurialism and tourism. From her point of view entrepreneurship is not based on reproducing one’s life and providing a service for a community, but in the creation of visible wealth and consumer value. In other words neighborhood businesses are only worth anything if they support the city as a whole through entertainment and experiences valued by outsiders. This realtor considers that every organization that is claiming Puertorricaness, without paying much attention to the whole space, is in fact destroying the potential for that space to become a city-wide destination.

Another interesting observation that Beatriz made is that one of the restaurants is overpriced for the area. Beatriz notes,

I think that restaurant is hurting, again. This is my personal opinion based on my experience. I think the restaurant has the right thing when it comes to marketing, but they hurt the other businesses within the area. From my experience, I won’t go back. Why? They’re overpriced and the food sucks. I ordered that cocktail and they charged me like $14. I know my cocktails, I said, I won’t do it again. But I take it back. My first time there I had a big group, it was my sister’s birthday party. We ended up having a good time. But we were upset with the staff, with the food, everything. It’s not worth what we paid. And I said, it’s just like water under the bridge. I gave it a second shot. It’s just that I will never go back. I just can’t take another dinner experience like that. I think they hurt the business. People will never go back. I spoke to the owner. So, anyhow, I think they hurt the other businesses. People won’t go back. A lot of them. And when they ask me where to go, I wouldn’t recommend it. They’re not going to look it up because it is not their mentality…you still have a lot of other places.

What I found most interesting about this passage is the belief that price should be strictly governed by the concept of supply and demand. In addition, Beatriz believes that price determines quality. She points out that the service at this restaurant is inferior, compared to other restaurants in that range price. Puerto Rican restaurants like this one, with bad service and inferior food, are doomed to failure because they are not able to compete with restaurants or areas in the city that are known for good
Beatriz points out that this restaurant is bad for the community because, if this is the first place people go and try, they might not give a second chance to trying other restaurants at Paseo. In other words, people assume that a market—in this case Paseo Boricua—is pretty much homogeneous in terms of price, service and quality.

Beatriz overall, has a very economically driven picture of the world, very different from the worldview of Puerto Rican community leaders. When Beatriz was asked what she knew about the invention of Paseo, she replied,

> I don’t know anything about their politics; I would be concerned about that, by getting involved with that sort of stuff. Because I am a Puerto Rican, I will take it personal and then it will begin to show in my professional life and I cannot cross that line.

Work and personal life are elements that need to be separated from one another, as they might run into evident contradictions. She understands that their position is directly in opposition to the growth-oriented development model and ideology that she supports as a realtor. Like David Hume Beatriz challenges Locke's natural rights and contends that property is a rule or convention that arises gradually over time as a byproduct of maturing society. As rules of property emerge, perhaps taking on diverse forms across social groups, more cooperation is made possible, as well as increased collective aptitude in commerce and industry.

. . . .

Through the whole interview, Beatriz emphasized that capitalist growth in the future would be possible in both Paseo and Humboldt Park, even if today some hurdles were in the way. For example the cyclical nature of the market, the intervention of government towards benefiting the poor in the form of public housing and community projects sponsored by affordable housing developers. Beatriz has conflicting ideas about the nation-state and the role that it plays in capitalism. On the one hand, the
state creates public housing which hinders development and on the other hand they offer incentives to business owners, therefore, facilitating development. But her trust in supply and demand, as well as the ability for the market to transform spaces, is undeniable. The expansion of the market for Beatriz is a personal project. She is a character that personifies the disembedding of social relations. She separates herself from physical and political contact with her community, in a very rational way. Given that her self-identity is different from those in El Barrio (her sisters and friends are renters and low-income), she emphasizes individual agency in order to explain these differences. As a realtor, Beatriz clearly sees the role of the deepening of capitalism in replicating the redevelopment that exists downtown to other spaces, including the community of her childhood and family. To some extent she alienates herself from Puertorricaness and sees it as some sort of irrational activity that seeks to embrace a traditionalism and that conflates with the modernization of an otherwise desirable space. She endorses modernity and all that it brings (less crime, better looking homes and successful businesses, so on and so forth) even if it means to get rid of all the Puerto Ricans that are left, including those that are closest to her. Therefore, she becomes alienated from them. Modernity then, in her view, is precisely the ability to erode the identity project. Capitalist development is just a matter of time, a linear process where people are acculturated and do better in the future, while spaces are gentrified and modernized as the rent-gap increases. Thus by rationalizing and accepting an economic life, Beatriz reflexively conforms to the common sense narratives surrounding market economy, development and capitalist modernity.

