CONCLUSION

LATINO URBANISM AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF OPPORTUNITY

As any ten-year-old in East L.A., or Philly's El Norte knows, borders tend to follow working-class Latinos wherever they live and regardless of how long they have been in the United States.

Mike Davis, Magical Urbanism

As the twentieth century drew to a close, Lawrence barely resembled the city it had been at the end of World War II. While its landscape was still dominated by brick mills and triple-decker homes, its economy and population had been profoundly transformed by suburbanization, deindustrialization, and Latino immigration. As scholars develop a distinct historiography of postwar Latino urbanism, Lawrence may not prove to be typical—as no city could possibly be—but its history nonetheless provides a set of essential questions to address: What was the role of U.S. imperialism in the Latinization (and globalization) of U.S. cities in the late twentieth century? How did race and class segregation in the era of suburbanization and urban crisis impact Latino settlement patterns and experiences? How did Latinos fight against disinvestment and discrimination and strive to claim their right to the city? Where did Latinos fit in the larger stigmatization of the "inner city" and the broad turn to conservatism that this discourse helped enable? From the periphery of U.S. empire to the ghettos at its center, Latino migration in the crisis era was a protracted struggle against containment and marginalization. Imperial migrants fought to have in the United States what U.S. intervention had denied them at home, pushing back against barriers of race and class in a segregated metropolitan landscape.

In Lawrence, as in many U.S. cities, the growth of the suburbs in the decades after World War II drew families, industry, and retail businesses out of the city. Intentional zoning decisions largely limited the construction of multifamily and subsidized rental housing to the city, concentrating the poor within Lawrence, while the suburbs experienced an upward spiral of desirability, property values, tax revenue, and public services. Deindustrialization and suburban competition precipitated an economic crisis in Lawrence as the city's tax base and services declined. These were the circumstances into which Latinos migrated. Pushed from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic by political and economic conditions that the United States had helped to create, and pushed from New York by that city's own crisis, imperial migrants searched for a place to find a better life. Aided by recruitment into the city's dwindling manufacturing sector, Latinos reconstituted their families in Lawrence, overwhelmingly segregated within the small city's boundaries and largely excluded from its suburbs.

For many white residents in Lawrence, the growing Latino presence became a symbol of urban decline. As the city suffered economically, many white Lawrencians and officials attempted to halt or reverse Latino immigration into the city, in the hope that this could somehow halt or reverse the city's economic deterioration. This scapegoating was a fundamental misinterpretation of the roots of Lawrence's crisis and created a deeply hostile climate for Puerto Rican and Dominican settlement in the city. Through quotidian acts of resistance, community building, and political protest, Latinos fought to assert their right to the city. White bigotry and Latino activism found their most visible expression in the 1984 riots, as both sides vented their rage at the crisis facing the city. After the riots, Latino organizers and their allies used the protests as leverage to pry open city government to Latino political participation, but the larger economic issues that had fueled the *disturbios* remained.

Lawrence's crisis only deepened in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Major metropolitan centers began to experience reinvestment in this era, and in many big cities, brutal ghetto poverty and a pathologized urban "underclass" existed alongside gentrifying neighborhoods of wealth and influence. Lawrence, however, suffered from pervasive and persistent disinvestment, resulting in waves of arson and crime and a deeply troubled public school system. Dependent on infusions of state and federal aid, the city and its residents became broadly stigmatized as undeserving, and there was little political will to remedy the segregated and unequal political economy that characterized the region. Circumstances in the crisis city proved a tremendous obstacle to upward mobility for many Latinos and were a source of

deep frustration. By the late 1990s, continued immigration and activism gained Latinos a prominent place in Lawrence's politics and public culture, and grassroots entrepreneurialism combined with a bilingual, bicultural service sector to revitalize the city's economy to some extent, lifting it from the nadir of its crisis. Yet overall, Lawrence remained impoverished and underresourced at the end of the twentieth century. As a result, while some Latinos found opportunities in the city, many others continued to find hardship and disappointment.

LAWRENCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In November 2009, Lawrence made history when it became the first city in Massachusetts to elect a Latino mayor. Latinos, by this point nearly three-quarters of the city's population, had fought for decades to gain political representation in the face of substantial white resistance.[1] In this context, the election of a Dominican, William Lantigua, was nothing short of a triumph. The *Boston Globe* reported, "Even before unofficial returns had been released, hundreds gathered at city hall to celebrate the apparent election of Lantigua. Chanting '*Si se pudo*,' or 'Yes, we did,' a crowd of hundreds—some dancing and crying—gathered in the city hall lobby." Lantigua sang "*Mi Gente*" (by the famous Puerto Rican salsero Héctor Lavoe) to the crowd and promised to represent all of the city's people.[2] This emotional moment was the culmination of decades of political activism and community organizing by Lawrence Latinos and their allies in the face of long-standing neglect and disenfranchisement by the city government. Without such activism, Latinos could have remained indefinitely *in* the city but not *of* the city, contributing to Lawrence but having no official power to help direct its future.

Lantigua had been a community leader and politician in Lawrence for over a decade before his election as mayor. Born in Santo Domingo, he had come to the United States as a teenager. He had lived in Lawrence and worked as a technician for an electric company for more than twenty years. Reflecting the broad Puerto Rican and Dominican political alliances that were central to Latino political strength in Lawrence, Lantigua had previously worked with two of the city's most important Puerto Rican politicians. He had served on José Santiago's successful campaign in 1998 (the first Latino to serve as Lawrence's state representative) and worked with Isabel Melendez on her campaign for mayor in 2001 (when she was the first Latina/o to win the Democratic mayoral primary). In addition, he had spent several terms as state representative himself after challenging Santiago in 2002.[3]

Yet it was not merely his local reputation and connections that helped land him in the mayor's office. The race had been close; Lantigua had won by only about 1,000 votes. Many speculated that the key to his victory had been the support he received from residents of the small town of Tenares in the Dominican Republic. Encouraged by local politicians and a morning talk-show host, many residents of Tenares had spent months calling and emailing friends and family in Lawrence, urging those eligible to go out and vote for Lantigua. This transnational support seems to have been crucial to Lantigua's election.[4]

The link between Tenares and Lawrence is strong despite the many miles and powerful national borders that divide the New England city and the Cibaeño town. Yet the role of Tenares residents in supporting Lantigua's election was just one very visible strand in a dense web of communication, support, travel, trade, and kinship that has long connected the two places. Of course, Lawrence's Latinos are diverse: native born, immigrant, citizen, legal resident, undocumented, and Puerto Rican, Dominican, Guatemalan, Cuban, and every other Latin American nationality. And many of these Latinos maintain various levels of connection to their (or their parents' or grandparents') home towns or home countries, even if for some that connection is largely symbolic. But there is a particularly sizable number of people from Tenares living in Lawrence; indeed, some estimate that between 50 and 70 percent of the city's Dominicans have roots there (the higher figure would mean that there are nearly as many Tenarenses in Lawrence as remain in the Dominican town). As a result, Tenares has been significantly impacted by its connections with Lawrence.[5]

Tenares is a town of just over 25,000 in the Hermanas Mirabal Province in the northern part of the Dominican Republic, in the Cibao region.[6] As discussed in Chapter 2, the Cibao's agricultural economy experienced dramatic decline in the second half of the twentieth century, at least partially due to pressures exerted by the United States on Dominican politics and economic policy. This rural economic decline spurred decades of emigration of Tenarenses to Lawrence and New York City. Migrants displaced by economic dislocation rarely sever ties to their home countries, however, often living transnationally as much as possible and dreaming of return. In the past couple of decades, many Lawrence residents from Tenares have invested in building houses back in their hometown in the hopes of eventually returning. Many of these houses stand empty or in states of half completion, as working-class Dominicans in Lawrence gradually accumulate (or fail to accumulate) the resources necessary to complete and furnish them. In the meantime, these

construction projects generate considerable employment in the town, as do the remittances sent back to family members. In 2011, the mayor of Tenares estimated that as many as 80 percent of the town's inhabitants relied on money sent back from the United States, most of it from Lawrence. As one Tenares resident explained, "Whoever doesn't have someone in Lawrence sending them money won't survive here, won't be able to eat."[7] This reliance on remittances is not unique to Tenares, of course. Families and towns throughout the Dominican Republic depend on money sent from relatives working in the United States, as is true in many other Latin American countries, such as Mexico, where U.S.-shaped economic restructuring has made it a dreadful imperative that families straddle national borders.[8]

