

TALES OF LATINOS IN THREE SMALL CITIES:

**Latino settlement and incorporation in Lawrence and Holyoke,
Massachusetts and in Providence, Rhode Island**

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Up until recently, New England was characterized by ethnic diversity but significant racial homogeneity. Over the last 50 years, African-American migration from the South and the immigration of Latinos and Asians has changed that, at least for the Southern New England states. Massachusetts and Rhode Island are experiencing a new racial and ethnic diversity that is challenging social, political, and economic institutions, bringing New England closer to the experience of other areas of the Northeast.

This paper focuses on the settlement experience of Latinos in New England, the largest non-white group in the region,¹ and its implications for social integration and political empowerment. Specifically, it discusses the experience of Latinos who, in contrast to the historic settlement pattern of dense concentrations in large urban areas, are forming big *barrrios* in small cities and towns.² In New England, this pattern of growth and dispersal of the Latino population, away from the traditional big urban cores, appears firmly established. For example, as of 2000, Latinos made up 7% (428,729) of Massachusetts' population; only about 20% of them live in Boston. The rest are distributed in small cities and towns across the state, where, in some cases, they account for large percentages of the population, as in Lawrence (60%), Chelsea (45%), and Holyoke (42%). Similarly, a large population of Latinos has settled in Providence and Central Falls (RI), where they represent 30% and 47% of the population, respectively.³

This change, which is slowly becoming the pattern in other areas of the country as well,⁴ is worth noting because it seems to be accompanied by differences in the process of social and political integration. Traditional theories of social and political integration postulate that immigrants tend to settle and form enclaves in large urban cores where spatial concentration and their "thick fabric" of social, political, and cultural organizations paves the way to political enfranchisement and empowerment.⁵ Dispersal into the suburbs takes place as immigrants acquire socio-economic mobility and political power. These maxims bear a great deal of empirical support, as shown by a

huge number of studies on the political and social incorporation of immigrant and ethnic/racial groups in American cities.⁶

The literature on the incorporation of Latinos has run somewhat counter to traditional wisdom—particularly literature that analyzes the patterns of incorporation of Latinos in the Northeast in the latter part of the 20th Century. The effect of urban development policies and entrenched patterns of residential segregation have altered the “normal rhythm” of immigrant settlements; the restructured economies that greeted Latinos fixed them in niches that did not easily promote upward mobility; the organizational environment was greatly dominated by Latinos’ use of the opportunities offered by the social policy and community development programs that were characteristics of the 1960’s, 1970’s, and 1980’s.⁷ Overall, the direction of Latino integration in the large Northeastern cities was not necessarily toward assimilation and suburbanization in subsequent generations, but rather toward, at best, an uneven incorporation and significant residential segregation and social exclusion.

Our look at the path of settlement and incorporation of Latinos in smaller cities reveals that these new communities do not fit easily into either paradigm. The new Latino settlements do not appear to represent solely a “spill-over” or a process of suburbanization from larger urban areas. Rather, migration to these small cities is also direct and often bypasses the “big city.” Also, immigrants into these small towns do not seem to reflect the flight of upwardly mobile sectors from the city. For Latinos in New England who have bypassed the “big city” experience, settlement in these small cities and towns has meant high rates of poverty, even relative to the “big-city Latinos.”⁸ Yet, after many years of extreme social isolation, exclusion, and struggle, Latinos appear to be making inroads to political power in these smaller cities.

In this paper, we focus on the settlement and path of social and political incorporation of Latinos in three small cities in Southern New England: Lawrence and Holyoke (MA), and Providence (RI). Lawrence is an old mill town of some 73,000 people near the border with New Hampshire. Latinos—Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and small groups of other Latinos—began to arrive in Lawrence in large numbers in the early 1970’s and currently represent 60% of the population. Holyoke is another former mill town of some 40,000 people located in Western Massachusetts close to Springfield. The city’s Latino population, almost entirely Puerto Rican, grew rapidly during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Currently, Latinos represent 42% of the population. Providence experienced a brisk expansion of its Latino population the late 1980’s and 1990’s and today over 52,000 Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Central Americans live in the city, accounting for 30% of its population. The findings reported here arise from

already existing extensive case studies of these communities,⁹ supplemented by 2000 Census data and interviews with community leaders conducted for this paper.¹⁰

We present the “tales of the three cities” organized around six findings:

1. Settlements in these small cities developed out of various migratory streams that include both direct migration from Latinos’ countries of origin and internal migration from other U.S. cities.
2. Latinos have experienced an uneasy fit into the economies of these small cities. Latinos have been incorporated into the dying manufacturing and the low-end service sectors of the economies of Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence. As a result, wages are low and poverty rates are among the highest in the region.
3. In all three cities, Latinos are highly concentrated in specific neighborhoods, where they have lived since they initially settled. They have faced urban renewal and displacement, but contrary to the situation of Latinos in large urban areas, they have managed to remain.
4. The social incorporation of Latinos in these small cities has been strongly contested by established residents and institutions. This dynamic has been affected by federal devolution in two fundamental ways:
 - a. It has affected local governments’ capacity (and willingness) to serve a rapidly changing and demographically different population.
 - b. It has affected the ability of Latinos to form the types of service-oriented organizations that have characterized the organizational environment (and might) of Latinos in large cities.
5. There is an independent, community-sustained social organization of Latinos in these small cities, although it varies greatly in its density, layering, and self-sufficiency. In some cities, community-based, culturally-oriented organizations have been a base for active political organization.
6. Although Latinos in all three cities have all increased their political representation, perhaps with Providence being the most successful, the keys (or strategies) to such an increase appear to be: (1) recurrent challenging of the local political machine (Holyoke); (2) the channeling of activism of the small community organizations into a pan-Latino framework for collective action (Providence and Lawrence); and (3) the management of intra-Latino differences or tensions (Lawrence and Providence).

1. The roads to small cities: Immigration and internal migration.

The prodigious growth of immigration from Latin America to the US during the 1980’s and 1990’s, and the specific characteristics of the regional economy, have propelled the formation and expansion of Latino settlements in Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence. Conventional wisdom would point to the Borges Mendez and Uriarte

creation of these settlements as “spill-overs” from Springfield, Hartford, Boston, and even New York City and in fact the findings underscore the importance of this as a factor. But, the evidence also reflects that Latino migrants and immigrants made their way to these cities directly, and through a variety of pathways that often bypassed the large cities, attracted (often recruited) by the specific characteristics of the regional economy.

People of Latin American descent have lived in New England since, at least, the mid 1800’s. The census of 1860 noted the presence of about four hundred Mexicans, South Americans, and natives of various islands in Boston,¹¹ and historical records in Rhode Island point to a somewhat latter arrival of Puerto Ricans, who by 1920 had already made their way to Providence.¹² The small population grew very slowly over the next 100 years. For instance, in 1960, the U.S. Census reported a total of 5,217 Puerto Ricans living in Massachusetts. Other figures for Massachusetts suggest lower numbers..¹³ Sparse data for Rhode Island seems to suggest that the numbers would be significantly smaller.

The volume of the migration to Massachusetts and Rhode Island changed dramatically in the second half of the 20th century. In the years between 1960 and 2000, the Latino population in Massachusetts grew from about 5,000 to almost half a million persons. Between 1980 and 1990, Massachusetts was one of the five states with the highest rate of growth of Latinos.¹⁴ In Rhode Island, the growth started later but by 2000 there were 90,820 Latinos. The makeup of the Latino population has also evolved. For most of the period, Puerto Ricans have been the largest group in the New England region, as well as in the three cities under study. Today (2000), although changing rather fast in Lawrence and Providence, they account for about 88% of the Latino population of Holyoke, about 37% of that of Lawrence and about one quarter (24.3%) of the Latino population of Providence. Dominicans are the second largest group in the region; they account for 28% of the Latino population of Providence and almost 38% of that of Lawrence. Central and South Americans, primarily Guatemalans and Colombians, make up the rest of the population of Providence.

Several phenomena converge to create the prodigious growth of the Latino population, its growing diversity, and its presence in small cities. The first has to do with the evolution of U.S. policy

Table 1. Growth of the Latino Population, Massachusetts (1960-2000) and Rhode Island (1980-2000)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Massachusetts	5,217	64,680	141,043	287,561	428,729
Rhode Island	NA	NA	19,707	45,752	90,820

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census

toward Puerto Rico and the use of Puerto Rican migrants in the economic transformation of the Eastern seaboard. U.S. capital investment in the island, through a program known as *Operation Bootstrap*, resulted in the accelerated industrialization of the island's economy, the destruction of agriculture, and massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States,¹⁵ just as northern cities in the U.S. were demanding low-wage labor for their dying urban industries. The migration of Puerto Ricans from the island formally constitutes a process of internal migration (not immigration), since Puerto Ricans are United States citizens by birth. Between 1945 and 1965, over half a million Puerto Ricans—about half of the active workforce of the island—migrated to the United States.¹⁶ Although the settlement of Puerto Ricans in New England began with seasonal agricultural workers who dropped out of the migrant stream and settled in urban areas of New England, the bulk of the Puerto Rican presence in the region is due to the recruitment of workers by industries after World War II. At first the recruitment responded to a brief expansion of this sector after World War II, but soon Puerto Rican became the labor pool for the dying industries in the region. Studies of the time speculate that the more active recruitment was the work of large employers and that the smaller employers benefited from the migration stream initiated by the larger ones.¹⁷

The second factor that affects the growth and diversity of the population is the presence of an increasing number of immigrants from Latin America, propelled by both a more lenient U.S. immigration policy and a series of economic and political crises in their countries of origin. Dominicans, the second largest group in the region, accelerated their rates of migration after the U.S. military intervention in the mid 1960's and consolidated their flow in the aftermath of neoliberal structural reform policies

Table 2. Distribution of the Latino Population by Ethnic Group

	Holyoke		Lawrence		Providence	
	2000	% of	2000	% of	2000	% of
	Total	Latinos	Total	Latinos	Total	Latinos
Latino	16,485	100.0%	43,019	100.0%	52,146	100%
Puerto Rican	14,539	88.2%	15,816	37%	12,712	24%
Mexican	85	0.5%	316	1%	2,237	4%
Cuban	58	0.4%	408	1%	468	1%
Other	1,803	10.9%	26,479	62%	36,729	70%
Dominican	168	1.0%	16,186	38%	14,638	28%
Central Am.	57	0.3%	1,001	2%	8,011	15%
South Am.	247	1.5%	725	2%	2,241	4%

Sources: U.S. Dept. of Commerce. US Bureau of the Census, Summary Tape File 1, 2000.

implemented during the 1980' and 1990's. Close to 1/5 of the population of the island has migrated to the U.S. in the last 40 years.¹⁸ The presence in New England of labor migrants from the Dominican Republic began in the late 1960's as workers came north from New York City to labor in the remaining industries in Rhode Island and Massachusetts: the manufacturing shops in Boston and Chelsea, the textile factories in Lawrence, the shoe factories in Lynn, the leather factories in Salem and Peabody, and the jewelry and textile industries in Providence and Central Falls.¹⁹

Although most Dominicans arrive legally from the Dominican Republic or via New York City, limitations on the quotas of U.S. visas allotted to the country force many Dominicans to be undocumented. Accounts from the period reveal that Puerto Rico and New York City are often intermediate stops between Santo Domingo and Providence, Boston, and Lawrence: would-be immigrants travel to Puerto Rico under the guise of tourism and then proceed to New York City's large Dominican community.²⁰ From there they make their way north. Undocumented status makes immigrant workers more vulnerable to abuse in the workplace and in housing. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 and the Immigration Act of 1990 provided avenues for the legalization of undocumented workers. But for many years the precarious legal situation of undocumented Dominicans in the region was a barrier to their incorporation into the economic, social, and political life of the communities in which they live.