**THIS IS THE VIEW OF EL BARRIO**

To the chronic challenges of asphyxiating police harassment, media demonization, slumlordism and sheer survival, middle class white newcomers added their now
ancestral hostility to Puerto Ricans while entitling themselves to the home Puerto Ricans had built over the spoils of an earlier generations of white ethnics. Hiding behind legality and superiority they started cornering residents and acting to remove their symbols and culture along with them. Whites thought of themselves as the superior race, and disregarded the culture and the behavior of the Puerto Ricans, and thought of them as inferior and discriminated against them and harassed Puerto Ricans for being Puerto Ricans. Newcomers believed that they were doing a favor to the minorities by “cleansing” the city of what they called “racial filth”.

They harassed street vendors offering affordable Puerto Ricans food to residents while Puerto Ricans were simply providing employment for themselves in a society that discriminated them in this front; they invaded the beach where their kids played turning it into a “cesspool” for their dogs; they harassed local institutions built by and serving the Puerto Rican community; in particular, they ridiculed their places of identity and their efforts to stay home while treating them as disposable nuisances; they called the police each time they were themselves or showed tremendous resourcefulness in making a living (e.g. turning their garages into car shops, gathering in porches to play domino and music at times accompanied by beer while their kids played in front); they angry at them and criminalized their self-expressions discarding off hand their cultures, socializing and survival practices.

In short, they disliked and condemned them for being who they were, racial minorities, making racial cleansing their contribution to the city. They did not try to join the existing community at all; rather, they had come to the area to rip the benefits of affordable ownership, the park Puerto Ricans had lobbied the city heavily to clean up, the location, the quality of the housing stock and the rent to capture. They treated the invasion of community as a mere “business transaction.” As a result, the
community Puerto Ricans had built with sweat, pride and politics, was discarded by newcomers whose only interest was money-making investment. Whereas community-building was a deep process of self-help, neighborliness and self-empowerment, for newcomers it was about commodification and the absolute priority of property values. As was the case for blacks, newcomers never saw the Puerto Ricans community with respect but rather as a threat to the property values and environment of condominiums and individualism. This is the view from the barrio. But the view of newcomers was one of commodification, entitlement, middle class, white aesthetics and of course, pure financial gain.

Property is often understood as a set of rights upon a couple of assets, thus emphasizing on a relationship between people and things. All around the world, property has taken a wide variety of forms, but regardless of this, it acts as a political institution, by allocating authority upon certain assets to individual people, groups, families, organizations and so on. Those who possess authority over a certain property also have a lot more influence upon it when compare to others. This means that property owners are allowed to give entitlement to others, exclude other people from using a certain property, as the owner desires. With this in mind, property is a form of control, rather than just a form of possession.

What makes the idea of property different in areas from around the world is that drastically different arrangements have been made, hence making the term have different meanings according to geography. In other words what constitutes property and doesn’t not constitute property is based on cultural traditions that are formalized by the state. Such regulations are still present today, but these can vary a lot on the local laws and practices. With times, the regulations have also changes and
organizations which are not actually individuals have the right to own property, but the way that it is used also greatly differs from private property. However, there are most importantly maldistributions, as some organizations and people may get access to property, whereas others don’t. In extreme cases, this brings in unfortunate conditions such as famine, where the public doesn’t own much property at all, and where all of it is controlled by the a few and/or the state. This is why progressives argue we that the discrepancies between public and private property should not be too wide.

... 

The flags of steel, along with all the symbols in Humboldt Park were conceived as a mechanism of ethnic empowerment and identity formation for the community at large that claim ownership over space. Counter-discourses that contest displacement and embrace claims of equality, social justice and fairness for the Puerto Rican people, are created and re-created through what Paseo Boricua means symbolically along with other cultural projects. As discussed, Paseo Boricua as a concept represents many things to Puerto Ricans living in Chicago, but especially for those who have fought for its establishment and for those whose monument is part of their everyday lives. This is why, more than ever, Puerto Rican leaders along Paseo feel that it is their responsibility to ensure a favorable outcome for the community at large which means: development without displacement and cultural ownership. Along these lines, they have promoted various affordable housing projects in Paseo and beyond. As Pablo Medina, former chair of the Puerto Rican Agenda reflected about the potential loss of Puerto Rican control over the space,

We are almost 20 years later, still here, alive and kicking. We want to bring development without displacement. But who has done that? We have done that! We are the developers, without displacing people. The Puerto Rican Agenda is an example that, “que si se puede!” (yes, we can!). And as long we are part of the have nots we will be having the same issues. La lucha
continua! (the struggle continuous). Having the same issues doesn’t mean that we have not done anything. We have created affordable housing, businesses…we have grown! We have done all that without any money. So, if you want to preserve a community: do not stay home! The best thing that we have done is moving the resources of our community. We, are, community-based.