Given the Dominican town's dependence on Lawrence, it is no surprise that Tenarenses feel invested in ensuring Latino political empowerment and economic opportunity in the Massachusetts city. As the Tenares resident mentioned above explained, "They work in Lawrence so Tenares can survive."[9] This transnational investment in Lawrence's politics is a sharp corrective to the stereotype of U.S. Latinos too caught up in "homeland politics" to advocate for themselves locally or to engage in state or national politics in the United States; on the contrary, the stakes of U.S. elections are often well known in Latin America.[10] Yet the campaigning of Tenarenses for Lantigua also stands in contrast to the provocative image of wealthy foreign nationals attempting to corrupt U.S. democracy.[11] This transnational political involvement came most definitely "from below," as Dominicans attempted to exert some agency within the context of a serious structural dependency. Tenarenses' support for a Latino mayor in Lawrence could serve as a means to shore up a precarious system reliant on aid and investment from emigrant kin, kin who themselves were often struggling to make ends meet in the impoverished city.

As thrilling as the hard-won election of a Dominican mayor may have been, Lantigua's ascent also shows the limits of Latino political power in a small postindustrial city within an unequal metropolitan political economy. Although decades of activism brought Latinos political strength within the city, Lawrence's impoverishment put it at the mercy of a state government that was far less responsive to Latino hopes for self-determination and unlikely to address the intrametropolitan inequality at the root of the city's economic decline. Lantigua inherited a $24.5-million shortfall and a city suffering from decades of urban disinvestment from the previous administrations. State legislators passed a "bailout" for Lawrence in February 2010 designed to enable the city to borrow $35 million over two years from private

sources, but the bailout also gave a state overseer authority over the city's spending. In addition, in November 2011, the Massachusetts Department of Education voted to place Lawrence public schools into receivership, the first time the state had ever taken direct control of a school district's finances and academics.[12] In effect, the small city was forced to surrender its autonomy in order to stay solvent.

There is a glaring parallel here, not only with other small postindustrial cities such as Flint, Michigan, whose fiscal crises left them undemocratically subject to outside control, but also with New York City in the wake of its fiscal crisis, with the Dominican Republic in the era of both "dollar diplomacy" and IMF-imposed "structural adjustment," and with Puerto Rico in its current debt crisis. Structural economic inequality was mitigated temporarily with loans, but that debt was then used as a mechanism for political and economic control by outside forces. Whether in Lawrence or on the islands, Latinos still found that crucial economic decisions were being made elsewhere; the political economic structure that determined the availability of jobs and services was shaped by factors over which local governments had little control. The impact of their activism was buffered by the larger, fundamentally undemocratic political economy that insulated economic decision-makers from popular pressure.

Overall, Lawrence has seen significant, albeit small-scale, reinvestment since at least the mid-1990s. Although this gradual and partial recovery pales beside the massive economic turnaround in major metropolitan centers like New York or Boston, Lawrence seems well past the nadir of its urban crisis era. As in cities and suburbs across the United States, immigrants have brought energy, education, and resources from their home countries to reinvigorate Lawrence. Grassroots activism has pushed to hold the city accountable to the needs of its poor and working-class residents. Lawrence has received a remarkable infusion of state funds (even if city residents do not always get to decide how they are spent). Crime has declined substantially since the early 1990s.[13] The city has developed a vibrant nonprofit sector able to attract government and foundation money and committed organizers, as well as developing home-grown community leaders. New businesses and residential developers are increasingly drawn to the Lawrence market, and Northern Essex Community College is expanding in the city.[14]

