

New Ethnic Landscapes

Place Making in Urban America

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TO THE GENTRIFIERS!! HARLEM DIDN'T START WHEN YOU GOT HERE!! HAR-
LEM IS FOR HARLEMITES!—COMMUNITY FIRST!

Recently I passed the graffiti above, hastily scrawled at a busy corner of 125th Street in Manhattan. The sentiment reflected a local perception that Harlem, long widely considered the cultural capital of Black America, faced a growing wave of economic revitalization, real estate speculation, and racial flux—in short, a spiral of gentrification. Indeed, the district's Black population declined from about 88 percent of the total in 1990 to 70 percent in 2010, according to the U.S. Census. As local rents and property values soar and affluent households move into still relatively affordable areas of northern Manhattan, Harlem is often said to be "losing its soul." The changes under way in this storied neighborhood—once home to such African American civil rights leaders, artists, and writers as Marcus Garvey, Billie Holiday, Langston Hughes, and James Baldwin—raise questions about whether Harlem can still accurately be considered an "enduring ghetto," as historian Gilbert Osofsky famously called it.¹

As diverse global and local forces restructure contemporary American cities, ethnic communities often struggle to keep their homes and preserve their neighborhoods in the face of prevailing tides of urban change. Even cosmopolitan centers such as New York and San Francisco, long known for their multicultural diversity and receptivity to new immigrants, risk pricing out the longtime residents who have provided a distinctive sense of place. The Hispanic population of Manhattan's East Village declined dramatically, from 62 percent in 1990 to 34 percent in 2010, for example, while in San Francisco's Inner Mission District, Latinos fell from 62 to 50 percent. According to a venerable community newspaper, San Francisco's bilingual *El Tecolote*, "As an influx of new businesses draws a more affluent clientele to the area, many Latino residents and business owners are outpriced and forced to relocate to more affordable neighborhoods."² Nearby, the Asian American residents of the city's famous Chinatown dropped from 93 to 83 percent over the two decades, due both to local real estate pressures and to declining immigration from an economically booming China. On the other hand,

ethnic communities continue to grow in America, particularly in new gateway cities like Poughkeepsie, New York, where nearly half the population of central areas is now of Hispanic origin.³

These demographic trends underscore the continuing importance of ethnic landscapes in urban America. The ghettos, barrios, and Chinatowns of U.S. cities have long incubated novel hybrid identities within North American cultural frameworks and social hierarchies. Ethnic terms such as "Asian," "African American," and "Hispanic" or "Latino" may have little personal relevance to migrants before leaving their countries or regions of origin, but on arrival, such categories greatly affect group acculturation and social mobility. While contemporary technological change undoubtedly homogenizes cultures in some ways, time-space compression also intensifies a sense of difference and "otherness." This differentiation remains much in evidence. Television, film, and news media rely on urban images—too often stereotypes—to depict ethnic groups, while advances in transportation, telecommunication, and money transfer encourage transnational linkages at odds with assimilationist "melting pot" ideals.

Urban America continues to showcase the varieties of ethnic change, now as in the past, and distinctive neighborhoods still serve as cultural seedbeds of identity. This chapter interprets contemporary ethnic landscapes through a historical-geographical lens on migration and settlement, cultural politics, and community change. These processes are directly connected to the formation of ethnic places in America. After a brief theoretical review of the cultural landscape and ethnic place-making literatures, this chapter draws on case studies from three cities of varying sizes, locations, and social compositions to empirically document several common types of ethnic landscape change. These three illustrative cities are

1. Poughkeepsie, New York, a small city long a commercial and industrial hub of the mid-Hudson Valley, has begun to reverse decades of socioeconomic decline with the recent arrival of a growing Mexican American population;
2. San Francisco, California, famous as a scenic and multicultural city with a large Asian American population, has experienced widespread gentrification and soaring real estate prices, which have favored some groups while threatening others with displacement; and
3. New York City, historically the country's premier immigrant port of entry, has witnessed a postindustrial economic restructuring led by corporate and financial sectors, thereby modifying the skyline and reshaping ethnic geographies.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND ETHNIC PLACE MAKING

The study of cultural landscapes has long been a leading paradigm in American academic geography. As the field's early infatuation with environmental determinism waned in the 1920s, geographer Carl O. Sauer proposed a focus on the cultural landscape in terms of the human imprint on the land. In his classic

formulation, "the cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result."⁴ Thus began an enduring approach, associated with the seminal work of Sauer and his intellectual descendants, which provided a conceptual compass for many twentieth-century cultural geographers. Although early landscape studies often focused on rural areas of Latin America or the U.S. Southwest, in time cultural geographers turned to the complex fabrics of urban landscapes. J. B. Jackson examined the "vernacular landscape" in a variety of settings, while Donald Meinig, Pierce Lewis, and others interpreted "ordinary landscapes" with an emphasis on contemporary urban and suburban cases.⁵