Great diversity in causes and conditions of immigration also characterize recent immigrants from Central and South America. The presence of these groups has exploded in the 1980's and 1990's. Most Salvadoreans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans came north escaping war, repression, and economic hardship during this period. Colombians, on the other hand, include small groups of long-term legal immigrants who came to work in hospitals or in higher education or as skilled workers in textiles and jewelry manufacturing, as well as a more recent large migration of mostly undocumented immigrants who have come to the US escaping the violence in their country.

Interview and focus-group accounts underscore that Latinos came to Providence and Lawrence both directly from their country of origin and from other cities in the U.S. Direct migration from their country of origin appeared to be most common among Central and South Americans. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have more experience in other areas, and the initial settler from a family usually starts his or her life in the U.S. in New, York, Hartford, or Boston. But the presence of industrial work and the networks of family reunification are strong pulls for other family members who now come directly to the smaller city. Living in smaller cities is also attractive because of the perception that they are safer and more tranquil than large cities, according to focus-group informants.²¹

2. A poor local/regional economic fit: Latinos and economic restructuring in New England.

Although, clearly, the formation of Latino settlements in these small cities responds to the specific dynamic of immigrant flows from the different Latin American nations, the particular characteristics of the local and regional economy and ways Latinos fit into those economies have also been critical factors. Puerto Ricans and other Latinos have been the labor power of fading New England industries for almost half a century, helping to breathe some life into this dying sector. These jobs, however, are characterized by instability, low wages, and poor working conditions, and have meant high rates of poverty for Latinos in the region. The restructured economy's high tech and biotechnology industries have largely bypassed Latinos, who in the new economy are concentrated in the low end of the service sector.

Table 3. Percentage of Latino Individuals Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence Below the Federal Poverty Line, 1969-1999*

	1969	1979	1989	1999
Massachusetts				
Latinos	22.4%	37.6%	36.7%	29.8%
Whites	8.0%	8.4%	7.0%	7.4%
Blacks	25.6%	25.3%	23.0%	21.2%
Rhode Island				
Latinos	N/A	N/A	30.4%	36.1%
Whites	N/A	N/A	8.0%	8.9%
Blacks	N/A	N/A	25.8%	29.5%
Lawrence				
Latinos	20.4%	45.4%	45.5%	31.2%
Whites	11.4%	15.6%	18.5%	17.7%
Blacks	19.7%	21.5%	33.0%	29.0%
Holyoke				
Latinos	27.3%	59.9%	59.1%	47.3%
Whites	14.7%	13.1%	13.7%	16.7%
Blacks	28.4%	43.5%	42.8%	34.6%
Providence				
Latinos	N/A	N/A	36.5%	40.7%
Whites	N/A	N/A	17.7%	22.7%
Blacks	N/A	N/A	31.1%	33.2%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1970 Census of the Population. Detailed Population Characteristics: Massachusetts; U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1980 Census of the Population. Detailed Population Characteristics: Massachusetts. PC80-1-D23; U.S. 1990 Census of the Population and Housing. Summary Social, Economic and Housing Characteristics: Massachusetts.; U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2000. STF3/STF4.

New England had led the nation in the process of industrialization but by the time Latinos arrived in the region it had already undergone several waves of de-industrialization. By the end of the 1970's, the new industrial structure of New England (and especially Massachusetts) consisted of five sectors: (1) declining labor-intensive, mill-based industries employing tractable labor and old technologies; (2) surviving mill-based industries producing mainly consumption goods through a combination of product specialization, substantial mechanization, computerization, and the use of relatively cheap sources of labor; (3) subcontracting manufacturing firms making capital goods for domestic and foreign producers; (4) high-tech firms making computers and peripherals and a wide variety of military, scientific, and medical equipment; and (5) expanding service sectors. Except for the 1982 recession, economic expansion continued until the late 1980's, mostly in Massachusetts—investing the state with the image of “Economic Miracle.”²²

Through the 1950's and 1960's, Latinos were making their way into the rapidly declining manufacturing industries, or into the still viable mostly labor-intensive manufacturing that remained in areas such as Lawrence and other mill towns: shoes, garments, paper and cardboard, and a few into electrical appliances and equipment. Notwithstanding, their insertion was precarious since the sector truly did not promise any long-term prospects of mobility, although it solved the problems of immediate employment.

During the 1970's and 1980's, Latinos were hardly able to enter the growing segments of the booming New England economy, especially in Massachusetts. The Miracle to a large extent was primarily a phenomenon reduced to some cities along Route 128, which left untouched other parts of the state and the region. Also, the over-concentration of Latinos in declining and obsolete manufacturing is one the factors that may explain why Latino poverty in Massachusetts and the region, including Rhode Island, exploded in the 1980's. In the 1980's, Latinos in Massachusetts showed the highest poverty rate of Latinos in any other state (Table 3). Latinos also doubled in number during the 1980–90 decade (Table 1). In 1970, 29% of the whites and 26% of the blacks in Massachusetts were employed in manufacturing, and 38% of the employed Latinos were in that sector. By 1980, the percentage of whites and blacks in manufacturing as a share of each group's total employment had decreased to 26% and 23% respectively; for Latinos, the share had increased to 42%. Boston aside, the concentration of Latinos in manufacturing in selected standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSAs) was even higher. For instance, in 1980 in the Lawrence-Haverhill SMSA, 37% of the whites and 58% of the blacks employed had manufacturing jobs; of the total number of Latinos employed, 72% were employed in manufacturing.²³

The decline of manufacturing dominated the employment picture of New England, Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence (RI) at least from 1967 until 1988.²⁴ During the same period, service jobs expanded continually, though at a slower pace than in other cities of the region like Boston, Worcester, and Springfield. In Rhode Island, this troublesome encounter between Latino growth, and declining manufacturing mostly took place during the 1988–1998 decade. During that decade, while manufacturing was losing 33.5% of its jobs, 43.1% of Latinos became concentrated in it, with some 29% employed in services, and the rest dispersed in rather marginal numbers through other sectors.²⁵ In occupational terms, this seclusion into declining manufacturing has translated into concentration in low-skill occupations with little prospect for upward mobility, moreover in a sector that continues to decline. For example, in Rhode Island in 2000 about 41.9% of Latinos were operators, and laborers. In Holyoke, and Lawrence, for which more recent data are available than for Providence, occupational diversification among Latinos has taken place, yet still 33.6%, and 35.1% respectively were laborers. In both cases, these are significantly higher shares than for the total population. Occupational data for the 1990's shows that there are new avenues opening for Latinos, although for the most part these are in low-skill, low-wage occupations: clerical, sales, and personal services.²⁶

Both at the macro level and within factories, Latinos became a “good labor match” between tractable labor and a patchwork of modernizing, declining, or downsizing manufacturing. During the 1970–1990 period Latinos were either recruited or hired in manufacturing when the sector was modernizing and restructuring in order to downsize or liquidate operations. More specifically, Latinos found little entry into the high-tech firms of the region, but they became a preferred source of labor to ride the decline or to extend the life of struggling labor-intensive manufacturing, especially in cities like Holyoke, Lawrence, and Providence.

Has this story of regional/local labor market insertion continued into the 1990's, and into the current recession? Has the almost 10-year expansion period of 1993–2001 seemed to have changed the terms of local/regional insertion for Latino immigrants? In this period, the Massachusetts economy underwent an expansion²⁷ fueled by the growth of the knowledge-based economy in high-tech, bio-tech, and financial services, which this time around seems to have been even more closely integrated into the economy of the immediate Boston area and Cambridge, with some employment and growth spill-over into the Northern suburbs but not as far as Lawrence.²⁸ In Massachusetts, the knowledge-based economy and the internal sophistication of the sector created a profile of jobs that are not likely to be filled by Latinos, especially given the high educational requirements those jobs demand. In Rhode Island, decline in manufacturing has apparently continued to worsen the economic outlook for Latinos,

even when jobs have become available in the service (and education) industries, especially in Providence.²⁹

The year 2001 marked “the end of a ten-year economic expansion for the nation and the New England”: over the course of 2001, New England lost 84,700 jobs on net across six states.³⁰ This 1.2% contraction was the region’s first since 1992, and was larger than the 0.8% decline seen nationwide.”³¹ Manufacturing in the region shed “6.6% of its jobs region wide, its largest cut since 1991 (although lower than the nation).”³² Massachusetts showed “the steepest decline in non-farm employment among the six New England states,” after nine years of consecutive growth.³³ In Rhode Island, the downturn has been no better where manufacturing “experienced a sharp descent, dropping 5,200 jobs.”³⁴

Caught in this roller-coaster ride, Latinos barely hold on. In the 1990’s, Latinos apparently derived some benefits from the overall economic bonanza. Poverty rates in the three cities, according to the 2000 Census, dropped significantly, as can be seen in Table 5. Still, however, the rates remain way high, as well as the gap with the rest of the population. In Lawrence, close to a third of Latino individuals are below the federal poverty line and way over a third in Holyoke and Providence are below such a line. In Holyoke, after the most prolonged period of economic expansion in the post-WWII era, an astounding 47.3% of the Latino population remains below the poverty line, making the city the poorest of the Commonwealth. Although in the last decade Latinos have experienced both occupational and sectoral diversification, the persistence of high rates of poverty makes it difficult to argue that they have been able to improve their “local/regional fit.”

3. Dense concentration in specific neighborhoods: The struggle for spatial integrity and continuity.

In all three cities, Latinos have been highly concentrated in specific neighborhoods, where they have lived since they initially settled. They have faced urban renewal and displacement, and “benign urban neglect.” But contrary to the situation of Latinos in large urban areas (for the most part), they have managed to remain. “Staying in place,” preserving the spatial integrity of the initial *colonias* and of to-be *barrios*, has been critical to spinning several territorially-based as well as cultural organizations. It has also provided an anchor to the growing Latino population base of the cities. The process, however, is far more complex and rich than the dry dynamics of “neighborhood replacement,” strongly marked by “white flight” (mainly in Holyoke and Lawrence). The process has been fraught with conflict, mostly in Holyoke and Lawrence, and to a large extent illustrates the tensions of social and political incorporation in the cities. It is worthwhile noting that the urban form of

all three cities bears strongly similar features, influenced by the layout required for large-scale textile manufacturing, including railroad lines, water canals for power generation, large and long multi-story buildings to house looms, and a clear class division between working-class quarters on the one hand and middle-class and industrial bourgeoisie Victorian houses on the other. As a matter of fact, Lawrence and Holyoke were planned and built as manufacturing cities by the same group of industrialists during the first two decades of the 19th century. Providence, as capital and port city, and bigger in scale, has other distinct features.

