

THE 'RICANS UNDERCLASS STATUS?
A LOOK FROM WITHIN CHICAGO

By

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To all my Puerto Rican friends who were an inspiration and my support, as well as my parents and other family members and friends for their encouragement in achieving this endeavor.

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This thesis examines the Puerto Rican population in the city of Chicago. Its purpose is to explain and understand why nationally Puerto Ricans trail behind Mexicans and other Latinos on particular dimensions of well-being, such as access to employment, education, and proper housing. To do this, I looked at the structural and social factors that have affected Puerto Ricans' likelihood to achieve economic success, and how those factors have limited their ability to improve their livelihoods in this city. I have chosen to study the Puerto Rican community in Chicago because of the sizeable Mexican and African-American populations present in the city, facilitating comparison among these groups. This study found that understanding the success of Puerto Ricans (or lack thereof), requires looking at the nature of the Puerto Rican migration to the mainland, the lack of U.S. funded or sponsored programs to assist in that migration process, varying racial and ethnic identities existing on the mainland and the island, and widespread gentrification in Chicago communities. These factors have hindered the successful incorporation of Puerto Rican migrants into American society and its economy, ultimately limiting Puerto Ricans' ability to achieve upward mobility in the United States.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The great immigration from Puerto Rico started after World War II, because of “cheap air transportation, acquaintance with the mainland acquired by many during service in the army, rising education under the new political order on the island [and] the growing pressure of population which has more than doubled since the beginning of the century” (Wagenheim and Jimenez-Wahenheim, eds, 2002:249). The economic challenges faced by Puerto Ricans on the island encouraged the migration of many non-skilled workers, who like most immigrants, faced a number of challenges such as racial discrimination, limited affordable housing and well-paid employment, etc., despite their legal status in this country. They joined the workforce on underpaid jobs such as service workers, precision production, repair, and transportation. They were also subject to discrimination and had to live in central cities of metropolitan areas, public housing or in areas more commonly referred to as the “hood.”

Nationally, Puerto Ricans trail behind Mexicans and other Latinos on particular dimensions of well-being such as access to employment opportunities, education, healthcare, proper housing, etc. This lag was caused by structural and institutional factors that will be discussed throughout this research. Furthermore, their disadvantaged status is troubling considering that Puerto Ricans are American citizens at birth, arguably granting them more employment opportunities, which in return, should allow for more opportunities for advancement. This research seeks to address broadly the question of why Puerto Ricans have been less successful than other Latino groups or other minority groups in the United States. Even though measuring success of this group is difficult, this research seeks to show how citizenship at birth does not necessarily mean that an individual will have equal access to opportunities that will help them improve their livelihoods. I will look at the nature of the

migration of this group, as well as structural and social factors (employment market, gentrification, racialization in the U.S. white/black dichotomy, etc.) that have affected their likelihood to achieve economic development. For the purpose of answering this question I have chosen the city of Chicago for it has sizeable Mexican and African-American populations with which comparisons can be made. I chose to study Chicago instead of New York City because there have not been many studies performed on Chicago and though the Mexican population in New York City is growing, is not as sizeable as it is in Chicago.

In addition to socioeconomic and demographic factors, this research considers how Puerto Ricans in the United States found it more “difficult than groups which came before them to form their own in-group leadership” partly because they lacked a tradition in leadership due to the hundreds of years of colonial administration (Wagenheim and Jimenez-Wahenheim, eds, 2002:249). This condition may help explain why Puerto Rican migrants were less successful than other immigrant groups in creating social networks/enclaves that could help their community to achieve upward mobility as opposed to the downward mobility that has been observed among second and third generation Puerto Ricans. For instance, Puerto Ricans have the highest poverty rates among Latinos, as well as the greatest percentage of female-headed households in the country as well as in Chicago.¹

Interestingly, Puerto Rican migration to the mainland has not been unidirectional and some authors have argued that this circular migration is a “disruptive process that prevents migrants and their children from establishing strong roots and attachments in local communities, labor markets, and institutions such as schools” (Pérez, 2004:94). On the other hand, other scholars have argued against these claims by “emphasizing the structural forces underlying these multiple movements, such as deteriorating labor possibilities as a result of economic

restructuring in northeastern cities like New York or changes in minimum wage legislation in Puerto Rico in the 1970s” (94). In addition, others have shown that only a “specific type of migrant engages in circular migration and that most are settled in particular communities” (Pérez, 2004:94). It can be argued that all these claims are possible and that they can be used to further explain why Puerto Ricans have not been able to build tight social networks from which they can benefit in order to succeed on the mainland. The issue of circular migration and its implications will be furthered discussed in Chapter 2 of this research.

According to the 2002 U.S. Census Bureau’s survey on Hispanic population, Puerto Ricans constitute 8.6%, or 3.2 million, of the Hispanic population in this country. Similarly, they are 30.6% of the Latino population under 18 years old, falling behind Mexicans who make up 37.1%, but leading Cubans who are at 19.6% of the Latino population and Central and South Americans who constitute 28.1% of the Latino population. And as mentioned earlier, among Hispanic households, Puerto Ricans have the largest proportion of single female-headed households (38.3%) as compared to 19.18% of Mexican households, 17.35% of Cuban households and 23.6% of Central and South American households.²

With respect to education, Puerto Ricans represent 15.5% of the Latino population with less than a 9th grade education, as opposed to 32.1% of Mexicans, 19.2% of Cubans, and 22.3% of Central and South Americans.³ Though Puerto Ricans seem to have performed better in middle school; on the other hand, with respect to the Latino population with a college degree or higher, 14% of Puerto Ricans have a bachelor’s degree, compared to 7.6% of Mexicans, 18.6% of Cubans, and 17.3% of Central and South Americans. In addition, the unemployment rate among Puerto Ricans is higher than other minority groups (at 9.6 %), in comparison to Mexicans at 8.4%, Cubans at 6.1%, and Central and South Americans at 6.8%. Finally, 65.1% of full-time,

year-round workers who are Latino with earnings of less than \$35,000 (2001) are Puerto Ricans, compared to 76.3% who are Mexicans, 65.5% who are Cubans, and 72% who are Central and South Americans.⁴ These statistics illustrate how Puerto Ricans do sometimes lag behind other Latino groups in the United States even though they are citizens at birth and are believed to have certain advantages, including access to education and employment opportunities that are not readily available to non-citizens or other minorities.

These statistics contribute to a better understanding of the demographics of Puerto Ricans in terms of their income, education attainment, age, family structure, etc., compared to other Latino groups. In addition, these statistics also help to compare this group to African-Americans. For instance, the percentage of full-time, year-round workers with earnings of less than \$35,000 in 2004 for African-Americans was 23.6% (compared to Puerto Ricans' 65.1% of the Hispanic population), their unemployment rate was 10.7% (Puerto Ricans, 9.6% of unemployed Hispanics), and the percentage of African-American female heads of households was 44.7% (Puerto Ricans, 38.3% of the Hispanic population). Furthermore, with respect to educational attainment, 5.7% of African-Americans have less than a 9th grade education (Puerto Ricans 15.5% of the Latino population), and 12.3% have completed a bachelor's degree (Puerto Ricans, 14% of the Latino population).⁵

From these statistics, we are also able to observe that in many ways, the poverty levels of Puerto Ricans, their unemployment conditions, and their household structure help explain why most Puerto Ricans live in poorer neighborhoods, have less educational attainment and, as a result, might have more opportunities for interaction with African-Americans than whites or other minorities. Table 1-1, provides the geographic distribution of Puerto Ricans in the United States according to state, with California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New

Jersey, Florida, and New York have the largest proportion of the Puerto Rican population (>140,000 people).⁶

It has been argued that Puerto Ricans “share common ground with African-Americans not only because of their similar socioeconomic experiences as racialized ethnic minorities in the United States but also because Puerto Rican culture is as Spanish as it is African,” considering how *mestizaje* took place on the island during the colonial time (Rivera, 2003:8). In addition, both Puerto Ricans and African-Americans have been integrated into the “lowest rungs of the labor structure under similar circumstances and, since then, have lived parallel experiences” (Rivera, 2003:25). For instance, their shared history of “unemployment and underemployment, police brutality, negative portrayals in academic literature and media, housing and employment discrimination, residential displacement and racial violence [which] have not only been similar but also linked” (25).⁷

Puerto Ricans have also been racialized as “dark, dangerous others who, although different from African-Americans, share with them a multitude of social spaces, conditions and dispositions” (Rivera, 2003:26). It is for these reasons that Puerto Ricans have tried to distinguish themselves from the African American population in order to avoid bearing similar racial and socioeconomic stigmas (27). This process was achieved by reassuring their “Puerto Ricanness” and embracing it as a race rather than just an ethnic origin and also by utilizing cultural markers such as language, the Puerto Rican flag, and music. Nevertheless, it is their shared history as part of their African *diaspora*, as well as their shared socioeconomic exploitation, marginalization and cultural formation that Puerto Ricans, as well as other Latinos, and blacks “learned they both suffer from oppression, poverty, and share common history and roots” (Rodríguez, 1995). These issues will be furthered explore in Chapter 3, in which I will

attempt to define what it is to be Puerto Rican and how Puerto Ricans on both the island and the mainland view themselves according to their location (island/mainland), see their Puerto Rican counterparts (mainlanders vs. islanders) and negotiate what they believe to be a “true” Puerto Rican identity with respect to each other and other minority groups. Finally, Chapter 4 addresses the history of Puerto Ricans in Chicago since their migration, the characteristics of their employment, and the effects that gentrification and their displacement from their former communities has had on their livelihoods.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ Chicago Urban League, Latino Institute, and Northern Illinois University 1994; Latino Institute 1995.

² U.S. Census Bureau. *Survey on Hispanic Population. March 2002.* April 17, 2006. April 2006. <www.census.gov>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2004, racial Statistics Branch, Population Division.

⁶ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File I.

⁷ See Nazario, *El elemento Afronegroide en el español de Puerto Rico*; Juan Giusti Cordero, "AfroPuerto Rican cultural Studies: Beyond Cultural *negroide* and *antillanismo*," *Centro* 8, no. 1 and 2 (1996): 57-77; José Luis González, *El País de los cuatro pesos y otros ensayos* (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1989); Isabelo Zenón Cruz, *Narciso descubre su trasero* (Humacao: Furidi, 1975).

Table 1-1 Puerto Rican Population in the United States by State, 2000¹

| State | Puerto Rican Population | State | Puerto Rican Population |
|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| New York | 1,050,293 | Oklahoma | 8,153 |
| Florida | 482,027 | Louisiana | 7,670 |
| New Jersey | 366,788 | Missouri | 6,677 |
| Pennsylvania | 228,557 | Minnesota | 6,616 |
| Massachusetts | 199,207 | Kentucky | 6,469 |
| Connecticut | 194,443 | Alabama | 6,322 |
| Illinois | 157,851 | New Hampshire | 6,215 |
| California | 140,570 | Kansas | 5,237 |
| Texas | 69,504 | Oregon | 5,092 |
| Ohio | 66,269 | New Mexico | 4,488 |
| Virginia | 41,131 | Utah | 3,977 |
| Georgia | 35,532 | Mississippi | 2,881 |
| North Carolina | 31,117 | Iowa | 2,690 |
| Wisconsin | 30,267 | Alaska | 2,649 |
| Hawaii | 30,005 | Arkansas | 2,473 |
| Michigan | 26,941 | District of Columbia | 2,328 |
| Maryland | 25,570 | Maine | 2,275 |
| Rhode Island | 25,422 | Nebraska | 1,993 |
| Indiana | 19,678 | West Virginia | 1,609 |
| Arizona | 17,587 | Idaho | 1,509 |
| Washington | 16,140 | Vermont | 1,374 |
| Delaware | 14,005 | Montana | 931 |
| Colorado | 12,993 | South Dakota | 637 |
| South Carolina | 12,211 | Wyoming | 575 |
| Nevada | 10,420 | North Dakota | 507 |
| Tennessee | 10,303 | | |

¹ Adapted from: Pérez, Gina M. 2004. *The Near Northwest Side Story*. Berkeley : University of California Press. p. 11. Original source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 2000, Summary File I.