As geographers increasingly grappled with issues of social change and multicultural diversity, urban landscapes became important sites for theoretical innovation. A new generation of scholars proclaimed a "new cultural geography" based on poststructural and postmodern interpretations. Instead of focusing solely on visible material cultures, this new approach emphasized landscape's symbolic dimensions, contested meanings, and social relations. For example, Peter Jackson argued, "Though much of the 'new' cultural geography remains wedded to the idea of landscape, the approach adopted here emphasizes the plurality of cultures and the multiplicity of landscapes with which those cultures are associated."⁶ Rather than avoiding reference to politics, modern media, and the arts, the new cultural geographers foregrounded cultural politics and incorporated visual representations in literature, advertising, and film. A rising tide of multiculturalism encouraged geographical studies of nationalism, class, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. As a result, landscape study remains alive and well in geographical scholarship, now going beyond material culture to encompass nonmaterial, discursive, and ideological elements as well.⁷

By abolishing the former Eurocentric "national origins" formula in use since the Immigration Act of 1924, the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 encouraged immigration from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Understood in terms of the association of built forms, human patterns, and social processes, the urban landscape serves as a useful "text" to "read" the dynamic and complex ethnic change in contemporary American cities. While this chapter thus retains the time-honored emphasis on material culture—the buildings, cultural signatures, and evolving streetscapes—it also incorporates issues of social space, cultural politics, public art, social resistance, community development, and empowerment characteristic of contemporary trends in cultural geography. This critical approach has particular relevance for ethnic communities, which emerge not merely in abstract spaces, but more concretely in specific places affected by diverse local and global forces.

Besides examining how ethnic communities reshape urban landscapes, this chapter relates such changes to neighborhood identities and perceptions. Through processes of place making, ethnic groups create distinctive geographies in social, spatial, and symbolic terms. While a "sense of place" generally refers to a location's inherent "personality" or "character," historical-geographical perspectives suggest that such identities arise through human action. As Doreen Massey argues, "Instead of looking back with nostalgia to some identity of place which it is assumed already exists, the past has to be constructed."⁸ This

constructionist approach suggests that place-based identities emerge through social conflict, political activity, and images of the news media. For example, new groups may rename districts, represent local businesses through symbols, tell particular stories of place, prefer distinctive building styles and public arts, and organize community festivals and other events. In short, ethnic places arise from a variety of socioeconomic, cultural, political, and other processes in urban America.⁹

By way of illustration, this chapter analyzes ethnic place making in terms of three emblematic types of urban landscape: incipient landscapes of ethnic arrival, consolidated landscapes of ethnic enclaves, and defensive landscapes of ethnic contention. This typology assumes particular historical and geographical contexts, subject to change over time. Specific ethnic communities may historically pass through two or all three of these landscape types, but this process does not imply an irrevocable progression or a unilinear "stage" model. Nor does it suggest that these types of ethnic landscape are all encompassing: processes of ethnic change are multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a three-part framework. Still, even if not exhaustive, this typology highlights archetypical ethnic landscapes of urban America.

Table 3.1 indicates the changing populations of major racial and ethnic groups—Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics—between 1990 and 2010 in the three cities and their respective case-study districts. Indicative of post-1965 immigration flows at the city scale, White and Black populations generally declined during this twenty-year period, while Asian and Hispanic populations increased. Ethnic geographies experienced the most volatility at the scale of urban districts, illustrating the three types of urban landscape change. For example, the shift of Poughkeepsie's Middle Main Street area from predominantly White and Black to Hispanic populations indicates the incipient landscapes of

Table 3.1. Populations by Race and Hispanic Origin in New York City, Poughkeepsie, and San Francisco, 1990–2010

City and District	Total Population, 2010	Percent White		Percent Black		Percent Asian		Percent Hispanic	
		1990	2010	1990	2010	1990	2010	1990	2010
New York City	8,175,133	52.5	44.0	28.7	25.5	7.0	12.7	24.4	28.6
East Village/Loisaida	44,709	35.1	58.5	19.8	12.6	5.7	14.6	62.0	34.5
Harlem	87,964	1.5	13.9	87.6	70.2	0.4	2.3	10.1	20.6
Poughkeepsie	32,736	65.4	50.9	31.5	33.5	1.5	1.6	3.8	19.5
Middle Main Street	3,868	57.9	38.0	36.6	30.7	1.3	—	9.7	44.2
San Francisco	805,235	53.6	48.5	10.9	6.1	29.1	33.3	13.9	15.1
Chinatown	14,542	3.7	12.4	0.7	1.6	93.1	83.3	0.4	2.5
Inner Mission District	33,362	46.6	52.9	4.5	3.0	13.2	11.9	62.3	50.3

Note: Percentages do not total 100, since not all racial categories are included here; in addition, the U.S. census considers Hispanic origin to be an ethnicity rather than a race. For our purposes, New York's East Village comprises census tracts 20, 22.02, 24, 26.01, 26.02, 28, 30.02, 32, and 34; Harlem includes census tracts 186, 190, 200, 208, 212, 214, 216, 218, 220, 222, 224, 226, 228, 230, 232, 234, and 236. Poughkeepsie's Middle Main Street area equals census tract 2011. San Francisco Chinatown covers tracts 107, 113, 118, and 611, while the Inner Mission District comprises tracts 208, 209, 228.01, 228.02, 228.03, 229.01, 229.02, and 229.03.