As in larger cities in the twenty-first century, there is evidence of growth and renaissance throughout Lawrence today; yet reinvestment has thus far not caused gentrification or displacement in this small city. As a result, unlike in major metropolitan centers, Lawrence's Latinos are not being

pushed out of the slowly regenerating city. A particularly lovely example of Lawrence's renewal is the Spicket River Greenway, an interconnected series of parks, playgrounds, walkways, and community gardens along the river in the Arlington neighborhood. Turtles can be spotted along the river's banks, surrounded by the red brick of the city's industrial legacy (and fully bilingual signage, of course). The greenway was created out of vacant lots and brownfield sites or abandoned industrial spaces, many of which had become illegal dumping grounds and environmental hazards. The project was spearheaded by the local nonprofit Groundwork Lawrence and received massive state and federal funding. Grassroots action was key to the creation of the greenway, as thousands of city residents cleared the riverbanks of more than 115 tons of accumulated industrial and other debris.[15]

In spite of this obvious renaissance in Lawrence, fundamental structural issues remain. The metropolitan political economy still keeps Lawrence poor relative to its neighbors and dependent on external funds, and this economic dependence undermines the city's political autonomy. Lawrence reminds us that many postindustrial cities have simply not seen the economic turnaround of New York or Boston and that persistent spatialized inequality remains between municipalities. The Greater Lawrence area still shows few signs of racial or economic integration, and Lawrence continues to be profoundly stigmatized in the region. This is true in many urban Latino communities across the United States, as well as in areas where Latinos have moved into the suburbs: Racial and class segregation persists, even in the suburban landscape; local tax bases still determine school funding to a great extent; and Latino-dominant neighborhoods and municipalities are often stigmatized in a way that impacts their residents' economic opportunities. Finally, on the most basic level, the political and economic inequality that persists between the United States and much of Latin America continues to spur migration. It is clear that immigration does not necessarily mean opportunity, however, as many Latinos face long-standing structural constraints on social, spatial, and economic mobility in the United States.

Representations of Latinos in the media and popular discourse are oddly complicated in the current era; Latinos are alternately celebrated as hardworking, family-oriented immigrants or vilified as dangerous, degraded "illegals" who "take our jobs."[16] The reality of Latino diversity, of course, will never be captured in media stereotypes, but it is important to note that an earlier era's obsessive discursive concern with an urban Latino "underclass" of the perpetually jobless and welfare reliant seems to have been eclipsed in the past two decades by (both positive and negative) depictions of Latinos as

workers. This is a welcome shift in rhetoric in many ways, but it hides as much as it reveals. Changes in U.S. policy since the 1990s have made immigration much harder for poor Latinos, have dramatically restricted immigrants' access to welfare, and have increasingly criminalized both authorized and unauthorized immigrants. Part of the aggressive policing of low-income communities of color in revanchist cities at the turn of the twenty-first century involved the widespread incarceration and deportation of even legal immigrants who failed to adjust to the straight-and-narrow neoliberal regime. Thus Latinos who do not fit the idealized immigrant narrative (law-abiding, hardworking, family-oriented) have no place in contemporary U.S. society; they are either locked up or pushed out of the country entirely, as the recent scholarship on Dominican and Salvadoran deportees illustrates.[17] Social acceptance for Latinos in the twenty-first century seems premised on their conforming to a higher standard of industriousness, docility, and gratitude than white U.S. citizens. Not only is this double standard unfair, but Lawrence's history illustrates that it is often simply impossible for many poor and working-class Latinos, particularly in areas suffering from disinvestment.[18]

Clearly, structural obstacles remain for Latinos, shaped by class and geography as much as by immigration status, language barriers, or the ever-shifting category of race. It is undeniable that Latino and other immigration has contributed immensely to the revitalization of cities and towns across the United States in the past few decades; but the benefits of this revitalization have been unevenly distributed, and access to its privileges has been restricted by an array of different types of borders. The boundaries may shift and move (no longer so tightly cutting city off from suburb, for example), and people may find innovative ways to cross them; but that does not mean the walls have fallen. A complex geography of opportunity and hardship persists in the twenty-first century, the nearly impregnable maze that stands between many Latinos and the American Dream.

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