CHAPTER 2 THE PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION

Puerto Rico was occupied in 1898 by the United States after its victory in the Spanish-Cuban-American war. Puerto Rico, being in the Caribbean, was considered geopolitically strategic as it would serve as an important economic route to Central and South America and as a strategic military location for “defending both U.S. mainland as well as U.S. interests in the rest of the Americas” (Genova and Ramos-Zaya, 2003:7). As Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth of the United States, and as such, it became an “enclave” of the U.S. economy (7), the U.S. government sponsored Puerto Rican migration by developing “official labor recruitment campaigns” established on the island in order to contract migrant workers to satisfy the labor demands present in the mainland industries (Genova and Ramos-Zaya, 2003:8). The Puerto Ricans who migrated were comprised of many people from the rural areas, specifically displaced farmers and farm laborers, whose activities were considered “economically marginal” (Rodríguez, 1989: 1).

Interestingly, the encouragement of immigration from the island by the U.S. was partly due to the break of the Cold War and the United States’ need to prevent the spread of communist ideas in the western hemisphere (Grosfoguel 2003). As new independent countries emerged in the periphery of the world economy in the aftermath of World War II, it created competition and preoccupation between the two super powers of the United States and the Soviet Union about “how to control the elites of the newly independent countries if the old colonial means of domination had been destroyed” (Grosfoguel, 2003: 107). The Truman administration’s response to this challenge was to engage in an “ambitious foreign aid and technical-training programs to ideologically co-opt Third World elites [and] increase the symbolic capital of the U.S. model of development vis-à-vis that of the Soviet model” (107). In other words, by

achieving social and economic development in Puerto Rico, the U.S. sought to present the success of its program on the island as a model for other Latin American countries to follow and prevent them from following the communist ideal. Part of this challenge constituted negotiations with the Luis Muñoz Marín's colonial government in Puerto Rico during the late 1940s in order to:

1. Conceal the colonial status of the island by creating a more subtle form of colonial relationship called the commonwealth.
2. Include Puerto Rico in U.S. federal programs for health, education, housing, and other infrastructural programs without its paying federal taxes.
3. Support Operation Bootstrap, which consisted of attracting U.S. labor-intensive industries by offering tax-exemptions and a cheapo-wage labor force.
4. Reduce the cost of air fares between the island and the mainland to foster mass migration. (Grosfoguel 1992).

Also after World War II, there emerged a large demand for cheap labor for manufacturing industries in urban centers such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Thus, in order to achieve the development program of Puerto Rico, the U.S encouraged the emigration of the lower strata of the island to allow the upward mobility of those who stayed behind (Grosfoguel, 2003:109). As a result, Puerto Rican migration to the mainland served as an escape valve for the increasingly poor population and as a way to relieve the socio-economic tensions created by the lack of industrialization of the island. In return, this migration helped the Truman administration use Puerto Rico as “part of the core-state’s geopolitical symbolic strategy to gain symbolic capital vis-à-vis the Soviet Union,” (Grosfoguel, 2003:110) and this model, if proven successful, could be sold to Third World elites as an alternative for development that differed from the Soviet Union model. However, resources were channeled to the islanders and not to those who had migrated. Consequently, the migrant group did not receive “proper state support in bilingual programs, education, health, housing subsidies, and job training” (110). This lack of programs to help Puerto Rican

migrants incorporate successfully into the American society, resulted in these migrants moving into urban ghettos as “unskilled low-wage workers with one the highest poverty rates in the United States” (Grosfoguel, 2003:110).

The Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. mainland and the lack of programs to assist those who migrated presents an occasion to compare to the migration of Puerto Ricans to another Latino group, namely Cubans. Cubans had been present in Florida since the late-19th century through the establishment of a flourishing cigar industry in 1885 by Vicente Martínez Ybor and Ignacio Haya. Ybor and Haya “purchased forty acres of swamp near Tampa, drained the land, and set about building a company town” which would become part of a steamship line between Havana, Key West and Tampa. Consequently, by the early twentieth century there were nearly 50,000 to 100,000 Cubans traveling between Havana, Key West, and Tampa. In addition, the small Cuban elite tied to U.S. companies invested their money on Wall Street, sent their children to U.S. colleges, vacationed in this country and many became citizens (González, 2000:110).

Furthermore, in addition to the political refugee status granted to the Cubans in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution (and the subsequent establishment of a communist regime) the U.S. government provided them with assistance programs under the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act. Cuban refugees were “instantly eligible for public assistance, Medicaid, food stamps, free English courses, scholarships, and low interest college loans” as well as able to “secure immediate business credit and start-up loans” (González, 2000:110,111). To date, no such comparable assistance has been given to Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, or other Latinos.

These benefits given to Cuban migrants, helped put Cubans in a more advantageous position *vis à vis* other Latinos. Not Dominicans, Haitians, or Central Americans (Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans), who were fleeing from civil wars and persecution in their own

countries, received any such services or legal status as the Cubans fleeing Castro's communism. In addition, the experience of Cubans in the U.S. after their massive *exodus* from the communist regime was different from other minority groups because in the white/black racial dichotomy of the United States, they were not racialized in the same ways Puerto Ricans and Mexicans who were, often considered "dark, dangerous, others" (Rivera, 2003:26). This is partially due to the differences in race and class of the early Cuban migrants compared to Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, who were often dark (at least in the "white" American social imagery) and low skill workers, while the Cubans tended to be light-skinned professionals.

Puerto Rican migration to the mainland was different than that of the Cubans because they were not fleeing political repression. In addition, their migration was unlike that of the Cubans because it was influenced by the crisis and decline of U.S. export-oriented agriculture on the island (sugar and tobacco) between the 1930s and 1960s. This process resulted in "massive unemployment and shift on the island toward export-oriented, light, labor-intensive, machine-based industry; the uneven imposition of welfare-state reforms; and a mass market for low-income housing and individual mechanized transportation" (Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, 2004:89). The subsequent re-incorporation of Puerto Ricans within the "restructured world-economy" led to the migration of manual day laborers, landless peasants, and distressed small-property owners. Even though, many of these immigrants brought "non-transferable skills," they also brought transferable skills that could not be used. As Handling (1959) argues, Puerto Ricans "had to accept whatever jobs were available" even if they had skills or had training in white-collar occupations, they still had to take the jobs being offered to them (70).

The migrants who left the island during this period (1960s) moved into the rundown buildings that had provided housing for Italians, Jews, and Poles in northeastern U.S. cities and

Chicago during the 1940s and 1950s. As they settled in these cities, the Puerto Ricans joined the “similarly colonized populations from the U.S. South, U.S. Southwest, and Mexico who were nevertheless being incorporated within a much a broader spectrum of the U.S. economy” (Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, 2004:89). This “broader spectrum of the economy” can be observed through how Puerto Ricans working as seasonal migrants in the U.S. mainland “began overlapping with other ways of exploiting peripheral labor in the United States –such as share-cropping, the convict-lease system, the *bracero* program- alongside higher-wage labor in the industrial production of capital consumer goods” (90).

Nevertheless, during the 1960s, Puerto Ricans’ successful struggles for labor and civil rights made them “too expensive for the increasingly informalized manufacturing sector” (Grosfoguel, 2003:165). At the same time, the de-industrialization of New York, as well as other cities, led to the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs. Many of the manufacturing industries transferred their operation to peripheral regions around the world, such as Asia and Latin America, where they could find cheaper sources of labor. Moreover, the manufacturing industry, targeted new Latino immigrants, whether legal or illegal, since they lacked the rights that “internal colonial subjects” such as Puerto Ricans had acquired through their citizenship (Grosfoguel, 2003:165). The subsequent exclusion of Puerto Ricans from surviving manufacturing jobs in the Northeast and Chicago, and “the racialized, segregated educational system that excluded Puerto Ricans from the best public schools, produced a redundant labor force that could not reenter the formal labor market” (Grosfoguel, 2003:166).

Further, the economic restructuring that took place on the island and the extension of federal minimum wage levels to Puerto Rico, as well as the strengthening of capitalist views around the world and its subsequent need worldwide for cheaper labor after the 1980s, led

employers to substitute different segments of Puerto Rican labor on the island with immigrant labor from other places in the world, such as Asia and the rest of the Caribbean Basin (Sassen-Koob 1985; Duany 1995). Unfortunately, those who were affected by the changes on the island migrated to the U.S. only to find that Puerto Ricans in some U.S. cities were facing the same challenges. Employers replaced them from the few manufacturing jobs available with cheaper laborers. This led to the creation of what is considered the Puerto Rican “underclass,” but which Ramón Grosfoguel and Sherri Grasmuck (1997) have referred to as a “redundant colonial/racialized labor force,” which for the most part encouraged Puerto Ricans to engage in alternative forms of employment (whether legal or illegal) in order to survive (Grosfoguel and Grasmuck 1997).

Even though the Puerto Rican migration of the 1940s through the 1990s was comprised mostly of working-class individuals, in the 1980s and the 1990s a more “socio-economically mixed migration” which included students and professionals took place. Nonetheless, in spite of this rise in “class differentiation” among Puerto Ricans on the mainland, according to estimates from 1998 and 2000, 30.4% of all Puerto Ricans lived below the official poverty line, with 7.3% receiving some form of public assistance and an unemployment rate of 8.3%.¹ Hence, Puerto Ricans as a group have steadily continued to be the poorest among Latino groups, and they have also remained among the poorest U.S. citizens (Genova and Ramos-Zaya, 2003:11).

An important consequence of the “long-wave of global economic decline” that led to the de-industrialization of cities such as New York was a change in the demographic profile of Puerto Ricans, who had overwhelmingly settled in the Northeast. In response to the economic changes in the Northeast, Puerto Ricans started to move in significant numbers to Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana. As a result, the percentage of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. Midwest, including

the city of Chicago, increased from 4 % to 10% during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, 2004:89). However, moving to a city like Chicago did not constitute a “qualitative shift” for Puerto Ricans toward different kinds of job opportunities than those found in New York City, but was rather a “quantitative shift.” Puerto Ricans were trying to “find more of the same kind of subsistence activities” that had started to decrease in the northeast (Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, 2004:89).

Due to racial segregation and limited affordable housing, Puerto Ricans became spatially and socio-economically concentrated in different areas establishing a variety of “identifiable barrios” (Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, 2004:97). For the most part these new ghettos were established in “close proximity to, or intermixed with, other Caribbean and African American populations” similar to East Harlem (El Barrio), New York City’s Lower East Side (Loisaida), southern Brooklyn (Los Sures), the South Bronx, Roxbury in Boston, Northern Philadelphia, and the Division Street sector of Chicago (Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, 2004:97).

The socio-economic marginalization of Puerto Ricans had a negative impact on future generations: 50% of all Puerto Rican children in the United States in 1998 still lived below poverty level (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Furthermore, the unemployment rates for Puerto Ricans continued to fluctuate between 2.17 times (1990) and 2.38 times (2000) the general United States average percentages. By the year 2000, Puerto Ricans continue to have one of the highest unemployment rates (8.3%) and most prominent poverty levels (30.4%) among all of the U.S. Hispanic population groups.² By 1999, 64 % of all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. had obtained a high school diploma or more education (up from 58% in 1991), performing better than Chicanos and Mexicans (49.7%), but still performing behind the equivalent

proportions for U.S. whites, whose high school completion rates had increased to 87.7% during this time (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

Nonetheless, Kelvin A. Santiago-Valles and Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz (2004) argue that this “dramatic increase in educational attainment appears to be associated with the increasing social polarization among Puerto Ricans in the United States since the 1980s, rather than any single statistical anomaly between Puerto Ricans and Chicanos and Mexicans” (107). To explain this discrepancy, they show that “despite having higher poverty levels than U.S. Mexicans, by 1999 there were proportionally more Puerto Ricans than U.S. Mexicans in the U.S. mainland who were full-time, year-round workers with annual earnings of \$35,000 or above” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Consequently, the presence of this particular Puerto Rican population, which was moderately in a better economic situation, “threw off the curve and contrasted sharply with the continuing bleak conditions among most Puerto Ricans in the United States during the 1990s” (107,108). In other words, the evidence found by Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz illustrates that though some statistics may show that Puerto Ricans had higher earnings than Mexicans in 1999, it does not necessarily mean this group does not have higher poverty rates than Mexicans. Instead, this discrepancy is explained by the influx of Puerto Rican professionals from the island during this time, which could have possibly skew the statistical curve and portray a reality that was not experienced by the mainland Puerto Rican community in general.