When gentrification seem like a given in 1995, today, 20 years later, members of the Puerto Rican Agenda keep organizing against it. A number of them have recently bought properties along the commercial corridor and are planning to transforming them into spaces for community—new businesses, art centers and housing projects will thrive on the remaining vacant and foreclosed properties. The case of Humboldt park shows that displacement is not a given and that gentrification is not natural—people can organize against it. Ownership has other forms and it is shaped by mental conceptions. Historical evidence helps us look into the future. Puerto Ricans and Paseo Boricua will be around for decades to come as long as organizations like the Puerto Rican Agenda are willing to fight gentrification and declaring a right-to-stay, as long as a number of Puerto Ricans decide to organize. And, who knows, maybe in 2515 Paseo will celebrate its 500th anniversary, but it would not be without struggle!

If the area was to become a white neighborhood it is unlikely that the Latino community that occupies it today can relocate as a group. Instead families would disperse throughout the city and often be forced to move to slums on the edges, away from job opportunities and good transport links. The power differences between whites and Latinos are quite significant and this would only escalate the situation. Gentrification is thus a threat against the entire community and threatens to scatter people who depend on each other for their collective memory of heritage for empowerment on their own terms.

By staying together as a physical community it becomes easier for the Puerto Rican diaspora to remain firmly rooted in its cultural heritage and identity. A physical
space dedicated to them and their own becomes a surrogate for their homeland, and a safe place in which they can reclaim and exercise self-determination.

It is about taking a space and making it a slice of Puerto Rico, as demonstrated by the flags displayed and the use of traditional signs on the street to evoke the feel of a Puerto Rican space. The physical space becomes claimed and can reinforce the national identity of those who live there. It sends a clear signal that the Puerto Rican community is distinct and unique, but also that it is part of the city of Chicago and that it intends to remain so.

Puerto Ricans are actively trying to reclaim their own voices and take up a ‘metaphorical space’ as a group of people who deserve to be heard and recognized. As a group these struggles are easier to endure and victories can be enjoyed together as a group and the only way that they can remain is if they declare ownership over space.
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Appendix A: Puerto Rican Counts and Change 1970-2010

Legend
- City Boundary
- Number of Puerto Rican
  - 0 - 100
  - 101 - 500
  - 501 - 1000
  - 1001 - 1500
  - 1501 - 2000
  - 2001 - 2500
  - 2501 - 3000
  - 3001 - 3500
  - 3501 - 4000
  - 4001 - 5000

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Appendix B: Showing “Gentrification” 1970-2010

Prepared following the work of Hudspeth, Nancy. "Interpreting Neighborhood Change in Chicago." Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement.

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[Map of Socio-economic Scores in Chicago for 1970]
Appendix C: Interview Guides

BUSINESS OWNERS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Topic: Your Business

1. How long have you been located on Paseo Boricua?
2. Do you own or rent the building?
3. Did you operate this or any other business somewhere else before moving to this location?
4. Tell me about your decision to locate your business in this district?
5. Do you remember what your first impression of this commercial strip was when you saw it?
6. Can you comment on any major changes you have seen since you moved here?

Topic: Clientele

1. How and where do you market your business?
2. Where do your clientele come from?
3. How do you characterize your clientele? [Prompt: Locals or tourists? Mostly Puerto Rican? From other ethnicities and races? Mostly families or young people?]
4. Has your clientele changed over the last years?
5. Do you think it is important to have a commercial area that caters to people of diverse incomes? Diverse ethnicities?
6. Which type of clientele would you like to attract to your business that you are not already serving?

Topic: Assessment of Paseo Boricua

1. Do you consider [name of establishment] to be a Puerto Rican business?
2. In your opinion; what is the social and cultural role of Paseo Boricua?
3. What is the economic role of Paseo Boricua?
4. Do you see Paseo Boricua as an economic engine for the neighborhood? For the city of Chicago itself?
5. Do you think that the businesses in Humboldt Park provide employment for the local community?
6. How is the Puerto Rican identity of Paseo Boricua helping or hindering the local business district’s ability to maintain economic vitality?
7. What types of new businesses would you like to see here on Paseo Boricua?