Struggle for Spatial Integrity in Holyoke. Latinos in Holyoke settled in the southern part of the city—in the predominantly Irish neighborhood known as “The Flats” and in French-Canadian South Holyoke. They concentrated in these neighborhoods for a number of reasons, mainly related to the overall ecology of decline that had embroiled the city. First, housing tended to be cheaper in these areas, and their relative proximity to the center of the city offered easy access to hospitals, churches, shops, and workplaces. The housing stock in these neighborhoods was made of multi-unit buildings and tenements built at the turn of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries by companies and mill owners to house immigrant textile and paper mill workers. A sizable portion of this stock had fallen in disregard. Second, since the late 1940’s some of the housing in these neighborhoods had been vacated by previous immigrants who moved to other areas within the city, or to surrounding towns as a result of having achieved some socioeconomic mobility during the immediate post-WW II bonanza and through educational opportunities offered by the GI Bill. Thus, in spite of socially disliking the incoming new Latino tenants, some landlords were economically relieved by Latino occupancy.

From the late 1960’s on, the city mounted several campaigns either to remove or to stop the process of Latino communal expansion, albeit unsuccessfully. We discuss this confrontation in a section below in greater detail. For Latinos, the story of remaining in those neighborhoods has unraveled through three phases of protracted confrontation with City Hall during a period of some 20 years. The first phase of urban renewal, which took place between the mid-1960’s and early 1970’s, sought to remove Puerto Ricans from the Flats, and targeting French-Canadian South Holyoke for industrial redevelopment. A second (1970–75) and a third phase (1975–early 1980’s) targeted the same areas with campaigns of “building code enforcement” with CBDG grants administered by the city. The protracted process threw the neighborhoods into a tailspin of arson, demolition, abandonment, and environmental decay, from which until this day they have yet to recover. Between 1969 and 1983, city government enforced the demolition of about 4,200 housing units, wiping out over a third of the city’s total rental housing supply and over half of the total rental units in the four Borges Mendez and Uriarte

census tracts that make up South Holyoke, where Puerto Ricans were and continue to be concentrated.³⁵

Nevertheless, an analysis of the distribution of Latinos in census tracts in Holyoke shows spatial continuity and consolidation. Holyoke is divided in eight Census Tracts. In 1970, in all eight tracts whites represented between 80–100% of the population, and in all of them Latinos represented between 0–19% of the population. Through the 1970's and 1980, Latinos slowly “climbed the ladder of concentration.” By 1990, only three of such tracts had white shares between 80–100%. Latinos in one tract had reached the 80–100% plateau, and in three more tracts they represented over 40% of the population. Those four tracts comprise South Holyoke. The 2000 Census, still under analysis, seems to point to Latinos growing in number in those tracts and beginning to move and to enter into the Northern area of the city, traditionally off-limits (2000 Census Tract Data to be added soon). (Table 9). From this spatial platform, Latinos have moved to spin some of its most important institutions in the city, like *Nueva Esperanza* CDC, which we describe in a further section.

Out of sight and neglected in Lawrence and Providence. In contrast, the process of concentration of Latinos in neighborhoods in Lawrence and Providence has been less contentious. In both places, Latinos did not settle in a section of the city slated for urban renewal or transformation; in other words, they did not occupy valued real estate and thus the concentration took place without significant interference.

In Lawrence, the paucity of urban renewal initiatives and municipal neglect allowed Latinos to plant roots in several neighborhoods and housing projects in the Northern part of the City, albeit under heavy ostracism which made living conditions deteriorate as years went by. Latinos settled in the mainly Irish Lower Tower Hill and the Italian Newbury Street neighborhoods.³⁶ In Lawrence, Model Cities monies and CBDG funding went into constructing high-rise buildings for the retiring old white ethnic population. Thus, Latinos were not as much faced with fighting “the bulldozer,” but with the constant harassment of “*los guardias* (the police)” and of other local institutions. The extent of the concentration, as in Holyoke, can be further appreciated at the Census Tract level. Lawrence is divided into 18 Census Tracts. In 1970, in all 18 tracts whites represented between 80–100% of the population, and in all of them Latinos represented between 0-19.9% of the population. Through the 1970's and 1980's, Latinos slowly “climbed the ladder of concentration.” By 1990, only two of such tracts had white shares between 80–100%. Latinos in one tract had reached the 80–100% plateau, and in ten more tracts they represented over 40% of the population. In 5 tracts, Latinos represented

Table 4. Distribution of Census Tracts by Share of P.R.–Latino and White Populations, 1970–1990

	Lawrence				Holyoke				Providence		
	1970	1980	1990		1970	1980	1990		1970	1980	1990
% White				% White				% White			
80–100%	18	11	2	80–100%	8	5	3	80–100%	29	25	18
60–79.9%		6	3	60–79.9%		1	2	60–79.9%	2	12	8
40–59.9%		1	5	40–59.9%		2	1	40–59.9%	6	6	4
20–39.9%			7	20–39.9%			1	20–39.9%		4	6
0–19.9%			1	0–19.9%			2	0–19.9%			1
Total Tracts	18	18	18	Total Tracts	8	8	9	Total Tracts	37	37	37
	1970	1980	1990		1970	1980	1990		1970	1980	1990
% Latino				% Latino				% Latino			
80–100%			1	80–100%			1	80–100%	N.A		
60–79.9%			5	60–79.9%			2	60–79.9%	N.A		
40–59.9%		3	5	40–59.9%		2	1	40–59.9%	N.A		1
20–39.9%		7	5	20–39.9%		1	1	20–39.9%	N.A	2	10
0–19.9%	18	8	2	0–19.9%	8	5	4	0–19.9%	N.A	35	26
Total Tracts	18	18	18	Total Tracts	8	8	9	Total Tracts	N.A	37	37

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000

between 20% and 39.9% of the population. By 2000, Latinos had moved into Southern Lawrence, “on the other side of the river,” previously rather off-limit to Latinos. (Table 4).

The settlement of Latinos in Providence has to be understood against the background of the city’s greater complexity and size, relative to Holyoke and Lawrence. Providence is not only the capital of the state of Rhode Island but also commands a significant presence within the urban hierarchy of the Northeastern seaboard corridor. As such, it has undergone significant processes of restructuring, especially since the 1950’s, in connection with its integration in the interstate highway system (I-95) that interconnects major and mid-size cities like New York City, New Haven, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, DC. In the 1950’s, the highway system enclosed the downtown area, and isolated it from the rest of the surrounding neighborhoods. “Renewal,” together with the collapse of the local economy due to the massive exodus of manufacturing from state and city, left the neighborhoods, for the most part, to their own fortune. Latinos started moving into some neighborhoods that also housed part of the African-American community in South Providence, more specifically the Elmwood, West End, and South Providence neighborhoods.

The brisk expansion of the Latinos community in Providence began in earnest in the 1990’s, as the city has been transforming through an aggressive redevelopment program leading to what is known as the Providence Renaissance—a case-study “exemplar” of “downtown redevelopment” anchored to the construction of the Rhode Island Convention Center, the Arts and Entertainment District, and the Providence Place Mall, a \$329 million, 150-store mall. Apparently, the massive restructuring during the last decade has not spilled-over into the original Latino settlements, with no direct threats for displacement or gentrification (yet). Here, too, there is evidence of concentration and expansion. Providence has 37 Census Tracts. In 1980, in 29 tracts whites represented between 80–100% of the population, in 2 tracts they represented 60–79.9% and in 6 tracts they represented 40–59.9%. In all but 2 tracts, Latinos represented significantly less than 19.9%. By 1990, the picture had changed substantially for both groups. Latinos climbed the ladder of concentration and whites simply left. The number of tracts with 80–100% white population decreased to 18. The number of tracts with shares of Latinos between 20% and 39% increased from 2 to 10 and in one tract they reached the 40–59.9% plateau (Table 4). These are tracts in the South Providence area. Using 2000 Census data, the City of Providence identifies about 8 neighborhoods where Latinos compose 40% or more of the neighborhoods’ populations, all practically contiguous neighborhoods of South Providence (Table 4).

Although for different reasons—resilience, resistance, or institutional obliviousness—in all three cities Latinos have managed to “stay in place.” Such long-term anchoring separates the experience of Latinos in these cities from that of Latinos in Hartford, New York, and, especially, Boston, where the forces of urban renewal, gentrification, and displacement unleashed by restructuring have kept the base of the Latino community “moving” from neighborhood to neighborhood and without the possibility of consolidating social capital and political power.³⁷ The consolidation of a territory has created possibilities for the development of a diverse organizational environment in these communities. The geographic base has made them recognizable to the local political system, be it to include them or to shut them out of the political process: both examples are present in our three cities. Nonetheless, this process seems to be consolidating the “Latino city trenches”—echoing Ira Katznelson’s image.³⁸

4. Contested Social Incorporation: White resistance in the midst of devolution

Although Latinos have managed to “stay in place” and consolidate their presence, the history of tensions between Latinos and local institutions cuts through these neighborhoods. If by social incorporation we mean Gordon’s classic definition of participation in the institutions and social organizations of a locality, then by most accounts from all three cities the social incorporation of Latinos has been slow, fraught with contention, and, even after decades of presence in these small cities and undoubtedly some successes, at best uneven.

In Lawrence the struggle for inclusion has been constant and more violent than in the other cities. This struggle came to the consciousness of the state on a hot night in August 1984, when a “big brawl” between Latino and white youth escalated into two days of racial/ethnic rioting. The riots, although many government officials insisted in that it was just a “big brawl,” marked the opportunity to assail the city for its failure to move forward on social and economic integration. In the aftermath of the riots, the city responded to the plight of Latinos with a number of policy measures that marked the beginning of a more open—although uneasy—sociopolitical relationship between Latinos and Anglos. Municipal and state authorities moved to: (1) create Lawrence’s Human Rights Commission; (2) subcontract with *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción* in Boston to create a social multi-service agency (*Centro Panamericano*); (c) build a recreational area; (d) rehabilitate the housing projects in the area; (e) open a Neighborhood Housing Services Office in the Lower Tower neighborhood; and (f) step-up efforts to employ Latinos in municipal jobs. Some of the proposed changes were not carried to any significant extent, as the

incorporation of Latinos in more city hall jobs. They however, paved the road to more serious political encounters between City Hall and the emerging Latino local power base.

In Holyoke, where the Latinos have the longest tenure, their inclusion in the social institutions, including the mainstream churches, appears to be marginal. A possible exception is the social service system, both public and private non-profit, where Latinos are users of the programs, but they are seldom represented in the staffs or in the leaderships or the organizations. Because of several crises in relationship to Latino infant mortality in the city, the health system is more attuned to Latino needs, but this does not mean that Latinos have a role other than users in those programs or activities.