Circular Migration and Puerto Rican Migration to Chicago

As it was discussed earlier, the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898 and the “subsequent consolidation of U.S. agrarian capitalism and shrinking small-scale subsistence cultivation helped set in motion population movements to places like Hawaii, Arizona, California, and most notably, New York City” (Pérez, 2004:10). In addition, between 1900 and 1940, more than ninety thousand Puerto Ricans migrating from the island (even though some

would later return to Puerto Rico) seeking employment in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.”³ This massive migration was encouraged initially by the large demand for cheap labor for manufacturing industries in urban centers after WWII, and then by the post-war de-industrialization of cities such as New York, which led Puerto Ricans to the Midwest seeking similar job opportunities. Furthermore, in 1946, “single Puerto Rican women were recruited by a Chicago-based employment agency to remedy the city’s ‘maid shortage,’” hence contributing to the growth of Puerto Ricans in this city (Pérez, 2004:9).

According to Pérez’s study (2004), nearly “one-third of the island’s population circulated or emigrated to the United States between 1955-1970, as Puerto Ricans continued to leave the island in large numbers” (10). Later by the early 1970s, however, the de-industrialization in Northeastern and Midwestern cities led to the migration of Puerto Ricans to other cities in the U.S. due to the decline in manufacturing jobs; it inversely reduced migration from the island as it became a “less attractive option for working-class migrants” (Pérez, 2004:10). Nonetheless, this trend would change in the mid 1980s and 1990s, when migration from the island increased yet again (10).

Puerto Rican migration has not been unidirectional and it is in fact circular as return migration began in the mid 1960s and then increased considerably by the early 1970s and in “some years even surpassed emigration from the island, a trend that continued through the early 1980s.”⁴ Interestingly, in similar ways to other late-twentieth century migrations, Puerto Rican migration had “evolved to include a variety of new destinations, multiple movements, and sustained connections among different places, a phenomenon popularly regarded as a “*va y ven*” (or *vaivén*), movement, an experience of coming and going familiar to many Puerto Ricans, and one that has provoked serious debate both inside and outside the academy” (Pérez, 2004:11).

For some scholars, the “*vaivén* tradition” is a consequence of economic changes both in Puerto Rico and on the mainland and it has “become a culturally conditioned way for migrants to improve their economic and social position” (Pérez, 2004:12). According to sociologist Marixsa Alicea (1990), the migrants and their families construct and utilize “dual home bases,” which is observed in how Puerto Rican migrants built these home bases on the island and the mainland, in order to “maintain social and psychological anchors in both the United States and Puerto Rico’ and belong simultaneously to several dwellings.”⁵

It can be argued that for other scholars like anthropologist Jorge Duany (2002), these “dual home bases” developed through circular migration –or “mobile livelihoods practices” –is also a “flexible survival strategy” that helps enhance the migrant’s socioeconomic status. For Duany, the poor economic conditions on both the island and the mainland have led Puerto Rican migrants to create and “make use of extensive networks, including multiple home bases in several labor markets.” These *transnational practices*, not only counterweigh the fact that “economic opportunities are unequally distributed in space, but they also undermine the highly localized images of space, culture, and identity that have dominated nationalist discourse and practice in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.”⁶ These transnational practices, therefore, illustrate the difference in economic opportunities in both the mainland and the island, which makes it in some ways preferable for Puerto Ricans to leave the island and look for better employment opportunities in the mainland. Similarly, these practices deconstruct what island Puerto Ricans have believed to be an authentic Puerto Rican identity as well as its culture for mainland Puerto Ricans have recreated traditional Puerto Rican cultural practices and have also created a new sense of identity that goes in hand with their experiences in the United States. The ways in

which circular migration have undermined these “highly localized images of space, culture, and identity” argued by Duany will be furthered studied in Chapter 3.

The “dual home bases” and “mobile livelihoods practices” are better illustrated in Gina M. Pérez’ ethnographic study (2004), which looks at the links between Puerto Ricans migrating from the community of San Sebastián de las Vegas del Pepino in Puerto Rico to the city of Chicago and from Chicago to back to this community in the island. Her findings show that circular migration can be understood, in the same way observed by Jorge Duany, as a “flexible survival strategy used by migrants to negotiate changing political-economic realities circumscribing their lives and to enhance their economic status” (94). Puerto Ricans move to Chicago searching for job opportunities and the means to provide a better socio-economic environment; however, more often than not, they are faced by dead-end jobs and poor living standards. As a result, many families return to Puerto Rico seeking a “safer environment for their children and families or to improve their living conditions” and according to Pérez, “they may subsequently return to Chicago for better health care, jobs, or schooling.” Pérez further argues that the “decision to move rests partly on the migrants’ assessment of which place offers the best opportunity to meet household needs, but it is also conditioned by decades of migration practices that have become woven into the fabric of Puerto Rican island and mainland communities” (94).

Pérez’ ethnographic study further helps scholars understand the difficulties undertaken by those who return to Puerto Rico after being in Chicago. One of her interviewees, Elena explained:

It wasn’t easy. After living in Chicago where you have your good job, and you would eat out on Fridays and maybe Saturdays too... and to come to Puerto Rico I had to get used to cooking breakfast, lunch and diner... It wasn’t easy... After one has lived in Chicago, it’s not easy to adjust to life here ... I would never tell anyone to come to Puerto Rico [to live] (107).

As it is observed, Elena's experience in engaging in this "reverse migration" illustrates the difficulties faced by her family on the island. It also shed light on how life in Chicago may be hard, but returning to the island does not necessarily guarantee an improvement in their living conditions.

Perez's study is filled with different examples outlining the struggles these families faced once they returned to the island. For example, she includes how many were seen as the "outsiders" and in many ways, their cultural identity had been renegotiated as they adapted to U.S. lifestyle; their "Puerto Ricanness" was often questioned by those still living on the island. Her study of the different families shows that it is harder for the children to adjust because their Spanish is often not perfect, and they tend to speak Spanish with an American accent as opposed to a "Puerto Rican" one. Women also have an arduous time in adjusting because they are subjected to "live up to constructed norms of behavior or dress" and when they fail to do so, they "are punished and labeled *de afuera* [women who have lived in the U.S. and come back to Puerto Rico]," which Pérez argues is a "process that demonstrated the ways in which a glorified Puerto Rican past depends on racialized constructions of women and motherhood" (Pérez, 2004:116). These changes are blamed on the influences of American popular culture which are found to threaten traditional Puerto Rican conservative/cultural norms. Nonetheless, despite these challenges, the women interviewed eventually adjusted to life in San Sebastián and believed it was the best move they had made for it provided a safer environment for their children.

Nonetheless, other writers have argued that the "continual circulation of Puerto Rican migrants is a key contributor to increased economic immiseration and poverty among Puerto Ricans on the mainland, since such movement disrupts families and people's participation in the labor market."⁷ Though such a claim may be applied to certain circumstances, it is almost

impossible to generalize and agree that circular migration has contributed to the “immiseration and poverty” of the Puerto Rican community. As it has been observed, it is the poverty levels of this community as well as their struggles in the United States what has caused Puerto Ricans to return to the island on the first place in an attempt to improve their livelihoods. Perhaps it can be argued that the way this movement disrupts their participation in the labor market has to do with their unavailability to be promoted in their jobs, for they are constantly in the move and once they return they are given the same position and have to start over again to advance.

Nonetheless, this issue cannot be observed in absolute terms and one needs to look at what structural and institutional factors are affecting Puerto Rican’s ability to find good paying jobs that will improve their living conditions and consequently, will not encourage their migration back to the island.

Conclusion

The Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. has been an ongoing process influenced by the labor needs of the U.S., the American response to the Cold War challenges, and the crisis of global economy after the 1960s. The first large wave of Puerto Rican migrants were skilled/urban laborers between 1900 and 1945 and during this period, Puerto Ricans they were actively recruited as cheap labor for the manufacturing industries in New York City after the first and second world wars. The second large wave of Puerto Rican migrants during the 1950s and 1960s were mostly unskilled/rural which were displaced by the decline of U.S. export-oriented agriculture on the Island (Grosfoguel, 2003:140). Unfortunately, though the Migration Division established offices in New York and Chicago in order to help the migrants to find jobs (Lapp 1990); it was not able to guarantee or intervene on behalf of the workers when their civil rights were violated. Furthermore, Puerto Rican migrants were “subjected to extremely negative discriminatory public opinion [as well] overcrowded and dilapidated housing, a lack of

institutional support for education, and poor medical services” (Grosfoguel, 2003:140). Hence, it can be argued that these factors have contributed to their socio-economic marginalization in American society.

The Puerto Rican migration to the mainland, as it was discussed, has been varied starting with the move of displaced farmers and farm laborers in the 1940s as well as students and other professionals after the 1980s. Puerto Ricans migrating to the U.S. had to take the jobs available to them regardless of their skills, and were considered a cheap labor force until the 1960s’ civil and labor rights movement made them somehow unaffordable to manufacturing companies due to their citizenship status and the rights entitled to them as such. Furthermore, the restructuring policies within the U.S., the de-industrialization of major cities with high concentrations of Puerto Ricans, and the restructuring policies on the island, led to more unemployment and their subsequent migration from cities such as New York and, from the island itself, to other areas in the American Mid-West.

With respect to *circular migration*, it was seen how there is an ongoing debate regarding this issue; and though, some scholars have argued that these “dual home bases” and “mobile livelihoods practices” provide a “flexible survival strategy” used by Puerto Ricans in response to their declining livelihoods and their poor living conditions; other scholars believe that these processes hinder their participation in labor market and it disrupts families. Nonetheless, the ethnographic study performed by Gina M. Pérez (2004) has shed light in how while many Puerto Ricans engage in circular migration in search of ways to improve their lives; and at the same time, it can also inhibit them from being able to advance in their current jobs and it does disrupt families as the children and the women have to adapt and learn “traditional Puerto Rican cultural values” in order to be accepted in the community.

The lack of programs tailored to help those who first migrated to successfully incorporate into the American economy, as well as racial segregation and limited affordable housing, has perpetuated their marginalization in this society. This claim is better exemplified by Antonio Pantoja statement gathered in a February 2000 newspaper interview,

The underlying problem is indifference by both government and the public, including economically comfortable Puerto Ricans, to a society where children are not taught by the schools they attend, families do not have decent housing to live in, where the color of your skin will keep you out of the services and resources all citizens are entitled to.

(Navarro 2000) (c.f. Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, 2004:108).

This research will continue to study how this socio-economic marginalization has had a negative impact on this group's ability to achieve upward mobility. In addition, it will look at how Puerto Ricans define and negotiate their identities vis-à-vis African-Americans and Mexicans as well as the relationship of both tension and cooperation among them.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ Data compiled by researchers at the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the State University of New York at Albany, based on pooled estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (March 1998, March 2000); (cf. Logan, 2002).

² Except Dominicans, whose unemployment rates and poverty levels surpass the Puerto Ricans'.

³ History Task Force 1979; Sánchez-Korrol 1994 (cf. Gina M. Pérez, 2004:10).

⁴ Meléndez 1993, 15-17 (cf. Gina M. Pérez, 2004:10).