Source: U.S. Census, American Factfinder, 1990 Summary File 1 (SF1), 100 Percent Data; U.S. Census, American Factfinder, 2010 Summary File 2 (SF2), 100 Percent Data.

ethnic arrival. Likewise, the continuing predominance of Asian Americans (nearly all of Chinese origin) in San Francisco's Chinatown, and of African Americans in New York's Harlem, reflects the consolidation of ethnic place-based identities.¹⁰ While the proportions have fallen over the last two decades in both districts, due largely to urban redevelopment and gentrification, Asians and Blacks retain solid majorities, and it remains unlikely they will soon lose their historic holds over their respective ethnic enclaves. On the other end of the spectrum are ethnic depopulation and displacement; the dramatic increase of Whites and decline of Hispanics in both New York City's East Village/Loisaida and San Francisco's Inner Mission District provide demographic evidence of the defensive landscapes of ethnic contention. All these variations of ethnic change can be complex and controversial, as they inevitably involve people's sense of place, community, home, and well-being.

ETHNIC ARRIVAL: NEWCOMERS MAKE DISTINCTIVE PLACES

Ethnic districts form initially through in-migration by groups that the majority defines as distinctive in national, racial, regional, or religious terms. The diverse factors affecting migration vary from case to case, but once established, migrants typically attract more of their compatriots through time. Geographical specificity often stems from "chain migration" by which communications among social networks of friends and families provide information and personal contacts in far-away places. Whatever the causes of out-migration from the sending country or region, localized constraints and opportunities in the receiving region ultimately shape U.S. ethnic landscapes. New ethnic districts emerge due to the presence of jobs, housing, services, and so forth. Immigrants of modest means seek out cheap housing—usually in residential hotels or shared rental apartments—and a street life ensues as they frequent local establishments. Prosperous immigrants have more residential choice and often resettle in affluent suburban neighborhoods. Although geographers have documented contemporary "ethnoburbs" and multiethnic suburbs with immigrant businesses, ethnic landscapes also continue to emerge in the working-class reception zones of central cities. Recent waves of immigration have repopulated and economically revitalized many struggling U.S. inner cities, as in Poughkeepsie.

Latino Revitalization of Main Street, Poughkeepsie, New York

Until recent decades, Latin Americans have not been highly visible in most cities of Upstate New York. Although migrant farmworkers long toiled in Hudson Valley agriculture, the Latino population did not establish a permanent presence beyond a few cities tied closely to New York City, such as Yonkers and Beacon, where Puerto Rican, Dominican, and other Caribbean migrants settled. During the 1980s, migratory currents from Mexico and Central America extended upstate and began to give a new ethnic sense of place to the mid-Hudson region. Officially the Hispanic population skyrocketed from 3.8 percent of Poughkeepsie's total in 1990 to 10.5 percent in 2000 and then to 19.5 percent in 2010. In

the city's central area, Latinos now comprise nearly half the population. Because many storefronts and houses were abandoned in blighted neighborhoods, the Latino influx repopulated the inner city rather than displacing residents. As a result, the city's total population rose significantly in recent decades, to 32,736 in 2010. While still far below the city's peak population of 41,000 in 1950, before postwar "urban renewal" demolished about four thousand housing units and ravaged the urban core, recent trends suggest a gradual downtown revitalization. Outside the central city, Hispanic residents comprised 9.8 percent of the surrounding town of Poughkeepsie's 43,341 suburban residents in 2010.¹¹ The origins of this Mexican American community can be traced to pioneer immigrants, who discovered the availability of local work and spread the news back home in Oaxaca during the 1980s in a chain migration fashion. Even minimum-wage jobs proved attractive, because an hour of work in the United States typically paid more than a whole day's labor in southern Mexico.¹² Mexican immigration first gained local visibility with the 1991 opening of El Bracero Restaurant on Main Street. The owner, Honorio "Pie" Rodriguez, hailed from La Cienega, a Oaxacan village of some three thousand residents. About a quarter of La Cienega's adult men worked in the Poughkeepsie area by the 1990s. Increasing migration from Oaxacan villages—La Cienega, San Agustín Yatareni, and Zaachila—provided compelling ethnographic evidence that new conceptions "of space and time enabled the creation of this single transnational 'locale.'"¹³ Time-space compression allowed Oaxaca and Upstate New York, once distant sites, to overcome geographic barriers and create an increasingly diverse transnational community: immigrants now arrive from other Mexican cities such as Puebla and Veracruz, in addition to Oaxaca, and from Central America as well.