In Providence, the situation is similar. In recent interviews, Latino leaders often expressed that the state, the city, and the private institutions were “in denial” about the presence of Latinos in their midst: “The institutions fail to understand that Rhode Island has undergone a demographic shift,” says Latino community activist Victor Capellán.³⁹ Nevertheless, there are glimmers of hope. The demise of the “old” political machine in Providence has opened the way to the election of new leadership, which came to power with significant Latino support. This, along with the cumulative effect of the constant advocacy for inclusion on the part of Latinos, is having an effect: key appointments have been made in City Hall and by the governor, and the Board of Directors of The Rhode Island Foundation just elected Dr. Pablo Rodriguez, a physician and a well-respected Puerto Rican leader, as President.

It is clear that in all three cities the exclusion affects Latinos as a group and has been longstanding, evoking causal analyses that rely on institutional racism as an explanation. Be that as it may, it is critical to point to the specifics that contextualize this dynamic in these cities at this particular time. This context, we posit, is related to the effect that federal devolution has had both on the delivery of public services in small cities and on the capacity of minority groups to develop their own solutions. Devolution seems to have had critical impact, on the one hand, on the local bureaucracies’ ability to maintain quality public services and their willingness to adapt these services to the new populations that are now its citizens. This has meant that public services do not serve Latinos well in these cities. On the other, devolution has deeply reduced the funding for specialized services, which in many inner cities had meant services organized by and directed to specific racial/ethnic communities. This has left Latinos in these cities without the possibility of developing, for and by themselves, at least a basic layer of supportive services.

Devolution in the small city: The geography of the new immigration has come in tandem with policies that have underscored the role of localities in the funding and delivery of public services.

Just as Latinos began to arrive in small cities and towns in large numbers, federal devolution began to create new challenges for local public administration and public policy development, as bureaucracies were called upon to modernize and evolve to date unedited processes of accountability while at the same time, local “no-taxes” initiatives capped the wiggle room of local governments. The “New Federalism” of the 1980’s challenged the basic premises of the “War on Poverty” programs of the 1960’s and ‘70’s not only on the role of the federal government in guiding and delivering social policy programs but also on the role of social services as vehicles for the empowerment of the poor. What began as an attack on “welfare” policies,⁴⁰ a fact that has marked the debate on social policy until welfare’s virtual demise in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, in fact, spilled over into other areas, including neighborhood revitalization and services to newcomers.⁴¹

Federal devolution has meant greater local policy discretion, and the use of market-driven instruments as the motors of local policy making. Those principles have replaced public-institution building, distributive equity, and mandated maximum feasible participation. In the process, also significant scaling-back and retrenchment has reduced available welfare resources and entitlements. Public policies and public funding previously geared to provide, if not “maximum feasible participation,” at least some limited opportunities for racial/ethnic groups shut out of mainstream service systems to meet their needs, are now the focus of struggle at the local level.

The process of devolution in many ways assumed modern, capable, and fair local bureaucracies. But the fact is that in many small cities—including our three cities—local political machines, and the long-settled coalitions or arrangements between old ethnic communities, have for the last 70 or so years shared or rotated the management and control of city hall. Yet the changes in federal funding format not only have handed greater discretion to the local levels, but they also demand greater local initiative and capable management to cope with competitive bidding and the aggressive partnering with multiple actors that is now required to address the funding gaps. Old political machines are not precisely prepared to manage local control and efficient use of resources—the new administrative challenges brought by devolution. Thus local governments vary in their capacity to meet the demands of better performance and systemic accountability, creativity, and entrepreneurial initiative in local administration.

At the center of the federal devolution are policies and funding in the areas of urban policy, social service delivery and education. Because the large migration north of African Americans largely bypassed these cities and towns, local polities and governments had remained largely homogeneously white and not had to address the needs of newcomers since the great influx of

immigrants in the early part of the Century. Local decision making, largely handled with the blessing of long-settled arrangements between white ethnic groups, now was taking place in a dramatically different demographic and political environment as new populations began to take up ever-larger shares of the polity of the towns. There has been great resistance to adapting priorities to the needs of the new populations and even more resistance to including new populations in the decision-making processes at the local level.

The political changes point to a very uneven process of engagement between the old political machines and the Latino community in its search for political space and empowerment. Federal, formula-driven allocations for programs are clearly not enough for the local bundle of problems. In addition, fiscal measures that limit expanding the local revenue base, like the Massachusetts' 2½% cap on property taxes, and the general resentment shown by “old towners”—who feel threatened or invaded by the new populations—hinders political change, or delays power-sharing, coalition-building, or outright power transfers. Part of the resistance shown by the local machines is related to the fact that government jobs in small cities and towns are a very important source of employment, and part of the system of rewards and incentives used by the political machines to hold onto power. But the resistance to change seems way more complex than a battle for jobs: in the vortex of power-sharing, or power-transfer, economic interests combine with institutionalized racism, administrative insufficiencies, mutual distrust, and shifting demographics.

Community Development in Holyoke. A case in point is the political relationship in Holyoke between the Latino community —predominantly Puerto Rican—and City Hall. The overall relationship has often been tense and acrimonious. During the last 20 years, confrontations have taken place over several critical problems: political representation, health and infant mortality; urban neglect; police abuse, and education. To a large extent, community capacity/organizational build-up has taken place around those instances of confrontation. But the dynamics and effects of devolution at play in the local agora are most clear in regards to urban and educational policy.

Since the late 1960's, the City of Holyoke has been making claims on South Holyoke—where most Latinos live—as an area that it wanted for industrial redevelopment. These claims were formalized in a plan that the city unveiled in 1968 and that called for the rapid industrial redevelopment of the area. The plan ignited the first sparks of activism of the Puerto Rican (and elderly French-Canadian) community, actually managing to amend the plan. But by the time the plan was amended, the neighborhoods had been red-lined by banks, destined to suffer from heavy physical deterioration because of arson, absenteeism, and municipal neglect. In fact, that is what happened. The City returned again to the charge (1970–75) armed with funds from the Workable

Program for Community Improvement and the Community Development Block Grant, both administered by HUD but implemented through and by the City. Between 1969 and 1983, city government enforced the demolition of about 4,200 housing units, wiping out over a third of the city's total rental housing supply and over half of the total rental units in the four census tracts that make South Holyoke, where Puerto Ricans were and continue to be concentrated.⁴² The pace of this destruction and deterioration caused a massive white flight but it did not manage to “extirpate” the growing barrios of South Holyoke. Arson, however, furiously ravaged the community, even though the city flatly denied the problem. *La época de los fuegos* (the era of the fires), as the period is popularly called, between 1976 and 1981 took the lives of 31 people, and between 1980 and 1982 another 76 fires left more than six hundred people homeless. The campaign to combat arson (and infant mortality) produced an organizing drive that would last for about a year and that comprised several marches, instances of civil disobedience, and community mobilization to assist to public hearings.⁴³

Through the 1980's, the City tried unsuccessfully to grow and promote various organizational “proxies” to reach Latinos, eventually having to come to terms with *Nueva Esperanza*. A revision of the Consolidated Program 2000–2004 by the City shows that some funding is reaching the Latino community through *Nueva Esperanza*, yet according to Latino leaders after “long battles for crumbs.”⁴⁴ Further examination of the Consolidated Plan and other anecdotal evidence suggest that the City largely relies on its decreasing formula-driven allocations, with little else done to mitigate fiscal insufficiency. Besides, in a city which is roughly 41% Latino, the Office of Community Development has no Latino officers or planners. Devolution has taken place but it is up to the local Latino actors to fight the battle for inclusion.

Ineffective services: education and social services. An area of high contention has been education: it has been at the center of the struggle between Latinos and local governments in all three cities and both states. Holyoke and Lawrence are among the cities with the worst school outcomes for Latino children in the Massachusetts. Following the Educational Reform Act of 1993 which attempted to equalize funding across school systems and introduce measures of accountability, Massachusetts embarked in a testing program that for the first time provided comparative data on outcomes by race across school systems. The MCAS included a high-stakes tests in Math and

Table 5. 10th grade English Language Arts and Math MCAS results for Latino students in Lawrence and Holyoke, MA 2000 and 2001 (% passing)

	Holyoke		Lawrence	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
1999	20	4	36	10
2000	18	8	33	19

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000 and 2001

www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/1999/race_report; www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2000/results/rande.pdf

English Language Arts in the 10th grade which students were required to pass in order to graduate from high school. In Holyoke, only 4% of the students passed the math exam; in Lawrence, only 10% did so (Table 5). Outcomes for Latinos in Providence Schools were only slightly better.⁴⁵

In Massachusetts, the effects of reduced local funding due to Proposition 2 1/2—which capped property taxes at 2.5%—began to show disastrous effects on local educational systems just as Latino children began to enroll in the small city systems. By 1990, about 70% of the students in Holyoke and Lawrence were Latinos. In Providence, although there was no cap in spending, with the local economy in shambles the schools were also hurting. “*We don’t get adequate funding...*” expressed former Providence Public Schools Superintendent Diana Lam.⁴⁶ By 1995, 47% of the children enrolled in Providence’s Public Schools were Latinos.⁴⁷

Through the 1990’s Massachusetts schools, including Lawrence and Holyoke, received substantial additional funding as part of the Educational Reform Act. But Lawrence and Holyoke quickly became the “poster cities” of Educational Reform gone bad. This was due to incompetence and mismanagement as well as resistance to change. Lawrence, for example, received more than \$250 million between 1993 and 1997 to improve its schools as part of Educational Reform.⁴⁸ Lawrence was well known for under-funding its school system, refusing to increase its property tax base to fund the schools. Under Educational Reform, the budget of the school system more than tripled; this funding was to be directed to increasing the teacher core, reducing class size, purchasing books and equipment, professional development for teachers, and building maintenance.⁴⁹

The fact is that educational reform, like devolution, assumed capable leadership at the local level. And this proved to be hard to come by in Lawrence. In a 1997 report on the use of Educational Reform funding in the Lawrence district, the State Auditor called the management practices of the district “horrific,” pointing to such “chaos in management” that there were millions of dollars in funding for which there was no accounting. The School Board, under strong pressure from the State Department of Education, fired James Scully, who had been Superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools since 1987 and had lived in Lawrence all of his life.⁵⁰ But the saga was not over. In

collaboration with the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education, the Lawrence Public Schools embarked on a search for Superintendent which yielded Mae Gaskins, a former Superintendent of the public schools in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her tenure would last less than two years. In January 2000, the Mayor of Lawrence called for her resignation for mispending \$600,000.⁵¹ Gaskins left Lawrence just as the economy faltered in 2000 and was replaced by Wilfredo Laboy, a top administrator in the public schools of New York City and a Puerto Rican. By 2002, Educational Reform funding was greatly reduced due to the State's budget crisis.