⁵ Alicea (1990) writes that many Puerto Rican migrants create dual home bases on the island and the mainland, a process that allows them to 'maintain social and psychological anchors in both the United States and Puerto Rico' and belong simultaneously to several dwellings (14). See also C. Rodrigues 1993; Meléndez 1993b; and Ortiz 1993.

⁶ Duany, 2002:235 (cf. Pérez, 2004:12).

⁷ Tienda and Díaz 1986; Chávez 1991 (cf. Pérez, 2004:12)

CHAPTER 3 DEFINING AND NEGOTIATING PUERTO RICAN IDENTITY

This chapter does not attempt to define Puerto Rican identity in absolute terms, but it seeks to achieve a better understanding of how Puerto Ricans develop such an identity on both the island and the mainland and how this identity is renegotiated as Puerto Ricans interact with other minorities and are incorporated into the American mainstream. Furthermore, this research is limited for it cannot extensively explore racial dynamics among this population; yet, it will engage in an effort to understand how these racial dynamics play a role in how Puerto Ricans ultimately define themselves.

According to Puerto Rican national discourse, Puerto Rican culture has three historical roots: the Taíno Indian, the African, and the Spanish (Duany, 1998 and 2002; Ramos-Zayas, 2003). These three roots and the product of their *mestizaje* have contributed to the formation of a national identity. Nonetheless, the degree in which Puerto Ricans choose to what root their *mestizaje* comes from depends highly in the way they are racialized on the island and on the United States mainland, as well as how they prefer to identify themselves. As a result, it is observed that some Puerto Ricans will claim to be more Spanish than Taíno or black and vice versa. Furthermore, as it will be observed, Puerto Rican national discourse has exalted its Spanish heritage and simultaneously glorified their Taíno ancestry at the expense of their African legacy as part of a political and racial discourse that helps them differentiate themselves from African-Americans as well as other Latino groups.

The racial component of Puerto-Ricanness thus emphasizes those elements from the Taíno Indian, African, and Spanish heritage that are “most closely associated with anti-colonial resistance.” This anti-colonial resistance discourse is thus articulated in different ways. During the Puerto Rican struggles against the Spanish rule, they emphasized their Taíno heritage and

while in Chicago, popular education programs and nationalist activists persisted on stressing those characteristics of “the triad” which were considered to represent resistance (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:197). These practices can be observed in the ways in which Puerto Ricans have acknowledge their African ancestry during the Civil Rights movement as well as embracing their Spanish heritage in contrast to the white American “other.”

Whereas on the island whiteness implies having “more Spanish Blood,” in the diaspora it is used to portray members of the dominant American society, *los blancos* (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:200). What is observed therefore is that on the island coalitions between popular and elite sectors “required that a large mulatto popular class evoke a racial discourse that valorized whiteness and thus reinforced dominant racial hierarchies” (Guerra, 1998:213; cf. Ramos-Zayas, 2003:200). As a result, Puerto Ricans in the United States “perceived valorizing whiteness as evidence of acceptance of the U.S. classification scheme,” while they simultaneously acknowledge their inability to break into the power granted to whiteness from the “standpoint of racialized subjects” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:200).

The United States popular constructions of class differ from those present in Puerto Rico for it is race, not class, which is the “key component of popular consciousness.” Consequently, Arlene Torres (1998) argues that even as people are categorized by phenotype, ancestry, class, and status, the acceptance of blacks is shaped by “cultural lightning” (296). This cultural lightning is not necessarily determined by the color of an individual’s skin, but by their success in leaving behind social and cultural markers, which are related to blackness and are thus thought to be negative. The assumption therefore is that upward mobility cannot be attained if individuals retain a black identity for there exist “negative cultural ascriptions associated with blackness” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:201).

The process in which this cultural identity is formed is historical as seen by the division of classes in colonial Puerto Rico, in which the *creole* class was oppressed by the Imperial power exerted by Spain, and in turn was “oppressing one other social class in Puerto Rico, the class made up of slaves, until their emancipation in 1873, of landless laborers, and of small craftsmen” (González, 1993: 8). In Puerto Rico, as for much of Latin America, the construction of race is closely related to class and as such, class tends to “whiten” individuals as they rise up the class hierarchy.

Grosfoguel and Georas (2002) also argue that Puerto Ricans need to be seen as a “category colonial/racial subjects of empire rather than simply racial subjects [for] racial categories are built in relation to colonial histories and they need to be looked at together” (155). What they argue is that focusing on the person’s color does not “address the fact that, although diverse colonized groups may be phenotypically undistinguishable from dominant colonizer groups they can nevertheless be racialized as inferior to others in a colonial situation.” This situation is exemplified by the relationship between the Irish within the British Empire as well as white Puerto Ricans in the U.S. mainland (155). This condition is furthered illustrated by Jose Luis Grosfoguel (2003) in which “no matter how ‘blond and blue eyed’ a person may be, or whether she or he can ‘pass,’ the moment that person identifies herself or himself as Puerto Rican, she or he enters the labyrinth of racial Otherness.” As a result, Puerto Ricans of all colors have become a “racialized group in the social imaginary of Euro-Americans, marked by racist stereotypes such as laziness, violence, criminal behavior, stupidity and dirtiness” (165). In order to understand how Puerto Ricans navigate the “labyrinth of racial otherness,” the following section of this chapter will discuss how some Puerto Ricans have chosen to exalt their Taíno

ancestry as a way to create an identity of their own and further differentiate themselves from African-Americans in the American white/black social imaginary.

The Taíno Revival and Displacement of the African Ancestry

The Taíno were “the pre-Columbian indigenous population that once inhabited the Caribbean, but are now largely presumed to be extinct since the 18th century” (Dávila, 1997-1998: 33). Historically, during and after Puerto Rico’s struggle for separation from Spanish rule, the Taíno were “the only non-transplanted population on the island” and as such it became a channel of “patriotic devotion and a tool to affirm a legitimate and continuous connection to the soil by the Creole ‘Puerto Rican’ elite *vis à vis* the Spanish colonial authorities” (37). Moreover, this preference of exalting the Taíno past of the island was also due to how this population was “viewed as a noble and generous legacy” (38) in contrast to how African heritage was seen as backwards and less gracious though they have contributed greatly to Puerto Rican culture.

Jorge Duany (1998) argues that until the mid-twentieth century, anthropologist often characterized the “Taínos as an ‘inferior race,’ compared to Europeans, but superior to Africans” (65). Furthermore, anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians “explicitly compared Taínos and Africans,” consistently coming to the conclusion that the “Indians were physically more attractive, intellectually more capable, and culturally more developed than blacks” (65). Nevertheless, as Puerto Rico changed “colonial masters” in 1898, from being Spanish territory to becoming a commonwealth of the United States, the “nationalist first turned to Spanish, not indigenous culture, as a form of resistance and affirmation against Americanization” (56).

The term Taíno came into widespread use during the early decades of the twentieth century, when academics such as Antonio Bachiller y Morales, Jesse Walter Fewkes, and M.R. Harrington used this phrase to refer to the whole indigenous population of the Western Caribbean (Haslip-Viera, 2001:2). Later during the 1960s and early 1970s years of political

tumult and cultural change, many alienated Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean Latinos in the Northeast and Middle West sought to reaffirm their identities in different ways. As a result, they “changed their dietary habits, revitalized Latin music, invented new art forms, and studied Caribbean history and culture” (Haslip-Viera, 2001:3). By the end of the 1980s, this movement resulted in the creation of a number of Taíno “tribes,” “councils,” and “associations” that emerged at the grassroots level in different parts of the United States (3). These groups thus became ways in which the de-franchised Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean Latinos could develop their own sense of identity within the United States.

Even though the Taíno has also been utilized as a symbol of national identity in New York and the Diaspora, this “role has been most of all directed at enhancing the status of a minority group through the assertions of cultural distinctiveness” (Dávila, 1997-1998: 40). In particular, the Taíno has been more directly associated to social movements and grassroots activism in the United States than on the island, where the “Taíno has had a long history of appropriation by nationalist elites and cultural institutions” (40).

Though Arlene Dávila (1997-1998) argues that “whereas on the island, the nationalist discourse promotes that ‘we are all Puerto Rican,’ veiling the subordinate status of sectors of the population according to race and limiting the recognition of distinct groups among Puerto Ricans” in the United States, the discourse of multiculturalism has provided larger opportunities to see the Taíno culture as a distinct unit (41). In addition, I argue that the revival of Taíno identity in the mainland is another effort from the Puerto Rican community to differentiate itself from African-Americans and assert an identity of its own to avoid bearing similar negative stigmas.

This Taíno revival is matched by an Afrocentrist movement found among Puerto Ricans and other Latinos from the Caribbean who “tend[ed] to be persons of darker skin color who are defined as ‘mulatto,’ ‘black’ or ‘African’ in appearance” (Haslip-Viera, 2001: 5). Nonetheless, those Puerto Ricans who were aware of the contempt for African-Americans by American society, were also aware of the African-Americans who not only sought to improve their lives but also shared “the belief in the inferiority of Black people” (5). Puerto Ricans thus responded to the discrimination against them by emphasizing “a cultural uniqueness that presumably transcended racial concerns.” For instance, as Puerto Ricans were subjected to the institutionalized racism of the United States, they “could –and often did- hold themselves apart as being neither white nor black, neither oppressor nor oppressed” (Jiménez Roman, 1998:116). However, this attitude became more problematic to maintain during the tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s, “when calls to take a stance against the *status quo* were invariably phrased in racial terms.” Hence, considering that Puerto Ricans were seen as “people of color” in the black-white imagery of American society, and as such, Puerto Ricans shared similar experiences of racial discrimination; for those who were of noticeable African descent, encountering the Black Power movement upheld a significant meaning (116) for it gave them an opportunity to break away from the discrimination they were subjected to and be entitled to civil rights and equal opportunities.

In the debate about who were the first Puerto Ricans, José Luis González (1993) argues that by 1534 the island was so depopulated that there were hardly any people of Spanish descent, there were only blacks, and it should be concluded that the first Puerto Ricans were actually black (10). González further argues that the Spanish ingredient to the formation of a popular Puerto Rican culture “must have taken the form of agricultural laborers, mostly from the Canary

Islands, imported to the island when the descendants of the first African slaves had already become black Puerto Ricans” (González,1993:10). For this reason, González claims that the first Puerto Ricans were in fact black (10). What he is claiming is that “it was the blacks, the people bound most closely to the territory which they inhabited... who had the greatest difficulty in imagining any other place to live” (10). He also explains that the black population was the “first to feel Puerto Rico as their true home and because they had no roots in or loyalty to Spain, Corsica, the Balearic Islands, or indeed anywhere else” (39).

González’ assertions that the first Puerto Ricans were indeed black bring into the academia two important arguments. First, that it is plausible to consider that the first Puerto Ricans were black as they constituted the majority of the population during the early colonial period and their allegiance belonged to Puerto Rico as opposed to anywhere else. Secondly, though the African contributions to Puerto Rican culture are extensive, this “black ingredient” to Puerto Rican national identity is often omitted in favor for an exaltation of the Spanish heritage and an, almost mythological, emphasis on the Taíno ancestry.

Nonetheless, because Puerto Rican migrants constituted a large numbers of mulattos, black, and *mestizos*, they were initially mistaken in the “white social imaginary” for African-Americans due to the “social construction of racial categories in the United States, where having ‘one drop of black blood’ is enough to be classified as ‘black’” (Grosfoguel, 2003:164). Ironically, accepting their African historical heritage, they found common ground in the United States to participate in the civil rights movements along African-American leaders in an attempt to improve their socio-economic status by challenging the *status quo*.

Puerto Rican Identity formation in Chicago

Puerto Ricans in Chicago challenged their racialization as black in the U.S. black-white dichotomy as well as their identity as Latino by “creating an alternative nationalist identity that emphasized cultural and political distinctiveness while securing social autonomy and citizenship rights.” In order to achieve this, “they utilized historical narratives and nationalist symbols to reject dominant racialization practices while alternately obliterating and exacerbating internal racial divisions on behalf of Puerto-Ricanness” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:36).