Latinos quickly entered the local workforce. From modest beginnings, they soon worked in a broad range of jobs, including stores and restaurants of various types and sizes, house painting, construction, landscaping, and fast-food establishments. Immigration occurred quickly and remained relatively unnoticed by regional residents until a tragic hit-and-run car accident on April 10, 1998, left Jaime Gil Tenorio dead on a downtown expressway. A police investigation revealed him to be a thirty-two-year-old undocumented migrant who worked in landscaping to support a wife and four children in Oaxaca. Rather than lead to a xenophobic backlash against Latino migrants, local residents, churches, and newspapers launched efforts to help the Tenorio family. Some 2,500 local donors raised \$22,583, which provided funds to fly the body home and assist the surviving Tenorios. After the accident, the *Poughkeepsie Journal* reported that local residents "have grown curious and friendly" about the growing Mexican American population in their midst.¹⁴ While early immigrants were predominantly male, a notable recent influx of women, children, and other relatives began to balance the sex ratio and to provide a more stable family life. Contemporary immigration has sparked surprisingly little social conflict. School administrators have reported that Latino students mix well with others, and youth gangs do not seem to be a major problem. Community leaders say that relations between Hispanics and African Americans, still the city's largest ethnic group, "have generally been good."¹⁵

As Ines Miyares has noted for New York City, the Latino cultural imprint is most evident in Poughkeepsie's commercial streetscapes rather than in the house-scaping.¹⁶ The explanation probably lies in the relative newness, low incomes, and renter status of the city's Latino immigration. Latin American or Mexican morphological and cultural elements present in the Southwest—historic plazas and street grids, brightly painted houses, yard shrines, and surrounding fences or walls—have not typically been present in northeastern cities. Locally, male Latino immigrants often rent apartments with others in the inexpensive units along central Main Street, while those with families prefer detached houses in surrounding residential districts. Poughkeepsie apartment buildings and houses thus show little Latino influence in facade color or religious shrines, unlike parts of the U.S. Southwest.¹⁷

The Latino presence stands out most visibly on the streetscapes of Main Street, traditionally the city's banner street, where ethnic signatures now emblazon storefronts. As the *Poughkeepsie Journal* enthused not long ago, "Walk down Poughkeepsie's Main Street and the colorful signs of change seem to leap toward you from downtown storefronts, impossible for passers-by to miss. Pancho Villa, Casa Latina, Sabor Latino, and dozens of other Hispanic businesses flavor the corridor with a Latin American zest."¹⁸ An aspiring Latino entrepreneurial class has contributed to Main Street's steady revitalization in recent years, after suffering from high rates of abandonment and deterioration since World War II. In addition to the competition of regional shopping malls and the suburbanization of affluent residents, urban renewal programs exacerbated central Poughkeepsie's decline during the late 1960s and early 1970s, given the widespread demolition of buildings to make way for traffic arterials, parking lots, and an ill-fated pedestrian mall along a three-block stretch of Main Street. After opening the Main Mall in 1973, the area's socioeconomic decline only accelerated. The re-opening of central Main Street to vehicular traffic in 2000, along with improved streetscapes for pedestrians, has encouraged a revival of several moribund blocks. Several upscale restaurants and shops have opened downtown with great fanfare, and generally the number of vacant storefronts and apartments has declined significantly in recent years.¹⁹

The 1992 city directory listed only two Latino businesses on Main Street: El Bracero Restaurant and La Oaxaqueña store. By 2013, just over two decades later, about twenty-five Hispanic businesses could be found clustered between Raymond Avenue and the Hudson River. The 2001 opening of the Casa Latina, a large grocery store, served the most dramatic notice of the ethnic transformation of Main Street. Fieldwork over the last decade has suggested a recent entrepreneurial stabilization, due both to the lingering effects of the U.S. economic recession and a slowdown in local immigration. Among the two dozen Latino businesses counted in 2013 were six variety and specialty stores, some of which advertise money transfers to Latin America; three Hispanic grocery stores; two *panaderias* or bakeries; two delicatessens; a hair salon; and many others.²⁰ Marked by signs mixing Spanish and English, these businesses initially tended to be modest undertakings but became more professional with time. Latino businesses often adopt visible transnational signifiers in the windows and



Figure 3.1. “El Azteca” (“The Aztec”), a Mexican-American grocery store on Poughkeepsie’s Main Street, evokes migrant origins to create a multicultural sense of place in Upstate New York.

facades. Most notable are the Mexican colors and flag, such national symbols as the saguaro cactus and the indigenous past, and references to places and festivals. Business names often refer to specific cities like Oaxaca and Puebla, Mexico (figure 3.1) This Hispanic influx does not suggest gentrification, given continuing commercial vacancies and the area’s working-class status, but the emerging cultural landscape provides renewed activity in what had long been a deteriorated and largely boarded-up area.