Wilfredo Laboy was the first Latino superintendent in Lawrence, a system that has been predominantly Latino for over 20 years. He joined two members of the school committee who were also Latino, but whose influence in the midst of the corruption and mismanagement had been limited. The same can be said about Holyoke, where Eduardo Carballo assumed the leadership of Holyoke's 7,400-student system in 2002. In Holyoke, Betty Medina-Lichtenstein was elected to the Holyoke School Committee in 1985, also the first Latino elected official to a local government post in Massachusetts. Carballo, has moved aggressively to change Holyoke's public image as the worst MCAS performer statewide, and has changed the leadership in half of the city's 14 schools since his arrival, which has increased political pressure upon him and other Latino leaders. In Providence, Diana Lam, former Superintendent of the Chelsea (MA) schools began her tenure as Superintendent of the Providence School Department joining two Latino members in the appointed Providence School Committee. Lam also moved quickly to modernize the Providence School Department and to bring in the first Latino administrators the system had ever had. Lam found great resistance from the unions, in a city, that she says, had little expectation of its public schools and where its institutions are resisting change: *"We are not adjusting well yet. Institutions are funny entities. Institutions need to feel the pressure, the outrage, and the urgency. That's what will push us to be more sensitive, more aware of the population that we serve."*⁵²

Undoubtedly, education is a critical battleground between Latinos and the established bureaucracy and service systems. But it is not the only one: public services of all types suffer similarly. Nor is the struggle constrained only to the public system. One of the effects of devolution and funding reductions has been the privatization of public services and the rise in the numbers of actors that deliver publicly funded services to communities. States and cities contract with private non-profits for the delivery of services. In places like Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence, these contracts take place with established agencies and do not demand delivery that is fully accessible to the Latino population. The outsourcing has created barriers, such as: (1) the lack of bilingual information about public services and eligibility; (2) the lack of trained interpreters or bilingual

personnel in public services, courts, and hospitals; and (3) the lack of Latino personnel in mid- and upper-level decision making jobs in service delivery agencies. In focus groups and interviews held in Providence in 2001, community leaders and residents underscored the great barriers to services that existed in the city, that are now taken for granted in larger cities with Latino populations.⁵³

Although still battling intense resistance, conditions in Providence are evolving in ways that have benefited Latino participation across different areas. At the center of this process has been the slow but sure weakening of the control of City Hall by the traditional political machine and the activism of the community. Many point to the election of the new mayor and the fact that Latinos made a critical difference in his campaign's success. But Latino activists explain that the softening has been taking place over time, as the population grew and as the grip weakened, opening small possibilities across a broad range of areas.⁵⁴ Activists working to break the exclusion of the community have focused on the community's integration to mainstream institutions. The elections of several Latino candidates for both city and state seats (see next section), the naming of Diana Lam as Superintendent, and the naming of Pablo Rodriguez to the Board of Directors and subsequently in 2002 President of the Board of The Rhode Island Foundation are often mentioned as important milestones of the last five years.

Latinos are now leading areas of social life in these cities, and these leadership positions are beginning to mean improvements for Latinos in those cities. But they often have inherited bureaucracies in crisis and reduced funding. As Providence Superintendent Diana Lam expressed, *"the expectations for what a district can do are completely unrealistic given the needs of our students and the financial support that we get. I don't think this would happen in a community that was serving all white students."*⁵⁵ Although, increasingly, the possibilities of Latinos to influence policy in their favor are real, so are the continuing gaps in influence and power vis a vis state and city government as well as in the non-profit service sector.

Devolution, welfare reform, and Latino community service agencies. Interviews in Providence and Lawrence pointed to the continuing need of basic information and social support for Latinos in these cities. For example, in Providence, community leaders pointed to the critical need for linguistically appropriate information about eligibility for public programs and benefits; about rights as tenants, as workers and as users of public services; and about services offered by existing programs across the breadth of social need. The types of supports are often handled as part of the services of Latino community-based agencies in most cities. Latino community agencies, particularly in the New England area, have been strong building blocks of Latino community organizational development and vehicles for capacity building and community empowerment.⁵⁶ In Providence there is only one Latino

service agency, the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHISPA), a small and struggling agency in Elmwood. In Lawrence there are two Latino agencies to serve the large Latino community. In Holyoke there are also two.

At the time that Latinos began to gather in Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence, the policies that sustained community-based, racial/ethnic-oriented, and racial/ethnic controlled service agencies were in frank retreat, reducing drastically the funding and support for these services. At this time, it is practically impossible for a new Latino community based service agency to develop, and those that exist are often in serious financial crisis. Welfare reform, disentanglements, and other policy changes have directly and indirectly shut down these “entry windows” into the political system and have all but eliminated the capacity for these groups to collectively participate in policy design and implementation by inhibiting the capacity of groups to develop their own, parallel service system with public dollars, as had been possible in the past.

Latinos in small cities are caught in the pincer of mainstream public and private non-profit systems resistant to serve them and policies that strongly restrict Latinos’ possibilities for building a social service institutional capacity of their own. The results are communities with few formal social supports and few avenues—because of language and cultural barriers—to access public, community, and social services.

5. The social organization of Latino communities in small cities

Closely related to Latino’s capacity to prevail in their neighborhoods is the possibility for the development of independent, community-sustained organizations that serve the needs of the group. The formation of these organizations, although at one point they were interpreted as a “lag from the past” and a barrier to social incorporation by strict assimilation scholars, has proven to be the formal expression of the dense and strong networks characteristic of immigrant communities and the vehicles for social support and political activism among these groups. Most recently, the literature on social capital and social networks has reaffirmed the principle that organizational density is a fundamental component of collectivities accumulating civic culture and eventually political consciousness and power for all groups.⁵⁷ The literature on community development also underscores that active participation in local, community-based associations and institutions is an effective road to community building in poor communities. This literature highlights the critical importance of collaboration, coalition building, planning, and leveraging resources to support community goals to the development of healthy, sustainable communities.⁵⁸

Accounts of the process of formation of Latino communities in the region also underscore the role of community-based organization. These accounts highlight: (1) the role of social networks, both local and transnational, in the formation and development of communities; (2) the plethora of small, formal and informal organizations present in communities ranging from storefront churches and small “bodegas” to sports and cultural organizations to political organizations focused on local or transnational issues; and (3) how the networks evolved from such groups form the base for the more formal organization in the community, usually more visible to outsiders; (4) the role of community based organizations in the process of leadership development.⁵⁹ The more visible organization may take different forms: small (or large) business enclaves, social-support and social-service organizations, or political organizations. They of course vary widely in their ability to sustain themselves and grow, depending on many factors, including the size of the community, the resources available internally, the management of the external environment, and the leveraging of external resources for their support.

The communities of our three cities reflect well these patterns, with, of course, variations. First of all, accounts of their formation are full of examples of the role of immigrant networks in organizing the early settlements. After the first “pioneers,” the fact is that most Latinos arrive to join other people they know: family, friends or acquaintances from the same town. This was the case in all of our cities and involving all the Latino groups. A pattern of multi-household, multi-generation migration had led to settlements where in many cases immigrants brought with them long-term relationships which were reinforced by the dense concentration of the population in specific neighborhoods.⁶⁰

In all three cities, organizations reflect the longing for the land left behind and the need to reaffirm culture abound. In Lawrence, “Los Juanadinos Ausentes” is an example of an organization formed by persons from a particular town, in this case Juana Diaz in Puerto Rico, that provides a context for social activity and social support. Cultural maintenance and dissemination, sports, entertainment, the celebration of patriotic dates, and the organization of yearly festivals are the focus of activity of many of these organizations. In Providence, for example, the numbers of these types of organizations reflect the gamut of Latin American nationalities—*Asociación Cultural Mexicana*, *Guatemaltecos Unidos*, *Alma Peruana*, *las Perlitás de Mexico*, *la Asociación Boliviana de la Virgen de Urkupiña*, and many others—and a broad range of cultural, social and sports activities. In Lawrence and Holyoke, the organizational base of the *Festival Latino* and *La Familia Hispana* Festival are analogous expressions. Organizations of this type also carry out significant transnational activity related to the country of origin, including political and economic activity. These organizations are also largely invisible to outsiders to the community because of their informality and their popular nature.

“Bodegas” (small Latino markets) are perhaps the most visible marker of Latino communities. These one- or two-person businesses provide Latino groceries, newspapers, and music. They are also the source of short-term loans—“*fiados*”—for newcomers and those not used to relying on formal banking. In Holyoke, Nueva Esperanza CDC has expanded small business development opportunities in South Holyoke creating a small business incubator with several Latino businesses.⁶¹ Also, “Fernández Family Restaurant,” right on High Street, the main thoroughfare of the city, calls attention to the change beginning to take place in the city. In Lawrence, relative to Holyoke, the power of the Latino business community, especially Dominican, is considerable. A commercial strip of Latino businesses practically dominates Main Street. The city also has a rather robust Latino small business community that has helped create the Minority Business Council and the Minority Relations Committee of the Greater Lawrence Chamber of Commerce, and maintains a small business development fund with the City’s Office of Economic Development and banks.⁶² In Providence, Broad Street in the South side, dotted with “bodegas” and Latino restaurants, has been the economic and social center of the community for decades. Latino leaders point to the development of small businesses, of which “bodegas” are the most visible example, as a strength in this community. “Broad Street has become the motor of economic development not only for the Latino community but for all of the Southside,” expressed Dr. Pablo Rodriguez in a recent interview.⁶³

There is also evidence from all three cities, but more markedly from Lawrence and Providence, that Latinos are utilizing the networks already informally mobilized around the national, cultural, and sports associations to take action around issues affecting the community. The emergence of advocacy political activity directed to the problems immigrants face in their communities represents the fruition of a subtle process of maturation of community leadership and organizational capacity.⁶⁴ In all three cities there has been considerable mobilization around issues pertinent to the community. In Holyoke, as was related earlier, activism has been directed toward the struggle against displacement from the community’s initial settlement. This long and protracted struggle brought Puerto Ricans into confrontation with City Hall very early in their process of development. Nevertheless, the community was able to sustain it and eventually win. But the cost in organizational burnout was high⁶⁵: it would not be until 1983 that Puerto Rican–controlled community organization, Nueva Esperanza Community Development Corporation, would emerge in Holyoke.

In all three cities, developing services for the community and advocating for inclusion in the city’s service environment also harnessed significant organized activity. In Providence, for example, action groups date back to the formation of Puerto Ricans in Action in 1970 and continued through a long process of organizing directed to building services for Latinos: the Latin American Community Center

(1970), the Latin American Medical Clinic (1971); the Coalition of Hispanic Organizations (1972); Acción Hispana and Proyecto Persona (1974); Progreso Latino (1976), and the Hispanic Social Services Association (1979). By 1980, only two had survived and remain to this day: Progreso Latino in Central Falls and the present form of the Hispanic Social Services Association now called Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy in Providence (CHISPA). The rest had fallen victim to organizational problems and the lack of funding that accompanied devolution and privatization of public services.

In Lawrence, organizations also formed but at first were strictly organized along national lines. Puerto Ricans and the growing Dominican population were unable to come together effectively until well into the 1980's, and specifically around an electoral race.⁶⁶ But this race helped to seal a spirit of intra-Latino cooperation that served to institutionalize concrete programs and activities. In Providence, pan-Latino organizing started very early, almost at the start of the process of community organizing and reflecting the fact that not one nationality overwhelmingly predominates in this community. The pan-Latino give and take experienced by community leaders, from the formation of the Latin American Center in 1970 on, has served Providence well as Latinos turned from organizing around services to the development of political organizations, such as Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee (RILPAC). The emergence of pan-Latino organizations in both Lawrence and Providence also signals maturation.