Similarly, in Chicago “cultural authenticity” entailed exhibits of “ethnic and natural solidarity” such as participating in festivals and grassroots politics as well as living in the zones marked as Puerto Rican. Their participation in “community-based projects and being knowledgeable of Puerto Rican history and politics in the United States relied on being marked as Puerto Rican and deploying this markedness for navigating the social margins” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:143). Nevertheless, defining Puerto Ricanness is often contradictory and ironical among islanders and mainlanders for while mainland Puerto Ricans would “organize salsa parties to promote unity between islanders and mainlanders along national lines, Puerto Ricans from the island generally avoided those events in favor of parties with rock or Motown music” (145). Furthermore, Puerto Rican writers and poets in the U.S. criticized the irony of assimilation among Puerto Ricans; for while Puerto Ricans on the island maintained that Puerto Ricans from the U.S. were assimilated, the islanders were the ones who “[ate] McDonald’s in the American discotheques” (Laviera 1981; author’s translation)

In some of the interviews carried by Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas (2003), it is observed how island Puerto Ricans questioned the authenticity of Chicago Puerto Ricans. For instance one of her interviewees, Francisco Ruiz, an electrical engineer who worked for General Electric and lived in the Chicago suburbs observed: “Some Puerto Ricans from here do not even speak

Spanish, or if they do, they speak a dialect, Spanglish. They don't even speak English well either. They speak Black English, not the English we learn in high school in Puerto Rico or in college" (Ramos-Zayas 2003:148). His comment clearly outlines the tensions often present between Puerto Ricans from the island and the mainland when trying to define and find an authentic Puerto Rican identity.

Similarly, "Chicago islander professionals tended to use islander and mainlander distinctions to point differences in attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles between themselves and their U.S. coethnics" for they are aware of the discriminatory attitude toward Puerto Ricans in the U.S (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:149). As a result, they have also "created alternative Puerto Rican identities that continued to reproduce their dominant status, the one they experienced on the island on the basis of their social privilege" (149). What it is observed then, is how this Chicago islander elite has used what they see as their class status in the island to avoid bearing the same discrimination that mainland Puerto Ricans face as they are socio-economically marginalized along with African-Americans.

Puerto Ricans in Chicago have also reacted negatively to the term *Nuyorican*. For example, they first declared that the term did not apply to them, and secondly, they defined their status in contrast to the Nuyorican "Other" specifically by focusing on "class identity and racialization process that saturate the term on the island." As Edna Acosta-Belén (1992) explains, *Nuyorican*, or *Neorican* --a hybrid of "New York" and "Puerto Rican," or "new Puerto Rican" – initially had negative connotations, especially as it was used on the island. When the term was first starting to be used, it suggested a "cultural impurity that the island elite attributed to uneducated younger generations of Puerto Ricans from 'El Bronx,' a racialized space" (980).

Moreover, *Nuyoricana* was the first terms to articulate the distinctions between Puerto Ricans from the island and the mainland.

The term or word *Nuyoricana* entails a “double marginality” founded on both class and blackness. As a result *Nuyoricans* are often described as “dark, young, and displaying mannerisms and dress styles that some Puerto Ricans on the island associate with black youth in the United States” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:33). Being *Nuyoricana* in many ways exemplifies the ways in which second and third generations renegotiate their Puerto Ricanness *vis à vis* the islanders, for they identify themselves as Puerto Ricans in every sense of the word; even though, their interactions with the African American community has shaped other cultural markers such as language, dress, and the way they carry themselves.

With respect to Chicago’s Puerto Rican barrio, the “public perception of physical encroachment, displacement, and gentrification reshaped national identities by inducing a popular nationalism that conflated cultural and political modalities.” Hence, this “conflation” led to the portrayal of a Puerto Rican citizenship identity that was not incompatible with separatist nationalism, but in fact contributed to the “negotiations of boundaries in relation to other Latinos, African-Americans, and whites” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:36)

Interestingly, this nationalist discourse employed by Puerto Rican activists, while differentiating itself from African-Americans, also “selectively” incorporated and emphasized blackness in order to achieve three main goals. First, blackness was related to the struggle of African-American civil rights leaders, “many of whom held nationalist views, rather than solely with an ahistorical African heritage root or folklore.”¹ Secondly, the activists explicitly acknowledge that Puerto Ricans were “racialized as black or similar to black by dominant society and other Latinos alike” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003: 199). Finally, Puerto Rican blackness

“could be negotiated as different from African-American blackness.” Emphasizing this distinction between how Puerto Ricans see themselves and how a “dominant other” sees them further fueled the growth of a Puerto Rican nationalism in Chicago. The racialization of most Puerto Ricans as “proxies for blacks in the bipolar racial system of the United States, the nationalist claimed, is another attempt by dominant society to oppress Puerto Ricans as it oppresses African-Americans” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003: 199).

For Chicago Puerto Ricans, “resistance entails not only a reconfiguration of the racial ideology of *mestizaje*, but also a recognition that the embodiment of Puerto Rican Creole culture, the *jíbaro*, is a militant black, rather than the passive white peasant of Puerto Rican national imaginary” (Torres, 1998; cf. Ramos-Zayas, 2003:200). The fusion of *jíbaro* and *negro* in Puerto Rico modifies how race has been “essentialized in racial categories in the Puerto Rican cultural imaginary;” thus, this union corresponds to a movement towards blackness (Torres, 1998:295-95). Consequently, the *jíbaro* is no longer constituted a white-skinned peasant, but rather he is a *jíbaro negro*. In Chicago, as this movement became nationalized; “*Puerto Rican* blackness was not to be conflated with *African American* blackness” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:201)

Despite these common grounds found with the African-American community, Puerto Ricans in Chicago have the highest segregation rates in relation to both white and African-Americans of all Puerto Ricans in the United States (Massey and Bitterman 1985; Massey and Denton 1989). The predominantly Latino neighborhoods throughout the city occupy the “interstitial zones” between African-American neighborhoods and diminishing white working class communities (De Genova 1998). The Puerto Rican community has traditionally been located in the area encompassed by the three adjacent Northwest Side neighborhoods of Humboldt Park, West Town, and Logan Square, and the heart of the Mexican community,

especially Pilsen and La Villita [Little Village], which is on the Southwest side of Chicago. On the other hand, the African American community is largely concentrated in the West and South parts of the city (Ramos-Zayas, 2003: 209).

Puerto Ricans are the only racialized group that has resisted a hyphenated identity (Grosfoguel, 2003). In some ways this resistance is partly associated to their “resistance against being fully assimilated in a society that marginalizes and racializes” them. The discrimination they face “reinforces a feeling of belonging to, and an idealization of, the imagined place of origin” (Grosfoguel, 2003: 141). Furthermore, this feeling becomes more “pronounced” with the continuous circulation of Puerto Ricans from and to the island thanks to the lack of border restrictions. As a result, many second-, third-, and even fourth-generation Puerto Ricans in the United States preserve a “feeling of belonging to the Puerto Rican ‘imagined community,’ even if they have never visited the island (141).

However, though Puerto Ricans in the mainland continue to construct their identity as Puerto Rican, they face challenges of becoming a “cultural hybridity” in the United States which is “not tolerated not only by nationalist intellectuals on the island but also by Puerto Rican middle classes” (Grosfoguel, 2003:142). This intolerance is shown by the prejudice against “nuyoricans” and, how this population in return, “questions some of the racist and elitist representations of Puerto Rican identity on the island” (142). The cultural hybridity of the Puerto Ricans in the United States represents a form of identity that includes elements of African-American culture which “threatens island elite’s efforts to conceal their African heritage while privileging the Spanish culture” (142).

Conclusion

As it was observed Puerto Rican identity and national discourse is founded around three historical roots: the Taíno Indian, the African, and the Spanish and the subsequent *mestizaje* process undergone among these populations. Moreover, we learn that Puerto Ricans at different times choose what root to emphasize to navigate the racial discourse in both the U.S. and the island, and that those roots have also served as a form of resistance. Hence, they have exalted their Taíno past against the Spanish colonial rule, then exalted their Spanish blood to resist American imperialism; and later would recognize their African ingredient to find allegiances during the civil rights movement.

Though Puerto Ricans in the mainland continue to construct their identity as Puerto Rican, they face challenges of becoming a “cultural hybridity” in the United States which is “not tolerated not only by nationalist intellectuals on the island but also by Puerto Rican middle classes” (Grosfoguel, 2003:142). This intolerance is shown by the prejudice against “nuyoricans” and how this population in return “questions some of the racist and elitist representations of Puerto Rican identity on the island” (142). The cultural hybridity of the Puerto Ricans in the United States represents a form of identity that includes elements of African-American culture which while maintaining an identity of its own.

In addition, Ramón Grosfoguel (2003) argues that there exists “heterogeneous ways” of being Puerto Rican that are not limited by the use of a common language, or a “common anything for that matter” (142). His study shows that many middle-class Spanish-Speaking Puerto Ricans on the island are more assimilated to American “white middle-class cultural practices with their suburban houses, cable TV, racist representations of Puerto Rican identity and mass consumption of fancy shopping centers than many non-Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans in the United States living segregated in urban ghettos” (142).² His findings are

important for it reminds scholars that we cannot possibly define Puerto Rican identity in absolute terms and even though the core culture of what it means to be Puerto Rican remains and it is transmitted from one generation to another, this identity is always evolving and being negotiated in their daily lives. Interestingly for mainlanders to be Puerto Rican is not only about choosing a color in the black-white racial dichotomy in the U.S., but it has become a race in itself.

Furthermore, as it was discussed throughout the chapter, by asserting their Puerto Rican identity, Puerto Ricans on the mainland attempt to first, differentiate themselves from African-Americans to avoid carrying similar stigmas of oppression and prejudice; and secondly, it provides a sense of belonging as they are viewed as “the other” in the American social imaginary and as such they are rejected even though they are fellow American citizens.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ Interestingly, in Puerto Rico, blackness is displaced onto specific marginal populations, like Dominicans or Puerto Rican return migrants, rather than deployed as inherent to Puerto Ricanness (cf. (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:261).

² See Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas (2003) study pages 147-152.

CHAPTER 4 PUERTO RICAN CHICAGO

Puerto Rican migration to the city of Chicago during the 1930s and 1940s was encouraged by the de-industrialization of manufacturing in cities such as New York as well as by the United State's Operation Bootstrap in the 1950s, an effort to industrialize Puerto Rico by giving American companies incentives (such as generous tax breaks, free land, and low interest loans) to move their operations to the island (Cruz, 2004: 9). However, this operation failed to create enough jobs for the growing Puerto Rican population; therefore, promoting immigration to Chicago and other cities in the search for employment opportunities in the steel mills, factories, and other manufacturing companies (9).

This migration wave had been facilitated by the Jones Act of 1917 which gave U.S. citizenship to all island-born and U.S. mainland-born Puerto Ricans. In addition, in the beginning of 1946 a private Chicago-based employment agency, Castle, Barton and Associates, recruited Puerto Rican men to work as unskilled foundry laborers and Puerto Rican women to be employed as domestic workers in Chicago and surrounding suburbs such as Waukegan (Edwin 1979; Padilla 1947; Padilla 1987). These early migrants moved into different neighborhoods such as Woodlawn, the Near North Side, Lake View, Lincoln Park, Uptown, West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, and the Near West Side. However, by the 1960s most Chicago Puerto Ricans were concentrated in Lincoln Park, West Town, and Humboldt Park and shared these neighborhoods with Mexican and Polish immigrants as well as African Americans (Padilla 1987). Map 4-1 illustrates the primary and secondary Puerto Rican communities in the 1960s before undergoing gentrification.