The increasingly pedestrian flow along Main Street has provided more “eyes on the street,” which as Jane Jacobs predicted has improved security.²¹ Latino men now can be found along Main Street at all hours, often walking in groups; bicycles provide a common mode of transportation for commuting to and from jobs. Day laborers assemble at the corner of Cherry and Main Streets during the morning, waiting for work. Women, children, and families also are increasingly visible, especially during daytime hours. This growing pedestrian presence on Main Street supports Mike Davis’s contention that Hispanic migrants have provided many U.S. central cities with a refreshing dose of “magical urbanism” to refresh deteriorating downtowns.²² The popular Walk Score index gives this part of central Main Street a “very walkable” index of 72, based on the proximity of various amenities, despite its predominantly low-income status. The population of Hispanic or Latino origin in this core census tract accounted officially for over 44 percent of the total in 2010. While the poverty rate was 30 percent among

residents, the median household income doubled since 2000 to about \$30,000—only about 25 percent below the citywide average, although still less than half of Dutchess County’s.²³

While building deterioration and vacant lots remain along Main Street, generally upkeep and maintenance have improved dramatically. The city has invested in a new public safety building and encouraged the construction of infill apartment buildings, while a community partnership known as the “Middle Main Initiative” has commissioned colorful murals, improved housing quality, promoted local businesses, and organized community events such as Mexican “Day of the Dead” celebrations. Begun by the Hudson River Housing organization, the Middle Main Initiative has focused on improving affordable housing, increasing resident pride, and encouraging investment in the community. Recently the organization obtained title to an abandoned factory, the Poughkeepsie Underwear Factory, where restoration of the landmark property will create new rental housing and a community center in one of the most distressed neighborhoods in the city of Poughkeepsie.²⁴

The new Hispanic businesses reflect the city’s changing demographics, as did the previous Irish, Italians, and other immigrants. Community events also reveal processes of ethnic place making. For example, since 1998 the Liga Independiente de Fútbol Asociado has encouraged young Latinos to play on soccer teams with transnational or translocal linkages to communities in southern Mexico and Central America, as in other cities.²⁵ Local festivals also feature new ethnic events, such as the Guelaguetza from Oaxaca, which since 2009 has attracted growing numbers of celebrants. On the last Sunday of July 2012, more than two thousand people packed Waryas Park on the Hudson River waterfront to celebrate Mexican heritage, folklore, music, and dance. The local Grupo Folklórico Poughkeepsie performed to the assembled multitudes, along with several dance companies, dressed in Guelaguetza costumes before a multiethnic crowd. Felipe Santos, an event organizer, was enthusiastic about this community celebration: “It’s a sharing of traditions and Guelaguetza means sharing. Everybody is involved and our culture is involved with Poughkeepsie. We want to share our traditions with our children, who were born here, and then they can share what they have to offer with others.”²⁶