The Holyoke and Providence Latino communities also evolved Latino “coordinating organizations.” These are formal organizations whose mission is to bring together leadership and activists around concerns of the broader Latino community, usually in relationship to advocacy directed towards institutions—public and private—outside of the community. In the case of Holyoke, the “coordinating organization” is the Coalition of Spanish Speaking Providers, which is a grouping of Latino and non-Latino health and social service providers that came together around the crisis in infant mortality affecting Puerto Ricans in Holyoke in the early 1980's and continues to work in Holyoke. The main work of this organization is to advocate for the creation of culturally sensitive services for Latinos and reduce the barriers to access which Latinos face in relationship to public programs.

The flavor of the coordinating organizations in Providence is somewhat different, and, like their pan-Latino work, it began early. The Coalition of Hispanic Organizations (CHO) emerged in 1976 as a loose confederation of Latino organizations, which came together in part to make themselves more attractive for funding. CHO would be replaced in the 1980's by Hispanic Social Service Association, which later became CHISPA and survives to this day. Although forced to provide direct services to both stay alive and stay connected to the community, CHISPA's mission is to bring together leadership for the purposes of strategic thinking about Latino community issues. Finally, RILPAC is an example of a very sophisticated and specialized “coordinating organization.” A membership organization, RILPAC

maintains direct contact to all Latino organizations—large and small—and involves members both in reviewing candidates’ political programs and in electoral mobilization.

But although there is a brisk organizational life in these communities, particularly in Lawrence and Providence, there remain concerns about the sustainability of community organizations, particularly the financial sustainability of service and coordinating organizations.

6. New strategies bring substantial electoral success

Analysts and observers of Latino politics in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New England are saying that a new era in Latino electoral politics has arrived.⁶⁷ Comparing our three cities, there is evidence that, although electoral results still trail Latinos’ percentage in the electorate, the 1990’s have brought political maturation and unprecedented penetration of the political arena. Latinos evidence some political maturity and expertise by winning state senate and house races in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and even New Hampshire; gaining numerous school committee and city council posts; and running some very visible mayoral challenges and triumphs, as in Hartford (Connecticut), whose new mayor is Latino. Apparently, we are beginning to combine our “numbers” with the effective use of the American political institutions, resource mobilization, pan-Latino campaigning and coalition building, leadership development, and other forms of political learning and strategies.

Managing the internal relationships within the community is one of the most critical variables and these relationships are currently battered in this region by contradictory forces that reflect the evolving dynamics of intra-group leadership. One critical piece is the evolving role of Puerto Rican leadership. Puerto Ricans are the oldest and still the largest Latino group in many parts of the region. Having historically spearheaded and mediated political mobilization in communities throughout the Northeast, Puerto Ricans, we speculate, are experiencing their own set of political dilemmas as the new local political reality exacts a different type of political maturity. Puerto Ricans are citizens by birth and, historically, among Latinos in the East Coast, Puerto Ricans were most able to use the avenues offered by public policy and public programs to gain a measure of political empowerment. In many ways, Puerto Ricans were the brokers of that relationship for Latino communities, and in this region, to their credit, the benefit was often well shared with other Latino groups. But during the 1980’s and 90’s, as was mentioned earlier, social policy reforms driven by devolution, privatization, and cutbacks greatly curtailed these avenues. For Puerto Ricans, this is a time of re-definition.

Simultaneously, we see some “new” Latino immigrant groups, especially those from the Dominican Republic, coming to the fore with great political strength. Better known for their involvement in transnational politics than in local ones, Dominicans seem to begin to be able to use one to push the other. Many elected officials in New England, are Dominican. The most critical variable in this development has been time—time for Dominicans to achieve citizenship and for the second generation of Dominicans, born and raised in U.S. cities, to exercise their power. Other groups, such as Colombians in Rhode Island, are also coming to the fore and getting elected to public office.

Holyoke. Holyoke's local political system has a 15-member City Council, with 7 members elected by ward and 8 members elected at-large. The city's 9-member School Committee is also elected, with 7 seats elected by ward and 2 at-large. Latinos in Holyoke have been running candidates practically every year since 1971. Between 1971 and 1995 a total of 15 Latino candidates ran in 27 campaigns. These were mostly at the district/ward-level. In 1997 there were four candidates, and in 1999 eleven candidates, the largest slate in any one year.⁶⁸ The first Latino/a elected to a public post in the city was Betty Medina-Lichtenstein to the School Committee in 1985, subsequently re-elected in 1987, 1989, and 1991. Then, in 1991 Diosdado López was elected to the City Council for Ward 2 (then an alderman system). Currently, there are three Latinos in ward seats in the City Council, and one Latino in a ward seat in the School Committee.

In Holyoke, Puerto Ricans remain the majority Latino group, although other Latin Americans (Colombia and Ecuador) have been long-term activists and leaders in a broad range of community settings. But, in general, inter-Latino political fighting is not a political problem. Latinos in Holyoke have for long been shut out almost completely from the avenues to empowerment offered by the development of community service agencies and the struggle around public policy issues. In Holyoke, the timing and path to some political representation has taken some 20 years of overcoming objective political and social barriers, trial and error, organizing, and reversals. Some of the barriers have been institutional, as for example, the City of Holyoke's requirement that citizens appear in a local census in order to be registered voters. Individuals who did not respond to this mail census, which was in English, were dropped from the list of registered voters. The form and characteristics of the census, moreover, during the aggressive campaign of building demolition and urban renewal in the city, needless to say, resulted in dramatic exclusion of Latinos from the list of registered voters.⁶⁹ It took the collaboration of the Massachusetts and the Holyoke Rainbow Coalition, local political organizers, and intervention from the Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to force the City of Holyoke to modify the use of the census as the basis for voter registration.⁷⁰ As a

result of the challenge by Latinos to the political structure, Latinos have secured poll watchers, bilingual materials, and greater understanding of how to get involved in the management of the political process.

Further into the political history of the city, in 1992, the Latino citizens of Ward 1, in conjunction with the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights under the Law of the Boston Bar Association, brought a lawsuit against the City of Holyoke (*Vecinos del Barrio Uno v. City of Holyoke*) arguing that the at-large city council system contributed to political under-representation. At first, the Massachusetts district court was sympathetic to the lawsuit, but the case was remanded upon appeal, and the court reversed its prior decision. The case opened a new era of political confrontation between the Latino community, and the City, and within the Puerto Rican community. The court's reassessment of the decision was based upon City Hall throwing its muscle behind "its own Puerto Rican" candidate for an at-large seat, who received 42% of his votes from non-Latino voters. Most recently, the same candidate accused a well trusted and liked Latino incumbent in the Council of electoral fraud, an allegation, which was thrown out after an investigation, but not without a political cost. In more recent years, the oldest member of the Latino representation in the City Council, after a decade or so, continues to emphasize the little representation Latinos have in the local administrative and service bureaucracies of the city. Citing the police department, he describes innumerable situations of abuse and of blocking the access of competent Latinos officers into the upper ranks of the force.⁷¹

Barriers to Latino representation in Holyoke have been strong and to overcome them has taken significant effort on the part of the community. Nevertheless, voting turnout among Latinos remains low, in part due to the poverty and youth of the population, divisions in the leadership, and weak candidates.⁷² Latinos have responded with political organizing through various strategies: (1) consistent running of candidates; (2) voter registration and "get out the vote" drives; (3) using the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1964 to challenge Holyoke's election system, especially the discriminatory implementation of the city census; and (4) taking the city to court for a redistricting battle.

Lawrence. Lawrence's local political system has a 9-member City Council, with 6 members elected by district and 3 members elected at-large. With the Mayor as the Chair of the School Committee, the city's 6-member School Committee is also elected, with all seats elected by district. In Lawrence, the history of Latinos running candidates dates from the 1980's. Since 1981 into the early 1990's, a dozen or so candidates ran, but their candidacies failed badly.⁷³ It is not until 1991 that a Latino, Ralph Carrero, was elected to the School Committee. This marked the start of a string of electoral victories by Latino candidates—a clear process of coming of political age during the 1990's.

In the 1999 local election, Latinos fielded 11 candidates.⁷⁴ The electoral victories have been shared by Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, along gender lines, and have been “scaling up” from the very local to the state level. Currently, the level of Latino representation stands at: two members at the School Committee; three city councilors including an at-large member who is also the Council’s President; and one of the three state representative seats (16th Essex District) in the Massachusetts’ House of Representatives.

Latinos seem to be coming of political age in this town. It would be a mistake to think, however, that this rapid ascent and breakthrough in the late 1990’s was clean and swift. Not so. It is connected to a rather long and heated political history of inter-Latino conflict, predominantly between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, which apparently has been subsiding in more recent years, and to a contentious and explosive relationship with the local white political machines of Irish, Italian, and French-Canadian background. The city’s Latino community has evolved to show a rather well defined set of leadership arenas in education, politics, business, religious, communications, and social clubs. In all of them there are Latino leaders pitching in one way or another into the pool of social and political capital of the community at large. The hampering conflicts between Latino leaders from different national groups, or between the different leadership arenas, of the 1970’s and 1980 have not necessarily disappeared; at times they still flare with viciousness, yet they are being well enough managed not to erode the accumulated political capital.⁷⁵ This shows, according to Council member Julia Silverio, political maturity. In addition, the passing of time has allowed the Dominican community to amass and activate a larger number of people with citizenship status who can directly influence local political outcomes.

Regarding the relationship with City Hall, it remains contentious yet is becoming more amenable to negotiations, framed by the terms of the old ethnic political machines yearning for “restoring a glorious past.”⁷⁶ Most important, this relational framework forestalls Latino appointments to meaningful posts in, and power sharing and managerial collaboration within, the numerous administrative commissions and departments that run municipal affairs.⁷⁷ Some Latinos have been appointed to some of these posts, like the Human Rights Officer, and Affirmative Action Director, yet the appointees come from smaller Latino groups (Chilean, Mexican-American) that have non-threatening power bases.⁷⁸ Most recently, appointments to the School Superintendent and Police Chief posts perhaps indicate a shift for the better.

In this context, Latino strategies of political incorporation have been combining electoral and confrontational strategies with more weight on the electoral side. To illustrate the matter, in 1998, responding to urgent complaints by citizens, the U.S. Justice Department filled a suit against the City Borges Mendez and Uriarte

of Lawrence for violating the Voting Rights Act.⁷⁹ Three issues were at the core of the suit: (1) districts and at-large seats may have been created or used to weaken voting power of Latinos; (2) not all election materials were provided in Spanish⁸⁰; and (3) the city had not provided sufficient Latino poll workers or a conducive environment to Latino political participation. After some political and legal haggling, the City negotiated a deal with the Justice Department. It included more resources and provisions to enhance and safeguard Latino participation in the electoral process.⁸¹ Although it did not include provisions to overhaul the structure of the districts, the fresh resources, according to local Latino political leaders and other observers, have greatly improved the prospects of political empowerment.⁸² Along the same lines, the combined strategy comes out clearly in the process of redistricting that carved the Massachusetts' State House Representative seat for the 16th Essex District, and in the election of a Latino to that seat (already alternately occupied by two Latinos of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent). The first victory was possible due to strong and well-organized grassroots and media activity among Latinos, including managing the tensions of a vote recount, transportation to get voters to the polls, and information about the voting process.⁸³

The process of political empowerment in Lawrence seems to have "taken-off" once Latinos began to effectively manage internal strife. This has enabled diverse leadership and a more focused electoral strategy while external pressures have forced some change upon the local political machine. Political electoral gains seem opening access into the administrative arena of municipal affairs.