Topic: The Neighborhood

1. Do you live in this neighborhood?
2. What characteristics of the neighborhood would you like to see changed?
3. Which characteristics would you like to see remain the same?
4. Can you think of other business districts in the city of Chicago that might be comparable to Paseo Boricua? If yes, can you tell me what these are? How well does Paseo Boricua compare? [Worse, Same, Better and Why]
5. Do you think that Paseo Boricua would ever become a Greek Town—that is, a Puerto Rican business district without Puerto Ricans?
6. How long do you envision operating your business on Paseo Boricua?
7. What factors would either solidify or change your opinion about staying here?

**Topic: Strategies**

1. How would you say your current business is doing (not as well as expected; about what you expected; better than you expected)? What do you attribute this to?
3. Have you ever, or have any other businesses in the area, had problems with city agencies (for example, with zoning codes, taxes, permits and so on.)?
4. Have you had problems accessing loans? Have any other businesses in the area that you know of had problems obtaining loans?
5. Are you involved with the Division Street Business Association or the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce?
6. Could you identify organizations, institutions, community leaders or politicians who might help business owners and Paseo Boricua better succeed?

**REAL ESTATE AGENT INTERVIEW**

**Mapping**

I am going to give you a map of the West Side of Chicago so that, while we discuss the following topics, you might draw out a conceptual map of this area.

1. If someone didn’t know anything about this area, what would you say are the selling points (For example, there is a park nearby; a commercial district down on Division St. which has X, Y, Z amenities; a new supermarket is going to be located nearby, etc.)
2. Which areas, if any, would you not recommend (there is crime past X street, perhaps; or y street is loud and so on.)
3. Can you delineate the areas you consider to be the borders of distinct real estate markets? If possible name the areas (e.g. Wicker Park, East Humboldt Park and so on.) or tell me how you might describe areas which do not have specific names to a potential client.
4. We will discuss various housing conditions and the extent to which the following are characteristics of these areas:
   a. Mostly a rental market? Mostly a homeowner’s market? Both?
   b. Higher rents? Lower rents?
   c. Vacancies?
   d. Foreclosures?
   e. Experiencing housing price depreciation? Housing price recovery?
   f. Listed sale prices? Actual sale prices?
   g. Housing renovation and improvement?
   h. New construction?
i. Speculation?

j. Flipping?

**Scenarios** (again, please feel free to skip questions for whatever reason)

1. Let’s say that I, as a young Puerto Rican woman, approach you and want to buy a home on the West Side of Chicago and that I can afford a home priced around $200,000 (it could be a little more or less). Which area would you recommend that I purchase a home in? If I can afford more than $300,000 would you recommend a different area? What if I can only afford something at around $100,000?

2. Would your recommendation change if I was a male and was unconcerned about safety?

3. Now, imagine I was not Puerto Rican; would your recommendations change?

4. Would your recommendations change if I had kids?

5. **Puerto Rican Identity**
   a. Do you think that the Puerto Rican identity of Humboldt Park or Paseo Boricua act as selling points for Puerto Ricans?
   b. Why do you think that more Puerto Ricans are buying here?
   c. Is the Puerto Rican identity a selling point for non-Puerto Rican buyers or is it a hindrance?

**PROPERTY OWNERS/MANAGERS AND LANDLORDS INTERVIEWS**

**Topic: About yourself and your company**

1. Tell me about how you came to be a property owner, manager or landlord?

2. In which neighborhood are your properties located?

3. How many properties do you have in Chicago? How many in this neighborhood?

4. How or why did you obtain a property in this neighborhood and not another?

5. How long have you been conducting property management? How long have you been conducting property management in this neighborhood?

**Topic: Finance**

1. What was your initial investment in the property?

2. How much do you charge for rent?

3. Is your cash flow good?

4. How has your cash flow changed over the last 5 years?

5. Do you expect your cash flow to improve? Why?

6. Do you have plans or have you ever considered selling this property?

**Topic: The Neighborhood**

1. What is the best thing about conducting business in this neighborhood?

2. What difficulties, if any, have you experienced while conducting business in this neighborhood?

3. Do you think that the Puerto Rican identity of the neighborhood affects your business in any way? For example, maybe Puerto Ricans want to move into the
area because of its identity or, conversely, others might try to avoid it for the same reason.