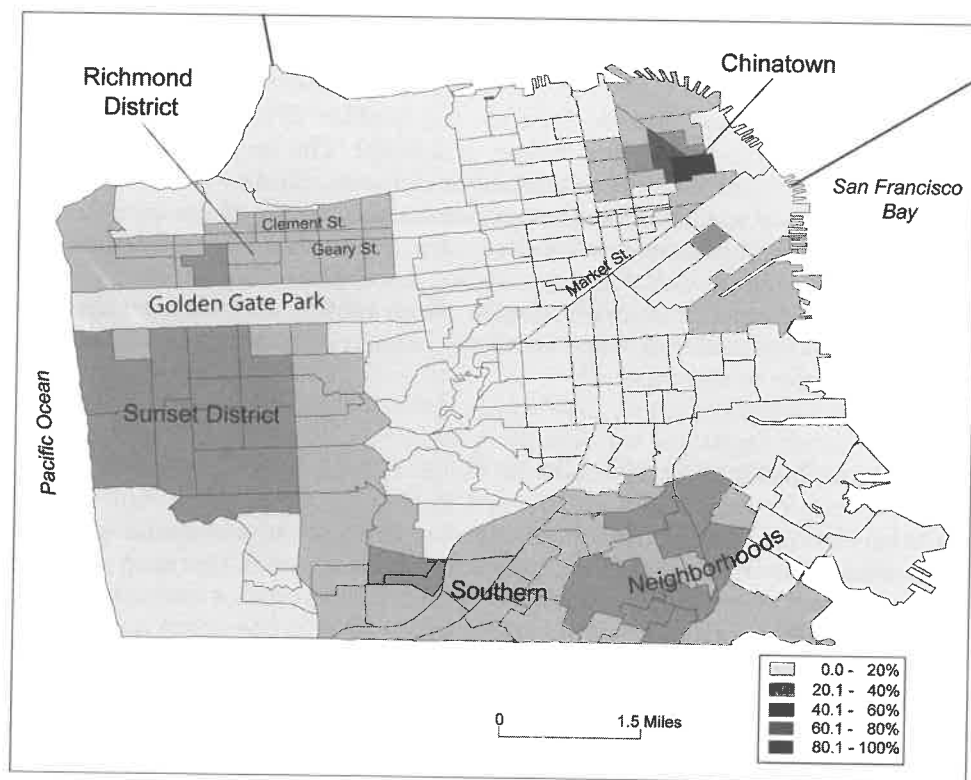
ETHNIC ENCLAVES: CONSOLIDATION OF PLACE-BASED IDENTITIES

The urban cultural landscape reflects the degree to which an ethnic group becomes dominant in demographic, political, and economic terms. As a group passes a critical threshold, processes of neighborhood change and ethnic place making typically accelerate and become more visible. If and when a district becomes the ethnic enclave of a dominant group, the urban landscape registers a full-fledged cultural imprint accordingly. While businesses typically cater to ethnic needs such as durable consumer items, food and drink, and entertainment, they also provide higher-order services such as doctors, insurance, and legal services. Signage in a foreign language or dialect illustrates this ethnic transition, as does local street life, social space, and sense of place. Local institutions of church

and state may offer bilingual services and ceremonies in native languages. Community art and architectural adaptation reflect ethnic themes. Entrepreneurs often project certain regional or national images to attract business by local residents, visitors, and even tourists. Community monuments, landmarks, names of streets and public spaces, and other ethnic symbols suggest enhanced group status and political importance. In short, the urban ethnic landscape becomes a source of collective ethnic identity.

Chinatown: From Enclave to Ethnoburb

Long isolated in urban Chinatowns, Chinese Americans have constituted one of the country's most distinctive and segregated ethnic groups. San Francisco boasts the oldest and most famous Chinatown in America, where a major tourist attraction also comprises a densely populated ethnic enclave (map 3.1). Once almost entirely Chinese American, Chinatown in 2010 was still more than 83 percent Asian and 80 percent of Chinese descent (table 3.1). This ethnic district dates from the California gold rush, when Cantonese peasants from Guangdong Province—suffering from the ravages of civil strife, poverty, and overfarming—came to *gum shan*, the “golden mountain” of America. While most Chinese initially went to the goldfields, San Francisco remained the main center of supply and services. In 1851,



Map 3.1. Chinese by census tract, San Francisco, 2010. Source: U.S. Census, 2010, SFI, table PCT 23.

some three thousand Chinese could already be found in the city. Rising popular resentment against the Chinese, fed by resentful White workers, particularly European immigrants, soon intensified Chinese urbanization in the West. Passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and antimiscegenation laws created a “bachelor society.” By 1890, San Francisco had 25,833 Chinese residents, overwhelmingly male, representing almost 9 percent of the city's population.²⁷

For a century San Francisco's Chinese were confined to a downtown district located along Dupont Street (later Grant Avenue). Speaking little English, restricted in housing, and fearful of attacks by outsiders, the Chinese had good reason to congregate. Chinatown became an insular ethnic enclave in which men outnumbered women by about twenty to one by the 1880s. This gender imbalance encouraged the proliferation of vice operations catering to single men, featuring such illicit activities as prostitution, gambling, and opium dens, that gave Chinatown a reputation for licentiousness and moral depravity. The Chinese could not live outside of Chinatown, and Whites regarded the area as dangerous and dirty. Ethnic associations, based upon surname, region of origin, and linguistic dialect helped organize life in Chinatown; the more important organizations joined forces in the politically powerful Chinese Benevolent Association, popularly known as the Six Companies. Like so much else there, the Six Companies was not Asian in origin but an American institution that grew out of urban segregation.²⁸

After the 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed Chinatown, along with most of downtown San Francisco, civic leaders proposed to relocate the district away from its valuable central location. Chinese Americans resisted the forced move, and the government of China also expressed its displeasure. Given the economic importance of Chinese commerce and taxes, and aware that other West Coast cities would welcome them, San Francisco backed down on the threats: Chinatown proved too lucrative to move. To combat entrenched anti-Asian racism, Chinese merchants proposed to rebuild the infamous vice district as an exotic but sanitized tourist attraction. Look Tin Eli, founder of the Bank of Canton, sought to redevelop the district with “veritable fairy palaces” filled with the Orient's treasures.²⁹ Following the lead of his faux-Chinese-style store at California and Grant Streets, other Chinese businesses contracted White American architects to design buildings with brightly colored facades, ornamental dragons, pagoda rooflines with curved eaves, painted balconies, wind-bells and flowered lanterns, and brilliant neon signage. As architectural historian Sally Woodbridge has suggested, “The district was also imprinted architecturally with Oriental stage-set trappings designed to lure tourists up from the downtown shopping area to a world-famous Oriental bazaar. The scheme worked.”³⁰

Previously built largely of wooden structures with no architectural distinction, Chinatown's reconstruction after 1906 featured brick-and-mortar construction and other solid building materials. Rebuilding began quickly with a predominance of three- to four-story tenements, consisting of small rooms suitable for single immigrant men; overwhelmingly these units had inadequate plumbing and were substandard by city codes. Besides the continued crowding, rebuilt Chinatown retained the same basic boundaries, except for an expansion along Grant Avenue to Bush Street, where a steady tourist trade developed.