Even though Puerto Ricans were recruited to work in manufacturing industries, most of their immigration took place during the "historical period when the traditional unskilled and

semiskilled jobs, which had represented the initial step of integration to the American institutional life for a large numbers of European immigrants, were in steady decline as major economic activities in many cities and were being replaced with white-collar and professional jobs” (Padilla, 1985:43). As a consequence, for Puerto Ricans in Chicago the decrease of employment opportunities in these kinds of factories led to their “concentration in non-industrial, poorly paid, menial, dead-end jobs” (43). For instance, Elena Padilla’s (1947) study “Puerto Rican Immigrants in New York and Chicago: A Study in Comparative Assimilation” of the first group of Puerto Rican immigrants to Chicago in the 1940s, shows how many of the newcomers found employment in the restaurant business as busboys, sweepers, kitchen help, waiters, as messenger and delivery men in stockrooms and packaging areas of many stores, and as janitors (cf. Padilla, 1985: 43).

The U.S. Census of Population corroborates that during the 1960s and 1970s, most Puerto Ricans worked in the industrial sector of the city (Toro-Morn, 2001:27). Changes in the global economy during the 1980s, however, caused many factories to close their businesses and move overseas to more profitable places in the Caribbean and Central America. Ironically, Toro-Morn (2001) argues, these “industries closed their operations in Chicago to open plants in Puerto Rico, thus further cementing the links between Chicago and Puerto Rico” (21). Many Puerto Rican families were laid-off and many of them “were not able to recover economically and slipped into poverty, a problem that hit the Puerto Rican community hard in the 1980s” (Toro-Morn, 2001:27).

The effects that the relocation of manufacturing factories had on the Puerto Rican community are further discussed in Martha Tienda’s article “Puerto Ricans and the Underclass Debate” (1989). In this article, she argues that “structural factors, namely, rapidly falling

employment opportunities in jobs where Puerto Ricans traditionally have worked and the concentration of Puerto Ricans in areas experiencing severe economic dislocation, are largely responsible for their disproportionate impoverishment” in comparison to Cubans and Mexicans (Tienda, 1989:107). Furthermore, her case study shows that the “weakened labor market position of Puerto Ricans and their consequent impoverishment have roots in their placement at the bottom of an ethnic hiring queue coupled with residential concentration in a region that experienced severe economic decline and industrial restructuring after 1970” (Tienda, 1989:107).

Martha Tienda uses Stanley Lieberson’s claims that a “discriminatory hiring queue results when employers activate their prejudices and preferentially hire workers on the basis of ethnic traits rather than market skills”¹ as a way for explaining the growing inequality among Hispanic workers. For example, she states that Mexicans have been “preferred workers in agricultural jobs at least since the mid-1800s” (as opposed to Puerto Ricans who have been actively recruited in manufacturing companies) (108). For Tienda, though the “incomes of agricultural workers are low compared with those in other low-skilled jobs, when evaluated against the alternative of unemployment or nonparticipation in the labor force, agricultural work is preferable because it at least ensures some earnings” (108). As a result, the “massive industrial restructuring of the Northeast” led to the disappearance of many unskilled and unionized jobs, which in return has “dimmed the employment prospects of all Puerto Ricans” (108). This analysis is interesting and helpful in understanding why Puerto Ricans economic performance lags behind other minority groups for it draws a contrast between the jobs they have traditionally performed, the lack of those job opportunities due to de-industrialization of manufacturers, their subsequent unemployment, and the situation experienced by other minorities groups such as the Mexicans. For instance, her study shows how Mexicans, whom are

employed in other sectors of the economy which have proven to be more stable (i.e. agriculture), have been able to achieve economic security despite the low-wages earned in such industries, but that are in return preferable than no wages at all.

Gentrification and its Effect on the Puerto Rican Population of Chicago

By the late 1960s, gentrification in Lincoln Park, an attractive neighborhood near Chicago's North Side lakefront "became desirable to developers and young, white middle-class professionals" (Cruz, 2004:9). This displacement was furthered encouraged as De Paul University, McCormick Seminary, and large hospitals began to develop in this area during the 1960s (Aspira 1996; Padilla 1987). The subsequent rise in property taxes and the creation of "expensive new homes [then] forced thousands of Puerto Ricans to move from the up-scale Lincoln Park to more affordable, working-class neighborhoods" (Cruz, 2004:9).

In addition, the renewal projects undertaken during the 1960s and 1970s through the Chicago 21 Plan in order to transform the downtown area into "a regional, national and global business district" further contributed to the dislocation of Puerto Ricans (Betancur et al, 1991; Perez 2000). These renewal projects seeking to rehabilitate this area through the development of more profitable businesses and encouraging white-middle class professionals to move into this neighborhood, thus created "buffer zones" to protect the downtown area from the low income communities around it, causing the displacement of low-income Latino, African-American, and white residents (Betancur et al, 1991; Perez 2000). These buffer zones became areas economically developed in which Puerto Ricans and other low income groups had no access to because they could no longer afford the increasing property values. Puerto Ricans were also forced to move out of the Near West Side neighborhood along Harrison Street to make way for the University of Illinois at Chicago Campus (Suttles, 1968). As a result, Puerto Ricans moved into West Town and Humboldt Park, creating Chicago's first Puerto Rican *barrio*.

In the late 1990s, a new wave of redevelopment hit the city encouraged by Mayor Richard M. Daley's initiative to attract affluent whites back into the city (Flores-Gonzalez, 2001). Nonetheless, this program and the subsequent arrival of middle- and upper-class whites preoccupied community residents "who remembered how the rapid influx of affluent whites to Lincoln Park and Wicker Park preceded and precipitated the displacement of Puerto Ricans from these areas" (Flores-Gonzalez, 2001: 10). For Puerto Ricans, whose income is considerably lower than that of white-middle class professionals, the movement of this white population into their neighborhoods is preoccupying. For instance, the influx of affluent whites does not only threatens the Puerto Ricans sense of community, cultural values and lifestyle, but it also translates into higher property values that they will not be able to afford.

Census data from the 1990s supports the rapid pace in which gentrification of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago took place during this time. According, to Nilda Flores-Gonzalez (2001), West Town experienced a loss of 24.7% of its Latino population while the white rate increased by 7% in the last decade. In 1990, there were 54,361 Latinos in West Town, constituting 62% of the residents. By 2000, their numbers decreased to 40,920 or 46.8% of the population. This constituted a loss of 13,441 Latino residents in West Town. The number of white residents increased from 44,728 to 50,887 for a total gain of 6,159 white residents from 51% to 58.8 % while the black population remained stable with a 0.1% decrease (Flores-Gonzalez, 2001: 12). These statistics do not only illustrate the rapid increase of the white population in Puerto Rican neighborhoods, but also shows prove that the fears of this community are well founded for the moving of professional middle-class whites into traditionally Puerto Rican areas have historically led to the displacement of the latter group.

On the other hand, Humboldt Park “experienced a very small increase in Latino population (6.3%, probably in part absorbing those leaving West Town)” (Flores-Gonzalez, 2001: 13). Nevertheless, the communities to the north and northwest of Humboldt Park radically gained a large number of Latinos. For instance, the percentage of Latino residents in Hermosa, Avondale, and Belmont Cragin increased by 41.6%, 99.6%, and 198.1%, respectively (13). For Flores-Gonzalez (2001), although the statistics presented above do not specify that all Latinos moving to this area are Puerto Ricans, “this trend support[ed] community residents assessment that Puerto Ricans [were] moving west” into other neighborhoods such as Hermosa, Avondale, and Belmont Cragin (Flores-Gonzalez: 2001, 13).

Statistics taken in 2000 by the U.S. Bureau of the Census for the City of Chicago illustrate the displacement suffered by the Puerto Rican population from Lincoln Park and Near West Side between the 1960s, where the population was highly concentrated in this area, to the 1990s, where new renewal programs further diminished their presence in these neighborhoods. In Lincoln Park the white population in 2000 was estimated to be 84.47% while African-Americans constituted 5.31% and Hispanic 5.00%.² Similarly, the population of Hispanics in Near West Side in this same year was 9.73%, the white population constituted 24.83% and, interestingly, 52.95% of the population of this neighborhood was African-American. Facing displacement, Puerto Rican residents then relocated to West Town and Humboldt Park. The Census statistics from the year 2000, show the population of West Town to be 39.9 % white, 46.76% Hispanic and 9.32% African-Americans, while in Humboldt Park 3.15% are white, 48.01% are Hispanic and 46.6% are African-American. The statistics for both West Town and Humboldt Park further show evidence of how whites are moving to these areas by how the percent of the white population is close to that of Hispanics.

Map 4-1 presents the location of Logan Square, Humboldt Park, and West Town. These areas have been traditionally considered Puerto Rican Chicago although Puerto Ricans have continuously moved to other northwestern urban and suburban areas in and around Chicago because of gentrification.³

While the Puerto Rican community have traditionally settled in Humboldt Park, West Town, and Logan Square, the Mexican community originally settled in major areas where they newcomers found employment: (1) South Chicago (steel), (2) Back of the Yards (packing houses), and (3) Near West Side (railroad) (Padilla, 1987). Today, the Mexican community is generally concentrated in the Pilsen area, which initially developed as a “seasonal stop-over for migrating Mexican families working in the Michigan Beet fields” (Walton and Salces, 1977: 17) and La Villita [Little Village] on the Southwest Side. Map 4-2 shows the distribution of these Mexican community settlements in the 1960s. Nonetheless, what were traditional Mexican communities in the 1960s; i.e. the Near West Side and South of Chicago, statistics of the 2000 U.S. Census show that these areas have larger African-American communities, representing 52.95% and 67.63% respectively of the total population in these neighborhoods.

The concentration of Mexicans in the neighborhoods of Pilsen and La Villita has been noticed by Puerto Rican residents in Humboldt Park, who have recognized “folkloric markers” in these neighborhoods that they associate with the Mexican culture and thus have been able to identify and define these areas as Mexican (Ramos-Zaya, 2003:212). Even though these “folkloric markers” seem to provide a way to enclose the Mexican population’s presence into certain neighborhoods; however, De Genova (1998) argues, that Mexican migrants in Chicago cannot be “enclosed within a homogenous space of cultural isolation” for they also share living spaces with Puerto Ricans, African-Americans and whites in other neighborhoods despite the

fact that Pilsen or La Villita appear to be populated almost exclusively by Mexicans. This observation is important for it illustrates in other ways the effects of gentrification. For instance, it is observed that those neighborhoods, which could be in the past defined in terms of the minority group living in them, can no longer be exclusively identified as entirely Mexican or Puerto Rican. Hence, we cannot only acknowledge the movement of people across the border (i.e. from Mexico or Puerto Rico), but there is also a movement across neighborhood limits as families are displaced in search for better employment opportunities or more affordable housing. As a result, through the statistical evidence provided early in this chapter we can observe how the demographics have changed in neighborhoods that were traditionally considered Puerto Rican or Mexican communities of settlement.

Chicago's Mexican population has also increased by nearly 40% in the 1980s alone, and it is the second-largest concentration of Mexican/Chicano settlement in the United States numbering well over half a million in the metropolitan area and over 15% population within the city limits (De Genova 1998, 100). This large population's visibility and the Puerto Rican community's need to both define the geographical limits of their own communities as well as the spaces in which other minorities groups live, is achieved by locating cultural markers in specific urban locations. Consequently, they are limiting what they considered to be areas of strong Mexican heritage to areas like La Villita and Pilsen while emphasizing Humboldt Park's Puerto-Ricanness (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:212). The use of cultural markers by Puerto Ricans to identify other non-Puerto Rican communities, thus seems as an attempt to define their own neighborhoods *vis à vis* the other in order to safeguard their own sense of community and identity as well as maintaining cultural values which seem to be threatened by the presence of other minority groups who may not understand or accept their cultural pride.

African-Americans, on the other hand, are largely concentrated in the West and South Sides of the city and share common living spaces with Puerto Ricans and Mexicans alike (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:209). According to the 2000 Census of the City of Chicago, African-Americans constitute 67.63% of the South of Chicago, Hispanics 27.20% and whites 2.64%; and in the Near West Side, African-Americans comprise 52.95% of the population, Hispanics 9.73% and whites 24.83%³. Similarly, in the community of Uptown, African-Americans constitute 21.07% of the population, Hispanics 20.05% and whites 42.05%; and in the community of Garfield Park, African-Americans comprise 97.75%, Hispanics 0.96% and whites 0.59%⁴.