**Topic: Clients**

1. How would you describe your tenants, demographically speaking?
2. Could you describe the benefits and challenges of managing these types of tenants?
3. What are your terms for rent out a property?
4. How is your relationship with tenants?
5. How do people generally learn about your rentals? From family, friends, advertisements?
6. Why do people say they want to move to this area? What is their motivation?
7. If people move out, what is their motivation?

**Topic: Tenants Change**

1. Have your renters’ demographics changed over time? If so:
   a. Generally speaking, how do your new tenants compare with previous tenants?
   b. If your clients have changed, could you compare your cash flow from before with your cash flow now?
   c. Has there been a change in turn-over rates and/or vacancies?
   d. Could you compare the physical condition of the property before and after?
   e. How do these changes contribute or hurt your business?
2. What are your expectations about the community over the next 10 years?

**Developers/Builders Interview**

**Topic: About you and/or your company**

1. Tell me about how you became a developer.
2. How long have you been developing properties? For how long in this neighborhood?
3. In which neighborhoods do you conduct business?
4. How many properties have you built in Chicago? In this neighborhood?
5. What motivated you to conduct business or further your mission in this particular neighborhood?

**Topic: Niche**

1. In which niche, if any, do you specialize? (e.g. Affordable, market rate or mixed; condominiums for sale or for rental; rehabs or new construction)
2. What groups are able to afford your units?

**Topic: Finance**
1. What are your usual sources of funding a development?
2. What are the pros and cons of your sources for finance?
3. If units are developed as affordable, would you be able to maintain them as affordable down the road?
4. Are there some things that you wanted to do but were not able because of a shortage in capital?
5. Have you ever had to make compromises to make a project feasible?

**Topic: The Neighborhood**

1. What is the best thing about conducting business or furthering your mission in this neighborhood?
2. What difficulties have you encountered while conducting business or furthering your mission in this neighborhood?
3. How does the character of this neighborhood or local public policies help or hurt the types of projects you are trying to develop?
4. Do you think the district’s character and culture has affected your organizational strategy in any way?
5. What changes do you perceive the neighborhood has experienced in the last 10 years? How does the market look in 2013 and how do you think it will look 10 years from now?

**Topic: Community Relations**

1. As a developer, do you feel welcome or unwelcome by the community at large?
2. Do you encounter opposition?
3. How would you describe your relationship with politicians and community leaders in the neighborhood?
4. How do you perceive the interests of these stakeholders?
5. Have you ever had to make compromises to make a project mutually beneficial?
6. How does your project contribute to a better neighborhood?
7. Have you ever experienced conflicts with the community? Do you see conflicts arising further down the road?

**Affordable Housing Developers Only Interview**

1. How do you strike a balance between wanting to serve local clientele and wanting to draw new people to the area?
2. How, if at all, has gentrification affected the availability of affordable housing?
3. How important has gentrification been in displacing households, if at all?
4. How significant, in your opinion, are current gentrification pressures and how many people are moving out of the community to seek other opportunities?
5. Where do people go when they can no longer afford to rent or buy in those areas?
6. How do you strike a balance between wanting to serve locals and those who are new to the area?
**Financial Institution Interview**

1. What role do you play in X bank/ credit union/ S&L?
2. How long have you worked for X and for how long in this location specifically?
3. How would you describe your clientele?
4. Has the availability of finances changed for developers in the area since 2008? Homeowners? Businesses?
5. Are you aware of any new housing projects in the area? What is your sense of future development potential as the housing and property market improves?
6. In your opinion what factors influenced developers’ and homebuyers’ decisions to invest within this area?
7. How do you strike a balance between wanting to serve local clientele and wanting to draw people from other areas?
8. Do you see a role for banks, credit unions or S&Ls to help minimize the displacement that may be caused by gentrification?
9. What measures could be taken to minimize the displacement of current residents which may result from new investment in the area, if any?
10. What other measures could be taken to ensure the revitalization of this area without displacement?
11. What role, if any, have local banking institutions played in expanding financial literacy? How about community development?
12. Thinking of different minorities—e.g. African-Americans, Puerto Rican, Mexican—do you think some groups are affected more or less than others regarding bankruptcy, foreclosure, bad credit and so on? Why?
13. What do you think the role of the government is in securing financial services for lower-income residents and/ or minorities?