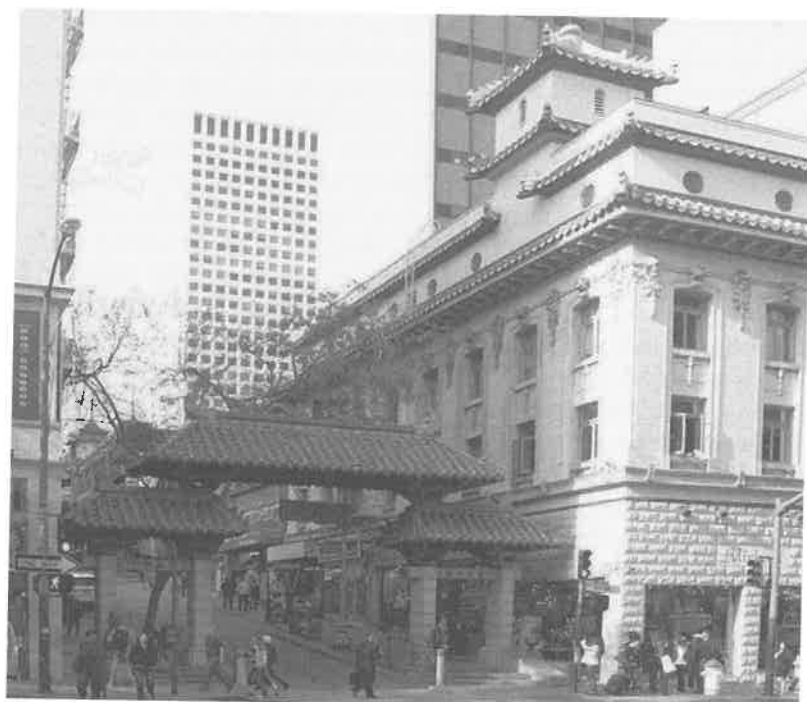


Figure 3.2. Chinatown's symbolic entrance is the "Dragon Gate" at Grant and Bush Streets, completed in 1970 as a gift of the Taiwan government, shown beside a faux Chinese "pagoda"-style building.

Grant Avenue became the ethnic banner street, lined with Chinese restaurants, specialty shops, grocery stores, and other businesses. Paradoxically, the architecture and signage assumed an increasingly "Oriental" look while the city's Chinese population decreased to less than ten thousand by World War I.³¹ As in other western cities, the urban landscape of San Francisco's Chinatown cannot be understood simply in terms of immigrant cultural origins, but also as racialized Orientalist images shaped by ethnic constraints, perceptions, and commercial opportunities (figure 3.2).

Given popular prejudices and racial covenants in housing, Chinatown remained a segregated community until the mid-twentieth century. With its own distinctive customs and institutions, outsiders perceived Chinatown as a foreign district immune from outside authority. Only after World War II did Chinese begin to move into new areas of San Francisco, given a gradual relaxation of residential segregation and immigration constraints. The repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, and the extension of the War Brides Act of 1945 to Chinese in 1947, finally permitted an end to the "bachelor society." As the lure of the suburbs produced vacancies in the city's older neighborhoods, Chinese Americans expanded beyond Chinatown into adjacent districts downtown and affluent neighborhoods of western San Francisco. With the passage of liberalized immigration laws implemented in 1965, which abolished the previous system of national quotas, San Francisco's Asian communities grew steadily from 22

percent of the city's population in 1980 to 33 percent in 2010 (table 3.1). Chinese Americans made up nearly two-thirds (64.2 percent) of San Francisco's total Asian population in 2010, while in the downtown census tracts of Chinatown, virtually all (95.6 percent) of the Asians were of Chinese descent.³²

The presence of a large Chinese population has attracted Asian capital to San Francisco. Hong Kong-based banks have proliferated in the financial district, and Chinese investors have generally found a friendly environment in San Francisco. The influx of investments contrasts with the continuing poverty and crowding in Chinatown, where immigrants from China and Southeast Asia face inflated housing prices because of the bidding wars for downtown property. Chinatown's core census tracts remain more than 80 percent Chinese in the midst of a major tourist attraction. In recent years, the influx of Chinese immigrants has slowed, while the educated "sea turtles"—Chinese educated abroad—often return home, lured by government incentives and economic opportunities. Coupled with economic pressures and suburbanization of successful Chinese Americans, Chinatowns across America have experienced declines in their residential populations. As Bonnie Tsui recently noted, "smaller Chinatowns have been fading for years. . . . But now the Chinatowns in San Francisco and New York are depopulating, becoming less residential and more service-oriented."³³

Affluent Chinese Americans have moved to western areas of the city or to outlying suburban locations. The movement into areas adjacent to Chinatown has generated controversy, as North Beach, Russian Hill, and Nob Hill have become largely Chinese American. A secondary Chinatown has emerged in the affluent Richmond District, where Clement Street features scores of Chinese businesses (map 3.1). The housing morphology of single-family houses and multiunit buildings appeals to Chinese extended families, who settle in close proximity or even under one roof. In addition, several transit lines run from the Richmond District directly to Chinatown downtown. This transportation connection has been important to maintaining family ties, access to ethnic foods and other products, and social institutions.