Providence. Providence has a 15-member City Council with all members elected by ward. Currently, a proposal is under study as part of the City's decennial review of its home rule charter to change such structure.⁸⁴ A commission has proposed to replace the current design with one with 10 members by ward and 5 elected at-large.⁸⁵ As it is, the system is drawn along rather well established neighborhood lines with clear racial/ethnic and class boundaries. The School Board is appointed by the Mayor. The city's ward system for years has been connected to a well-oiled political machine that recently has been shaken by the indictment of one of the most famous machine politicians in the city's history, Vincent (Buddy) Cianci, Jr. The entry of Latinos into this system has been vertiginous and mainly a phenomenon the 1990's. Complicating matters has been the fact that Latinos now live in traditional African American neighborhoods in South Providence, which has at time created tensions as Latinos challenge and replace African-American candidates and incumbents from those neighborhoods that both groups share. Whites have been exiting from these areas, eliminating any buffer effect between the two groups.⁸⁶ Interestingly, Anastasia Williams, a Latina of Panamanian descent, was the first elected to the Rhode Island Assembly in 1992 with support from the African-American community.⁸⁷ She has been re-elected since then. In 1994, Luis Aponte, of Puerto Rican

descent and a long-term community advocate, was the first Latino to run for City Council (Ward 10), losing that race but managing to win but four years later.⁸⁸ In 1998, three Latinos ran for city or state office. Subsequently, the ability of Latinos to “scale-up” into the political system has been remarkable.⁸⁹ In November 2002, the gains went even further: Miguel Luna was elected to the City Council for Ward 9 and Juan Pichardo (at 35 years of age) became the first Latino to be elected to the Rhode Island Senate for Providence. In addition to the elected officers, there are two Latinos in the School Board appointed by the Mayor. Most of these politicians (except Luis Aponte and Anastasia Williams) are of Dominican descent.

Latinos in Providence sought a different road to power. Latinos capitalized on the growth and concentration of the population through rapid and effective organizational strategies with distinct characteristics. First, Latinos showed and used a “platoon” of small cultural (and social) organizations well connected within the neighborhoods of the ward system, which at the right time can quickly mobilize people into the electoral process. Harnessing this collaboration is the fact that many of the Latinos elected do have experience working with these organizations.

Secondly, Latinos effectively used the means of mass communication (radio, Internet, and TV) for informational and mobilization purposes. In recent interviews held in Providence, Latino leaders spoke about the role the Latino media and the Internet had played in the mobilization around the recent elections, enhancing the strengths of small Latino community organizations to mobilize at the base. “Not everyone has a computer but only one member of a small Latino organization has to have a computer,” said a member of the Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee. “We communicate with that one person and he or she communicates with everyone else.” And they came out in large numbers to work for candidates and to vote. As one observer described the process, “[In 2000] At the Sackett Street School, the city’s most heavily Latino polling place, lines reached down a flight of stairs and out to the street, while Dominican-owned taxi shuttle services dropped off vanloads of voters in 15-minute intervals, and dozens of campaign volunteers swarmed the sidewalks. *Poder 1110*, the city’s most popular Latino radio station, pounded the airwaves all day, broadcasting live from the polls and exhorting listeners to get out and vote Latino.”⁹⁰

Thirdly, Latinos were able to squeeze into the political arena through the opened and weakened cracks of the old political machine, under siege by federal investigations and loosening political attachments. New leadership, in the figure of Mayor David Cicilline, contributed to easing the resistance of the old ethnic political machine. Fourthly, Latinos created in 1998 a progressive pan-Latino organization, the Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee (RILPAC), which lent support to several (but not exclusively) of the Latino candidates. RILPAC was founded by Dr. Pablo

Rodríguez. Moreover, the organization has played “the curious role of providing a ‘safe’ space for white politicians of both major parties to get exposed to Latinos...”. RILPAC is consciously pan-Latino in its make up and its perspective, with leaders from across the national spectrum involved in the organization. Yet, it does not necessarily endorse Latinos simply because of their ethnic origin: all candidates have to present to the RILPAC membership their political program both in writing and orally and argue its benefit to the Latino community.⁹¹ RILPAC has declined to endorse Latino candidates that do not present their programs to the organization or whose programs are not deemed to be as beneficial to the Latino community as that of other candidates.⁹²

The features of the process of Latino incorporation into Providence’s political arena can be summarized as follows: (1) brisk and extremely compressed into the latter part of the 1990’s and even into the most recent period, 2000–2002; (2) a grass-roots, pan-Latino perspective from the start of political organizing, although strongly driven by Puerto Rican and Dominican leadership; (3) aided by the weakening of the old white political machine that has been gasping for air due to the pressures of federal investigations and the reforms carried by the new Mayor; (4) more clearly successful in the electoral arena than in the policy-making arena, although progress is apparent in education.

Although all three cities have shown gains, there are features about Latino political incorporation in these cities that should be highlighted. First, comparing the three cities, the timing and path of the process of political penetration of the local arena (and beyond) differs substantially. In Holyoke and Lawrence, the path has been longer and has been plagued by a much-protracted estrangement from City Hall and the local machine. In Providence, the process has been much compressed into the 1990’s, with apparently much better relations with City Hall. Secondly, Latinos in each city have faced distinct barriers to political access and electoral empowerment, which demanded distinct strategies of empowerment. Fundamentally, in Holyoke and Lawrence, in contrast to Providence, resistance to change has been very strong. Not that in Providence the road to incorporation has been “paved with roses,” but it seems to have been much easier due to the weakening of the local machine. Thirdly, in relation to the above, Latinos are using an array of political strategies to suit their local political needs, which range from voter registration, to judicial challenge and pan-Latino campaigning and the broad use of the media. Fourthly, there are differences in the characteristics of Latino political leadership in each of the cities which are related to organizational and ethnic/racial mix of the communities, which in turn are relevant to prospects of Latino political unity or fragmentation. The infusion of new energy and determination from the Dominican community seems a very important factor, as well as a maturing relationship between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, which is evolving into a much less conflictive relationship and into a

pan-Latino outlook to incorporation. In Providence, the above also applies to the relationship between Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and other Latinos. In Providence, though, the challenge is also to build and maintain bridges with the African American community.

Finally, although we do observe electoral political gains, we also see disconnection between those gains and the access to the policy-making institutions of the city, especially in critical areas such as education, urban and economic development, and general urban services. This is not to say that the situation has not been changing. In recent years, for example, all three cities have appointed Latino school superintendents, Lawrence has appointed a Latino police chief and promoted others into the upper ranks, and in Providence the new Mayor has appointed Latinos to the School Board and other important administrative boards. For the most part, however, we estimate that the disconnection between the political agora and policy-making arena is still hindering Latino political empowerment.

Concluding points

There is a feeling of sharp contrasts and contradictions which often takes the observer by surprise, as one strolls or drives by the big Latino barrios that have formed in the small and mid-size cities of New England, like Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence. You could see front offices of the PRD (*Partido Revolucionario Dominicano*) and propaganda for elections in the Dominican Republic, or you could buy “*El Vocero*,” a Puerto Rican newspaper closely akin to the *National Inquirer* in terms of journalistic quality, with the latest political, sexual, or criminal scandal in front-page display. Or you could be received by a large banner that reads “Welcome Back Susie,” referring to Susie Castillo, Miss USA 2003, of Dominican and Puerto Rican parents raised in and resident of Lawrence. Keep going, and further down, go and get “*mangú*,” “*ensalada de carrucho*” (conchfish salad), “*alcapurrias*” or “*pupusas*” in Norman Rockwell’s Main Street. But as you lift your eyes you could also see big, turn-of-the-century textile mill buildings, truly glorious, spectacular for a SoHo- or Tribeca-like revival, but at this point mainly a decaying infrastructure belonging to a bygone industrial era—far gone, especially in Holyoke and Lawrence. Providence, though, has seen a revival of some of them.

It is not easy to understand how context and community are beginning to fuse or come together in these “new spaces,” because you also see the signs of dislocation and poverty, often singled-out and in display in the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, and even the *Washington Post*. Stories that speak about—often with great exaggeration and in racist terms—about some of these cities as “stops” in the New England drug circuit, full of welfare mothers and grandmothers who use Borges Mendez and Uriarte

their children in the drug trade, or school systems in which nothing works, even basic things that we might take for granted in some schools in the “Third World.” Undeniably, some of these things may be true to some extent, but still how can we tackle these realities with strategies to improve these communities, not just to have them displayed as “bad accidents of migration,” waiting to exploit. The vortex of questions is voracious and absorbing: try to understand the making of Puerto Rican hip-hopper on Roberto Clemente Street in South Holyoke. As you search deeper for answers, you “venture into City Hall,” you begin to pose questions yourself and to others about empowerment, indeed challenging and difficult questions to answer. What have we found? We line-up our conclusions in the same way we structured the main sections of the paper.

1. The roads to small cities: Immigration and internal migration.

Settlements in these small cities developed out of various migratory streams that include both direct migration from Latinos’ countries of origin and internal migration from other U.S. cities. These new Latino settlements do not represent “spill-over settlements” nor are they the result of the process of suburbanization of larger urban areas. Migration to these small cities can be direct, thus bypassing the “big city,” as well as it can be internal, mainly through network vines grounded in cities through the Northeastern seaboard. Our look at the path of settlement and incorporation of Latinos into what amounts to “big *barrios* in small cities” reveals that these new communities do not fit easily, or only partially, into the classical paradigm of immigrant spatial assimilation, which predicts a “big-city/suburbanization” path. Further, the various streams that converge in the formation, expansion, and further consolidation of these communities do not occur as a simple “push-pull” mechanical outcome of economic forces: employer-or government-sponsored recruitment, “word-of-mouth,” social, political, and cultural forces in Latin America, the countries of origin, the New England region, and in the specific city interplay to “modulate” the flows. A major difference between the three cities is that the Latino community in Holyoke has remained largely Puerto Rican throughout, while Lawrence, and Providence have become much more diversified, with a growth of the Dominican population and an influx of other Latinos, largely from Central America and Colombia. Although we have not been able to explore the matter in a systematic fashion, these multiple streams do seem to have an influence upon the processes of leadership formation and development in distinct spheres of communal life: social, business, political, cultural. The issue remains open for further inquiry.