**Investors Interview**

**Topic: Niche and Finances**

1. In which niche you specialize? (e.g. residential redevelopment, rehabbing, landholding and so on.)
2. Generally, how do you learn about potentially good deals?
3. On average, how long do your properties sit on the market? Has this changed over time?
4. What are your usual sources of funding?
5. Is your cash flow good?
6. Has your cash flow changed in the last 5 years?
7. Do you expect your cash flow to improve? Why?

**Topic: The Neighborhood**

1. In which neighborhoods do you invest?
2. Why do you invest in the Humboldt Park neighborhood?
3. What is the best thing about conducting business in the Humboldt Park neighborhood?
4. What difficulties have you encountered in conducting business in the Humboldt Park neighborhood?
5. How has the character or the local policies of the Humboldt Park neighborhood helped or hurt the types of projects that you are trying to develop?
6. Can you comment on any major changes you have seen since you have been investing in the Humboldt Park neighborhood?
7. Have your clients changed over time? Who are your clients? Where do they come from, predominantly?
8. What are your expectations about the community in the next 10 years?

**Topic: Community Relations**

1. Do you feel welcome or unwelcome by the community at large?
2. How well do you relate to politicians in the neighborhood?
3. How do you feel that your projects contribute to a better neighborhood? Who benefits?
4. Have you ever experienced conflicts with the community? Do you see any chance for conflict in the future?

**Community Leaders and Organizations Interview**

Questions to be asked will depend on the expertise of the subject.

**Topic: The Flags**

1. Could you tell me about the history of the flags on Division?
2. Where did the idea of the Puerto Rican flags on Division street come from? Why not something else like a statue or a plaque?
3. Who was involved in the creation and promotion of the flags and who contested them and why?
4. Do you think that the flags are still controversial today?

**Topic: Paseo**

1. What is the primary function of Paseo Boricua?
2. What are the overarching social, economic, cultural and political goals of Paseo Boricua? Has this changed over time?
3. How would you describe Paseo Boricua to others? What are its dominant icons (the flags, the restaurants, the institutions and so on.)?
4. How would you describe Paseo Boricua before and after the installation of the flags? How would you describe the changes in the community itself?
5. Do you think that Paseo Boricua helped to put the Puerto Rican community onto the broader map of the city of Chicago? What does the space communicate to Chicagoans?
6. What effects have the flags had for Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood? How has it affected other racial and ethnic groups like whites, African Americans and Mexicans who live in the neighborhood?
7. What effects have the flags had for Puerto Ricans who do not live in the community? How have they affected other racial and ethnic groups like whites, African Americans and Mexicans who live in other Chicago neighborhoods?
8. As you reflect on your experiences, do you believe that the installation of the flags accomplished the intended purposes?
9. Considering the goals of Paseo Boricua in general, what needs to change for Paseo Boricua to be more effective in accomplishing its goals?

**Topic: Assessment of Community Change**

1. What major challenges do you think the Puerto Rican community faces in the Humboldt Park area? How can these challenges be overcome?
2. What are your greatest concerns about the future of Paseo Boricua and about the future of the Humboldt Park community more broadly?
3. What characteristics of the neighborhood would you like to see change? Which ones you would like to see remain the same?

**Topic: Community Mobility**

1. Chicago’s Puerto Rican community has been continually moved westward and away from the city’s center over time: Do you think that Puerto Ricans will finally be able to stay in this community? Why?
2. Do you think that Puerto Ricans have been moving west due mostly to gentrification or do you think that there are other factors influencing such patterns?
3. Why do you think that Puerto Ricans are currently re-concentrating in Jefferson Park and Potrage Park?

**Topic: Neighborhood Change and Gentrification**

1. How would you describe the process of gentrification? How would you characterize a gentrifier?
2. What has your organization done to fight gentrification?
3. Do you think that the establishment of Paseo Boricua and its role in maintaining the area as a Puerto Rican space in lieu of gentrification needs to be studied and documented more clearly? What would you most like to know about Paseo Boricua? About gentrification?
4. How can a research project on Paseo Boricua which seeks to examine the causes and consequences of gentrification be useful to this community or to your organization?