In addition, in the Near North Side neighborhood, African-Americans are 18.90% of the population while Hispanics are only 3.91% and 69.30% are whites, and in Woodland, African-Americans are 94.07% of the population, Hispanics 1.14%, and whites 2.78%. These statistics are significant for they illustrate the large number of African-Americans who reside in the same communities with Hispanics in areas that were traditionally considered Puerto Rican or Mexican in the 1960s. These communities include Garfield Park, Near West Side, South Chicago and Near North side. Furthermore, these population figures and changes illustrate how white middle-class professionals displaced Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, as well as African-Americans who sought affordable housing and employment opportunities. The statistics presented thus illustrate that the historical arrival of middle-class white professionals into these neighborhood between the 1960s and 1990s have changed the demographical composition of these neighborhoods and thus represent the displacement suffered by the Puerto Rican population.

Division Street/ Paseo Boricua

Following the gentrification, community organizations and business leaders founded the Humboldt Park Empowerment Partnership (HPEP) “out of concern for the impending displacement of the Puerto Rican community and previous attacks on service-oriented

organizations” (Lyndersen 2000). In addition, Puerto Rican leaders developed the Humboldt Park Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan in 1996 as an “economic initiative to develop various commercial strips around the community, increase affordable housing, maintain the Puerto Rican flavor of the community through the development of cultural landmarks” (Flores-Gonzalez, 2001: 13). This initiative from the Puerto Rican community resulted in the creation of *Paseo Boricua* along Division Street as part of the redevelopment plan.

According to Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas (2003), nationalist activists and some barrio residents explained gentrification in terms of the “invasion” of Puerto Rican space (211). The subsequent development of a community building project was referred to as *la Islita* [the little Island], “suggesting that the barrio was a surrogate Puerto Rico” (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:211). The issue at hand for barrio activists meant that the “disappearance of the community” threatened theirs and others jobs. For instance, Ramos-Zayas explains, it “was possible that workers at community-based institutions, vendors who sold their wares from rolling carts, and owners of ethnic specific businesses would not find a place in the institutions newly located in the barrio- fancy hospitals and proliferating coffee shops that were not created for Puerto Ricans” (211-212). The potential displacement of these types of ethnic-based employment generators, coupled with the elimination of job opportunities in the industrial sector, limited the Puerto Rican community’s access to alternative forms of employment and further diminished their economic success.

Puerto Ricans were also aware that Chicago Mexican migrant workers satisfied the need for cheap labor which was more easily exploited due to the workers “predicament of legal vulnerability” (De Genova 1999). This legal vulnerability was represented by the undocumented status of most Mexican workers in the United States. This is in contrast to Puerto Ricans’

citizenship status, providing them with legal rights to minimum wage and other government benefits.

While the tension with Mexicans was centered towards the latter's group ability to provide cheaper labor due to their undocumented status; with respect to African-Americans, the hostility manifested by Puerto Ricans towards this group was articulated in other terms. Puerto Rican residents "explained the growing hostility toward incoming African-American residents by focusing on the tightening housing market and the diminishing commercial opportunities in the barrio, for which they blamed blacks competition over rehabilitated neighborhood housing" (Ramos-Zaya, 2003 229). These conditions further exacerbated racial tensions for Puerto Ricans not only felt as if they had to differentiate themselves from the African-American population to not bear the same type of negative stereotypes and stigmas, but they also had to compete with them for the few available resources. Furthermore, by revisiting Chapter 3 of this research, it can be better understood that these racial tensions are also founded in the Puerto Ricans own prejudice against African-Americans and their belief in the inferiority of these people (Haslip-Viera 2001). This condition is also observed by the Puerto Ricans exaltation of their Taíno and Spanish heritage while devaluating the African contribution to their culture in the process of defining an authentic Puerto Rican identity. The previous statements are not meant to claim that Puerto Ricans are racist, but that in the white social imaginary of the U.S. and the confinement of Puerto Ricans to certain stereotypes associated with the African-American population, Puerto Ricans have made an effort to differentiate themselves from this minority group by asserting a cultural identity that is different from that of African-Americans in order to avoid the same discrimination.

Some Puerto Rican activists' belief was that "blacks won't take as good care of the Puerto Rican area as [they] would because they don't understand the symbols, struggles, and they don't experience the cultural pride [that Puerto Ricans have]" (Ramos-Zayas, 2003:230). Thus, part of the antagonism towards African-Americans came from the belief that because they are not Puerto Rican, they will not protect and be considerate towards the neighborhood as Puerto Ricans would and that their influx to their communities will be followed by a decrease in the neighborhood's safety and sense of community. In addition, Puerto Ricans believed the increasing presence of African-Americans would intensify the competition for low-paying jobs and affordable housing (Ramos-Zayas 2003).

The increasing African-American population in the "westernmost section of the Puerto Rican barrio" encouraged those residents and activists who were preoccupied by the growing African-American population in their neighborhoods to develop new grassroots efforts to protect the Puerto Rican community from imagined or tangible threats to their security and their sense of community by establishing cultural markers that would identify the neighborhood as Puerto Rican. Thus, as a response to these concerns, the unveiling of the flags on Division Street "suggests most efforts evoked nationalist symbols and rhetoric" (Ramos-Zaya, 2003:230). The establishment of the Puerto Rican flag arches, one of the proposed projects by area activists and popular education centers, was thus significant for it served as a cultural marker of the area as mainly Puerto Rican. Furthermore, other Puerto Rican symbols, -like Old San Juan *garitas* [Spanish fortress], Taíno Indian hieroglyphics, and Afro-Caribbean *vejigantes* [festival masks and costumes] – "were inscribed on steel boards that hang from Spanish-style *faroles* [light poles] along the sidewalks of Paseo Boricua" (Ramos-Zayas, 2003: 212) .

Ramón López (1995), a Chicago-based artisan and anthropologist (cf. Ramos-Zayas, 2003:14), described what the two steel flags on Division Street meant for the “culturally intimate:”

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, *coquís*, *vejigantes*... -that accompanies us in a city that belongs to another climate and whose rented walls we want to paint and ornament 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 blood shed in the history of that Island and in the pavement of this street” (López, 1995:20)

López (1995) concluded, “here in Chicago the flag is panted 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” (21). The flag monument thus represented “the oppositional resistance discourse that emerged when the validity of dominant norms was questioned from the perspective of an everyday practice that challenged belief in the depoliticized nature of the steering mechanisms of law, bureaucracy, and consumerism” (Franco, Yúdice, and Flores 1992; cf. Ramos-Zayas, 2003: 216). For Puerto Ricans this flag monument articulates a discourse of historical and political resistance in which they have defied both cultural norms which have bounded them to a second-class citizen status due to their ethnicity and the prejudice they have suffered as such, and it also serves as a statement that makes their presence in the city Chicago tangible and which needs to be considered.

The location of these steel flags on Division Street, and the marking of this area as Puerto Rican, was historic for the creation of the Chicago Puerto Rican community because it is in this area that Puerto Ricans have historically settled and where their resistance movements have been born. Furthermore, Division Street has been the location for several cultural activities and celebrations of national pride for Puerto Ricans. As one example, the annual Puerto Rican Parade is celebrated every June, ending with a procession down Division Street. It was originally celebrated as *El Día de San Juan* (St. John's Day), an event organized by *Los Caballeros de San Juan* (the Knights of St. John), one of the first Puerto Rican religious and social organizations in Chicago (Padilla 1987).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed how the Puerto Rican migration to Chicago took place extensively during the 1930s and 1940s, largely as a consequence of the de-industrialization of manufacturing cities like New York. Further, the migration was encouraged by the United State's Operation Bootstrap in the 1950s, when the U.S. sought to industrialize Puerto Rico by giving American companies incentives to transfer their factories to the island. The Project, however, failed to provide enough jobs for the growing Puerto Rican population. In addition, Puerto Rican migration wave was facilitated by the Jones Act of 1917 and the citizen status granted to all island and mainland-born Puerto Ricans, and the active recruitment by private Chicago-based employment agency such as Castle, Barton and Associates.

This chapter also addressed the issue of how Puerto Ricans migrated during a time in which employment opportunities in the sectors of the economy where most of the population had traditionally worked were decreasing. As discussed, many manufacturing companies chose to move their operations overseas in search for cheaper labor. These changes, coupled with the gentrification in neighborhoods where Puerto Ricans lived, created conditions which threatened

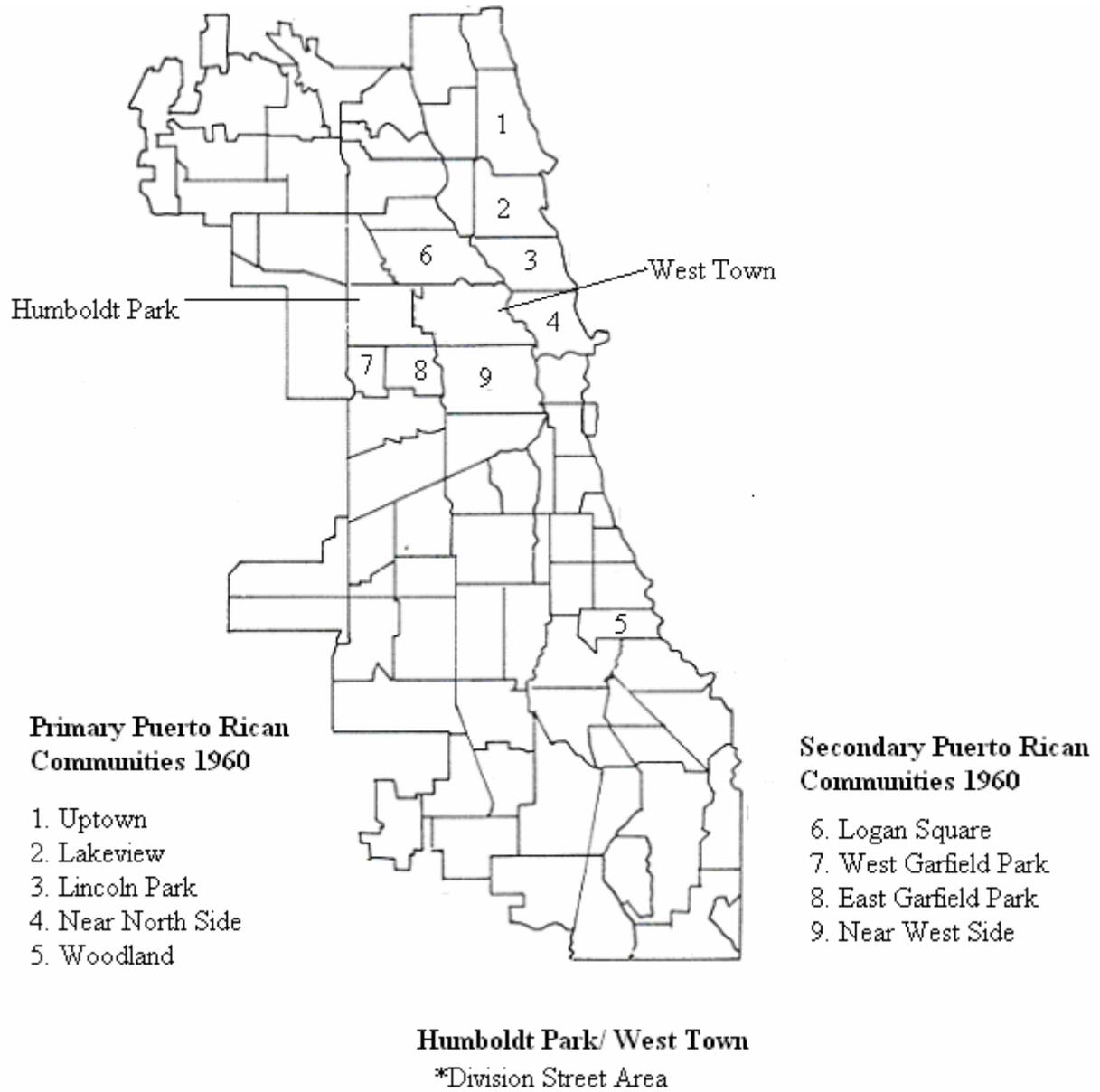
their livelihoods, as many Puerto Ricans were displaced in search of more affordable housing. Furthermore, the displacement caused by gentrification hurt ethnic-based Puerto Rican shops, because as African-Americans, whites, and other minorities moved into their neighborhoods, not only did the demographics change, but so did the needs, therefore diminishing some of the demand for these shops.