2. A poor local/regional economic fit: Latinos and economic restructuring in New England.

Latinos have experienced an uneasy fit into the economies of these small cities. They have been incorporated into the dying manufacturing and low-end service jobs of the economies of Lawrence, Holyoke, and Providence. As a result wages are low and poverty rates are among the highest in the region. Likewise, they have not been able to enter the rising industries, at least into some of the good occupational categories. They remain concentrated in low-end, low-pay occupational categories. Such poor fit took place in the prosperous mid-1980's, and appeared to have repeated itself in the mid-to-late prosperous 1990's. The poor fit is particularly dramatic in Holyoke, since the city has remained disconnected in both occasions from any significant "axis" of growth at the regional or sub-regional level. Lawrence, although not so well connected either in spite of being so close to Route 128 and other "spots" of economic activity, saw a brief period of recuperation in the 1990's, yet not enough to call it an economic revival. Poverty rates dropped but still remain very high. Providence, however, has been going through a Renaissance—with a 10-year period of massive investment in downtown redevelopment. Its uplifting effect on the socioeconomic quality of life of Latinos though is arguable given the high poverty rates and occupational concentration in low-end, low-pay occupations. In relation to the previous history of immigrant economic incorporation in the region and in these cities, Latinos have not been uplifted by the expansion of manufacturing, as it happened to immigrants during periods of early industrialization (1830–1880) and monopolistic expansion (1880–1920). Previous immigrants did face poverty and dislocation, and inter-generational opportunity was abridged by early deindustrialization which started briefly after WWI. Nonetheless, those immigrants were able to gain from an institutional platform built by unions and state regulation of work and wage relations.

3. Dense concentration in specific neighborhoods: The struggle for spatial integrity and continuity.

In all three cities, Latinos are highly concentrated in specific neighborhoods, where they have lived since they initially settled. They have faced urban renewal and displacement, but contrary to the situation of Latinos in large urban areas, they have managed to remain. In South Holyoke, Latinos fought against an aggressive City Hall–sponsored campaign of "renewal," "code enforcement," and demolition and managed to stay. In North Lawrence and South Providence neighborhoods, mainly stories of "benign neglect," the paucity of renewal allowed communities to

prevail spatially, yet at the expense of other malaises like disinvestment and isolation. This capacity to “stay in place,” even “*contra viento y marea*” and “challenging the bulldozer,” has allowed Latinos to develop some primary organizations “in situ.” These organizations become an important building block toward further political incorporation. But they are not powerful enough to contend with other forces such as local ostracism, institutional racism, exclusion by political machines, and devolution. Such forces detracted these organizations from the traditional path which the organizations of previous immigrants might have followed. In the path to political incorporation, so the story goes, immigrants develop a spatial power base—city trenches with marked ethnic identity, or an enclave—that catapults the group into power. In our cases we see such “path” severely curtailed. Some differences begin to appear, very much entangled with the process of political penetration that immigrants presumably launch from the spatial power base or trench. It is necessary to understand though what is the influence of a shifting organizational environment for immigrant communities in the cities, the resilience of the local white political machines and as well as other dynamics of social incorporation.

4. Contested Social Incorporation: White resistance in the midst of devolution

In recent years, the welfare state has been undermined, and replaced by a much less responsive subsidiary state oriented by principles of market efficiency, performance-driven social service provision, and individualist responsibility. The policy garb of this transformation in which cutbacks have been covered with the overrated advantages of devolution—local autonomy and flexibility—have had an ambiguous effect on the prospects of Latino political and social incorporation in these rather new settlements. The social incorporation of Latinos in these small cities has been affected by devolution in two fundamental ways. First, devolution has limited the local governments’ capacity (and willingness) to serve a rapidly changing and demographically different population. Secondly, it has made it more difficult for Latinos to form the types of service oriented organizations that have characterized the organizational environment (and might) of Latinos in large cities.

This is a difficult “dialectic” to disentangle. It involves dissecting a complex, almost symbiotic, relationship, in the making since the 1960’s, between the organizational capacity of Latinos and the structure of organizational opportunities made possible by the priorities of social policy and specific ways funding for these priorities evolved in areas that ranged from pres-school services to community development. Such outlays and “policy windows, so to speak, helped to develop and support Latino community-based/social service agencies for some two decades. And they have been for the most

part unavailable to the newly forming Latino communities in any of the cities studies here. To this you add the resistance of the local political machines to the new environment of accountability, reductions in the lifeline of support of these machines due to cutbacks, and their reluctance to accept that Latinos are here for good, and the results are strongly exclusionary political practices. This is an area for challenging research and with vast practical and strategic implications for Latino communities. For the most part, what we have found is that the combination of these factors has generated a very weak pattern of social incorporation (and political incorporation) in mainstream organizational life, especially in Holyoke and Lawrence. In Providence though the outcome seems to differ, most interesting, because of the weakening of the local political machine under numerous federal investigations which ended up removing many of the old bosses from power. This created a political opening for Latinos, further advanced by the positive relationship between the new Mayor and the Latino community.

5. The social organization of Latino communities in small cities

Modernization theorists or social capitalists? What is the value and importance of Latino social organization in the small cities and towns? Some scholars have emphasized that autochthonous organizations are a leftover of the past and traditional culture, while others emphasize their value as the basis of more complex organizations. We stand with the second group. The independent, community-based social organization of Latinos in these small cities is characterized by the development of small, independent community-based organizations. These organizations are the base of active political organization in these communities. They also go through several stages, prior to becoming building blocks for Latino empowerment. At first, small cultural organizations, organized along national and even hometown lines, serve as meeting point, with activity largely revolving around social support, culture, sports, and politics of the home country. But they pave the way for political activity focused on everyday issues of the community in the U.S. “*Los Hijos de Borinquen*” (The Sons of *Borinquen*) begin to coexist with “*Puertorriqueños en Acción*” (Puerto Ricans in Action) and later come together with others in the “Latino Coalition” (*Borinquen* is another name for Puerto Rico). Here, the twist that transnational politics brings to these communities must also be considered. It has proven to bring a high level of organization and of leadership experience. In this regard, it is necessary to factor in the little-explored topic of the support provided by the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (PRD). In Providence, as in Lawrence, current and past presidents of that party and of the Dominican Republic make a point of visiting the Dominican communities—most recently Leonel Fernández and Hipólito Mejía were visitors.

Within time, the matrix of social organization also diversifies to show differentiated spheres of leadership in business, politics, religious life, cultural life, and even media. In some instances, organizational maturity opens the door to the formation of “coordinating organizations,” leading into a pan-Latino framework that leaves behind the cultural specificity of the small national organizations of the moment of communal formation. The pan-Latino organizations are coterminous with a moment of communal expansion and consolidation. But as we mentioned, this process is by far not linear and has been interrupted by various forces like urban renewal and social ostracism, to name a couple of factors. For the most part, the consolidation of a pan-Latino organizational outlook marks sufficient maturity to penetrate the local political structure. In Lawrence and Providence, we see that process, but especially in Providence, and at a rather fast pace. In Holyoke there are no real inter-Latino politics to speak of since Puerto Ricans are practically the sole Latino group in the city, although some other Latinos have been part of the Latino leadership for a long time. The organizational weakness of the community is driven by other problems such as poverty, lack of resources, institutional racism, and perhaps our own lack of interest in political matters.

Sustaining independent organizations is difficult in poor communities and so it deserves study and understanding. Recent work on the social role of religious institutions at the community level is expanding our understanding of the nexus between involvement and participation at this level and sustenance, social support, and community building. So is the work on the role that the process of community organization has in the development and leveraging of social capital. Building diverse, independent, and self supporting organizational environments in poor immigrant communities –from businesses to churches, to social support, to cultural expression—not only serves the many needs of a community and expands the points of its influence but also nurtures the development of leadership and power.

6. New strategies bring substantial electoral success

Although Latinos in all three cities have all increased their political representation, perhaps with Providence being the most successful, the keys (or strategies) to such an increase appear to be: (1) recurrent challenging of the local political machine (Holyoke); (2) the channeling of activism of the small community organizations into a pan-Latino framework for collective action (Providence and Lawrence); (3) and the management of intra-Latino differences or tensions (Lawrence and Providence). But the choice of strategy is no accident or random. Latinos have chosen strategies to match their counterparts, the political machines they have had to face in the three cities. Albeit dying

and decrepit, these machines continue to resist, although in Providence, as we mentioned, it has been weakened by federal indictments. Under such conditions, Latinos in that city have found a much swifter (and faster) entrance into the local political arena and beyond, although the road has been rough and contentious—although less so than in Holyoke and Lawrence. Two important factors appear in the Providence which are necessary to explain the rapid pace of Latino electoral success. On the one hand, there is the effective capitalization of the rapid growth of the community by a platoon of small organizations that can effectively mobilize people. On the other hand, a very important factor in the political configuration of the Latino road to political/electoral empowerment in Providence (and in Lawrence) has been the remarkable contribution of the Dominican community. Such political contribution is mediated by a strong set of transnational linkages that connect Dominican communities in the USA and the politics and resource mobilization tactics of political parties in the Dominican Republic. We did not explore this last issue in depth but certainly warrants much more attention. Finally, we have observed an interesting shift in the mediating role that Puerto Ricans have played in local politics. Historically, Puerto Ricans have been the connecting group between Latino communities and political structures in most cities of the Northeast. We see that to be the result of the complex changes that have taken place as a result of devolution, and other social dynamics that are beyond the scope of this paper.

Is the experience of Latinos in Providence, Lawrence, and Holyoke different from that of those in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia or from that of those immigrants that came before them in those same cities? Traditional political scientists would say that ultimately we are just in front of another process of replacement, of newcomers replacing old timers—a common story in American local politics. Sociologists may have more to argue about because this experience harks back to elements of the process of insertion of traditional immigrants, particularly in the development and use of independent, community sustained organizations to attain social influence and political power while it must maintain front and center the structural realities brought about by the economic insertion of Latinos and the presence of profound social exclusion, neglect, and institutional racism. However, perhaps the most interesting questions arise from the confluence of public policy and economic decisions and the lives of immigrants in the intense relations of small places. “This is a small place, City Hall is just down the street. There are not the many layers of people and bureaucracies to get to the politicians and decision makers,” said a Latino activist in a recent interview. “You look power in the face almost every day.”⁹³ And when it looks back, in the intense exchanges that breed in constrained spaces, the question is whether it will see the partner to take this small place to the future or the enemy to be maintained outside at all costs.

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² In general terms, a *barrio* is the Spanish word used to identify concentrations of Latinos in a particular district(s), neighborhood (s) or area(s) of a city where they represent the majority of the population. Barrios vary in size and extension depending on the city. The origin and development of barrios in urban areas of the US obeys to the diverse circumstances of urban development and change of cities, the history of migration, settlement, and labor market insertion of the different Latino sub-groups, and to their socio-cultural background.

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⁵ For a review of these theories see: Alejandro Portes & Robert Bach. (1985). *Latin Journey*. Berkeley: University of California Press. An exemption to the "traditional" path took place when immigrants were attracted to small company towns in search for mining or manufacturing jobs, but concentration in large cities, for the most part, was the rule.

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