**INTERNET/FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR RESIDENTS**

Residents will be of various subject positions:

- Puerto Rican, Mexican, White, African American and so on.
- Long-term residents and more recent incoming groups.
- Renters and Homeowners
- Low-income & middle-income

**Topic: First Impressions**

1. How were you introduced to this area? How did you first learn about it?
2. How did your friends and/or family react to your decision to relocate here? Why?
3. Tell me the top two or three reasons you decided to live in the area?
4. What attracted you to this area?

**Topic: Neighborhood Identity**

1. Who lives in this neighborhood?
2. Is there anything noticeable in this space that tells you a certain group of people live here? Can you describe the symbols that maintain or create this sense of identification?
3. Do you identify with the symbols?

**Topic: Fitting-In and Community Relations**

1. Do you see yourself as similar to the people living here? How might you be different?
2. If people are different, which other neighborhoods are more like you in Chicago? Would you like to move there? Why?
3. Are there any neighborhoods in Chicago which you would never live? Why?
4. Do you feel that you fit into this neighborhood? Do you feel welcomed?
5. How are your relations with your neighbors? How about others in the community?
6. Do you take part of any community organizations or churches? What groups are most likely to take part in those organizations (e.g. people like you, all kinds of different people and so on.)?

**Topic: Change**

1. What physical changes, if any, have you observed in the neighborhood? [Prompt: renovated homes, cleaner streets, new businesses and so forth.]
2. What social changes, if any, have you observed in the neighborhood? (If the interviewee needs prompting, mention more cohesion/unity, less cohesion/unity, conflict levels, crime levels, more block parties, changes in retail establishments, interaction among neighbors and so on.)
3. Are there any new groups of people in the neighborhood that you didn’t see when you first moved here?

**Topic: Leaving or Staying**

1. When you first moved into this area, how long did you intend to stay and why?
2. Compared to your expectations about the neighborhood when you first moved in, how (if at all) have your ideas or attitudes changed toward the neighborhood?
3. Have you considered moving out of the neighborhood? Why or why not?
4. Which kind of physical, social or cultural changes in the neighborhood would make you consider moving or staying?

**Topic: Challenges and Opportunities**

1. What are the major problems/challenges the neighborhood faces?
2. Is there a lot of crime in this neighborhood? Do you consider this to be a safe neighborhood for you and your family? Has your opinion on crime and safety changed over time?

3. Even if you like living in this neighborhood, you may see ways to improve it. What can be done to make this community a better place to live? How do you think this might best be accomplished?

4. What challenges do you think the neighborhood will be facing 10 years from now?

**Elected Officials and Government Staff Interview**

1. If any, what are the impacts of gentrification in this area?

2. What do you feel the negative effects of gentrification are? Are there any positives?

3. Do you think that public policy has a role in the marketplace? If so, broadly speaking, what is that role?

4. Have you sponsored any particular policies or programs that were intended to alleviate problems associated with gentrification?

5. Did anyone oppose these policies or programs? If so, why?

6. How effective have these policies and programs been? How might they be improved?

7. How have the strategies employed been changed or altered over time?

8. Do you feel that these responses are trying to halt gentrification altogether or just slow the process down? Do you think that gentrification is inevitable?

9. Is revitalization without displacement possible?

10. What other measures not currently employed could be taken to revitalize the area without causing displacement?
Appendix D: Curriculum Vitae

Originally from Puerto Rico, Ivis Garcia Zambrana is an urban planner with research interests in the areas of community development, housing, and identity politics. Ivis has spent time as a professional planner in Albuquerque, New Mexico, San Francisco, California, Springfield, Missouri, Washington, D.C., and most recently with the Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Community Improvement, a research center within the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she is also in the final stages of her doctoral requirements. She has a long history of working with and for Latino communities throughout the country. In San Francisco, for example, Ivis worked with the City Supervisor Gerardo Sandoval, now a sitting judge with the Superior Court of California, to facilitate the integration of Latinos into the City's democratic processes. More recently, in Chicago, Ivis has become an appointed leader within the City's highly-charged Puerto Rican population, assuming the role as Chair of the Puerto Rican Agenda, the nation's largest Puerto Rican organization, in 2014.

Currently guest editing a special issue for El Centro Journal, Ivis has also recently contributed chapters to several forthcoming volumes, acted as project leader for several reports for the Illinois Latino Family Commission, as well as for the Governor and Legislators of Illinois, and, this summer, will be conducting a large-scale documentary project in collaboration with the City University of New York to record the stories of Puerto Rican leaders living in and around Chicago. Ivis intends to bring the same leadership and voracity of spirit into a faculty setting here with the University of Utah.