The effects of gentrification are corroborated by statistical evidence. Early Puerto Ricans migrants had moved into different neighborhoods such as Woodlawn, the Near North Side, Lake View, Lincoln Park, Uptown, West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, and the Near West Side. However, by the 1960s most Chicago Puerto Ricans were concentrated in Lincoln Park, West Town, and Humboldt Park, and later in the 1990s, most Puerto Ricans were displaced from Lincoln Park and are now mainly concentrated in Humboldt Park, West Town, and Logan Square (Ramos-Zayas 2003). The effects of gentrification were also felt by Mexicans, who, in the 1960s were concentrated in both Near West Side and South Chicago, but, by the 1990s had left, as the population of these neighborhoods had become majority African-American.

In addition, it was observed how gentrification, the tightening housing market and the decrease of job opportunities for Puerto Ricans exacerbated racial tensions between Puerto Ricans and African Americans. Puerto Ricans became concerned with the influx of African-Americans, fearing it would have a negative impact on the neighborhood's safety, and that it would also diminish the Puerto Ricans sense of community. In response to these changes Puerto Ricans worked in creating a physical space, what Ramos-Zayas (2003) has called a "surrogate Puerto Rico" along Division Street, which in return serves as an identifiable cultural marker of where the Puerto Rican community is present. The steel flags monument also articulates a discourse of resistance in a city where Puerto Ricans have had a historical presence and where

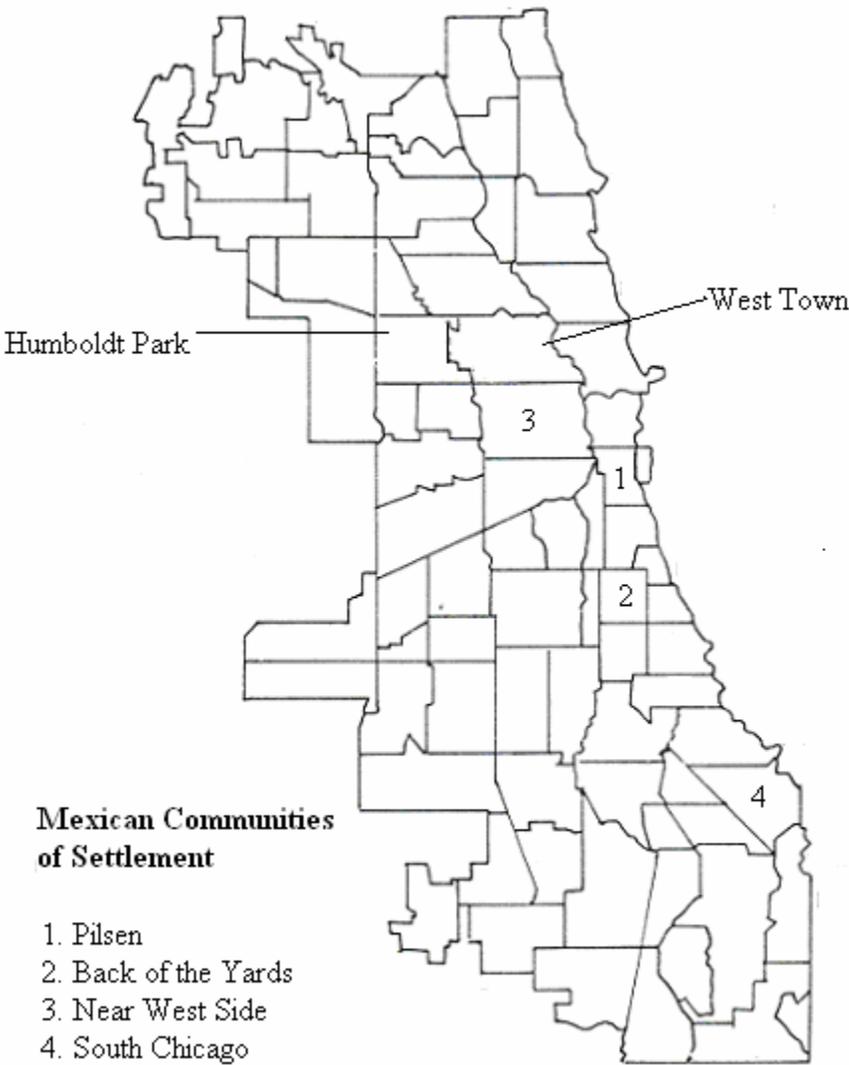
they continue to struggle to both preserve their community and provide better lives for their families.

MAP 4-1
 PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITIES OF SETTLEMENT IN THE 1960s²



² Adapted from: Padilla, Felix M. 1985. *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. p. 41.

MAP 4-2
MEXICAN COMMUNITIES OF SETTLEMENT IN THE 1960s³



³ Adapted from: Padilla, Felix M. 1985. *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. p. 21

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¹ See Stanley Lieberson. 1980. *A Piece of the Pie*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (cf. Tienda, Martha, 1989:108).

² Though these statistic do not specify the percentage of Puerto Ricans within the Hispanic population in this area, and considering that Lincoln Park was traditionally an area in which Puerto Ricans were concentrated prior to 1960s, the effects of gentrification are observed by the high percentage of the white population in this neighborhood in comparison to African Americans and Hispanics.

³ Source: Ramos-Zayas, Ana Y. 2003. *National Performance: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 45.

* The Map is Courtesy of the Department of Planning and Development, City of Chicago.

⁴ Consider, in the 1960s, both Near West Side and South Chicago were Mexican community settlements.

⁵ Interestingly, in 1960s East and West Garfield Park were considered traditional Puerto Rican community settlements and in the 2000 Census, the percentage of African Americans constitutes almost the entire population of this are, while Hispanics and whites' population is minimal.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to address broadly the question of why Puerto Ricans have been less successful to advance than other Latino groups or other minority groups in the United States by understanding social and cultural characteristics of this group, as well the nature of their migration and how certain structural and social factors (such as the employment market, gentrification, their racialization in the U.S. white/black dichotomy, etc) have limited, if not inhibited, their ability to advance in the American society.

It was thus observed how the first large wave of Puerto Rican migrants were skilled/urban laborers arriving between 1900 and 1945 and during this period, they were actively recruited as cheap labor for the manufacturing industries in New York City following the first and second world wars. The second large wave of Puerto Rican migrants came during the 1950s and 1960s and was mostly unskilled/rural workers, displaced by the decline of U.S. export-oriented agriculture on the Island (Grosfoguel, 2003:140). Puerto Ricans upon migration to the mainland were “subjected to extremely negative discriminatory public opinion [as well as] overcrowded and dilapidated housing, a lack of institutional support for education, and poor medical services” (140).

In addition, Puerto Ricans migrating to the U.S. had to take the jobs available to them regardless of their skills, and were considered a cheap labor force until the 1960s’ civil and labor rights movement made them “unaffordable” to manufacturing companies, namely because of their citizenship status and the rights entitled to them because of citizenship. It was also discussed how Puerto Ricans migrated during a time in which employment opportunities in jobs where this population had traditionally worked were decreasing, as manufacturing companies began to move their operations overseas in search for cheaper labor. These changes, coupled

with the gentrification process undertaken in neighborhoods in Chicago where Puerto Ricans lived, created conditions which threatened their livelihoods as they were displaced in search of more affordable housing. Furthermore, gentrification and the displacement of Puerto Ricans threatened ethnic-based Puerto Rican shops that addressed community needs. As more African-Americans, whites, and other minorities moved into traditional Puerto Rican neighborhoods, they changed the nature of these shops and diminished the need for them.

It was also observed how gentrification, the tightening housing market and the decrease of job opportunities for Puerto Ricans exacerbated racial tensions as Puerto Ricans increasingly felt competition with African-Americans for the few resources available to them. Further, Puerto Ricans became concerned that the influx of African-Americans would have a negative impact on their neighborhood's safety and would affect their sense of community.

This research also discussed briefly how Puerto Rican migration to the mainland can be argued to be circular in nature. Some scholars have claimed that "circular" practices allow for the creation of "dual home bases" and "mobile livelihoods practices," providing a "flexible survival strategy" for Puerto Ricans in response to their declining livelihoods and their poor living conditions (Pérez, 2004, Duany, 2002). On the other hand, scholars believe that these processes hinder their participation in labor market, as well as inhibit employment advancement; these processes also disrupt families, as children and women have to adapt and learn "traditional Puerto Rican cultural values" in order to be accepted in the community (Perez, 2004). Similarly, the lack of U.S. government-funded programs tailored to help those Puerto Ricans who first migrated to successfully incorporate into the American economy, and the subsequent racial segregation and limited affordable housing for Puerto Ricans, has perpetuated their marginalization in this society.

As it was also observed, Puerto Rican identity and national discourse is founded around three historical roots: the Taíno Indian, the African, and the Spanish, and the subsequent mestizaje between these groups. Moreover, it was discussed how Puerto Ricans at different times choose what root to emphasize to navigate the racial discourse in both the U.S. and on the island, and that those roots have also served as a form of resistance. Hence, they have exalted their Taíno past against the Spanish colonial rule, then exalted their Spanish blood to resist American imperialism, and later would recognize their African ancestry to find allegiances with African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, it was discussed that by asserting their Puerto Rican identity, Puerto Ricans on the mainland attempt to first, differentiate themselves from the African-Americans to avoid carrying similar stigmas of oppression and prejudice; and secondly, asserting Puerto Rican identity provides a sense of belonging, as Puerto Ricans are viewed as “the other” in the American social imaginary and as such they are rejected even though they are fellow American citizens.

Though the conclusions of this research are primarily based on qualitative data, by using some statistical evidence it has been observed that Puerto Ricans are indeed trailing behind other groups in certain areas such as employment, earnings, education, etc. Furthermore, the statistics used on this research have also illustrated the displacement of Puerto Rican communities by gentrification in the city of Chicago. In addition, these chapters utilize socio-cultural factors in order to explain how structural and institutional restraints have affected the ability of Puerto Ricans to achieve upward mobility. Thus, we can draw parallels between the characteristics of the population which first migrated, their subsequent marginalization and discrimination as a result of the prejudice present in a white/black dichotomous society, as well as economic

changes in the global economy which caused de-industrialization of major cities such as New York and Chicago and caused unemployment among this population group.

The factors discussed earlier can thus be closely linked to their impoverishment, which in return, causes Puerto Ricans to move to urban ghettos where opportunities for second and third generations to have access to proper education are less than ideal. What is then observed is what some anthropologists have called the cycle of poverty; in this context the marginalization suffered by first migrants has been reproduced by later generations of Puerto Ricans and few have been able to break away from such cycle.

In general, finding an answer to the question of why Puerto Ricans have been less successful to advance than other Latino groups or other minority groups in the United States is not an easy task and there are no absolute answers. As it was discussed there exists a variety of variables that have contributed to the marginalization of this minority group in the U.S. and this research has thus presented a link between social and institutional factors that can help explain the issue at hand. Nonetheless, further quantitative research of this population specific to the area of Chicago needs to be performed so that we can adequately and accurately compare Puerto Ricans to other minority groups in this city and shed light on how statistical data, coupled with the qualitative findings discussed in this research, can provide a better understanding of this population, and their struggles, and perhaps identify what can be done in order to help them achieve better livelihoods and succeed in American society.

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