Chinese Americans now move into such southern neighborhoods as Visitation Valley, Excelsior, Bayview, Oceanview, and Ingleside, which have become virtual ethnic "suburbs" within the city (map 3.1). Chinatown is no longer a necessary gateway for recent immigrants. Social service agencies are now more likely to send immigrants to outlying districts than to crowded Chinatown. Those who arrive with significant financial resources no longer need the gateway community services, of course, since they can move directly into homeownership in such affluent Chinese American "ethnoburbs" as the city's Sunset District or the East and South San Francisco Bay regions. "Ethnoburbs are altering demographic composition, business practices and social relations in suburbia," according to geographer Wei Li. "They challenge the dominant view that assimilation is inevitable and the best solution for minorities."³⁴

Harlem: Place Making in an African American Mecca

Speculative overbuilding of the housing stock transformed New York's Harlem from a well-to-do White streetcar suburb of the turn of the twentieth century,

served by elevated trains and the IRT subway lines to Lower Manhattan, into a crowded Black ghetto by the 1920s (map 3.2). A decisive turning point came during the economic depression of 1904–1905, when the building boom ended and left many vacant apartments and foreclosed mortgages. Philip A. Payton, an enterprising Black real estate agent, persuaded the White owners of property

Map 3.2. Blacks by census tract, Manhattan, 2010. Source: U.S. Census, 2010, SFI, table P8.



on West 134th Street to rent their vacant apartments to African Americans, whose numbers were increasing due to the "Great Migration" under way from the U.S. South. Payton promised White landlords good rents and efficient management for "colored tenements." His Afro-American Realty Company facilitated the movement of Blacks from the downtown slums of San Juan Hill and the Tenderloin to Harlem uptown. Despite efforts of some White residents and property owners to stop the influx, the district became predominantly African American by the 1920s.³⁵

The Harlem Renaissance signaled a creative efflorescence by Black artists, poets, and musicians during the 1920s. The emergence of the "New Negro" and a Black bourgeoisie made Harlem a symbol of unimagined success, luxury, and cultural mystique. Harlem's fame grew with the success of the Cotton Club, Connie's Inn, and other uptown nightclubs where Whites went "slumming" to enjoy Black bands, singers, and dance shows. Black churches also joined the movement to Harlem during the 1920s. The exclusive St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church, long reputed to be the wealthiest Black congregation in Harlem, sold its downtown property and bought large real estate holdings on 135th Street, where it rented apartments to Blacks. The Abyssinian Baptist Church under the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Sr. also purchased property during the 1920s. Through the ups and downs of this district, African American churches have remained pillars of the Harlem community.

As the Roaring Twenties gave way to the 1929 Depression, Harlem's glamour dissipated amid widespread unemployment, growing poverty, racial discrimination, housing deterioration, and declining living conditions. The district's public health situation was considered the worst in the city by the early 1930s. Building maintenance declined as landlords cut back. To meet rents, many African Americans subdivided apartments, and increased crowding paradoxically created a "slum boom" for property owners. Although World War II brought greater employment opportunities for Harlem residents, overcrowding and physical deterioration of the neighborhood continued unabated. After the war, housing disinvestment and abandonment in Harlem steadily worsened, intensifying the "ghetto" conditions for which Harlem has long been known.³⁶

Out of this poverty and racism, however, arose the civil rights movement. The radical politics of Marcus Garvey's "back to Africa" movement in the 1920s, followed by the large-scale race riots of 1935, 1943, and 1964, created a historical memory of African American activism in Harlem. The Abyssinian Baptist Church became the largest and most influential Black church in New York, while its pastor, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., became the city's first Black congressman while serving as Harlem's representative from 1945 to 1971. Meanwhile, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture became an important part of the community. Other twentieth-century symbols of Black Pride and African American culture arose in Harlem: Malcolm X Park, Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, and the Harlem State Office Building.

During the 1980s, after a half century of steady decline, Harlem unexpectedly began to experience an economic upswing as affordable housing in Manhattan grew scarce. The financial-services boom and widespread gentrification downtown led to increasing housing renovation in Harlem. When two intrepid

geographers, Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith, published an article on "The Gentrification of Harlem?" in 1986, the notion that this long-deteriorated district would experience widespread upgrading and real estate appreciation still seemed far-fetched to many observers.³⁷ But their argument proved prescient.

Although the district suffered a downturn during the stock market decline of the late 1980s, by the mid-1990s Harlem real estate was hot again. Rents and real estate prices have continued to spiral steadily upward: restored townhouses in Harlem now sell for \$1 million or more. The historic district of Striver's Row, which has been renovated as an elegant residential district, saw the sale of a townhouse for \$1.7 million in 2003—an unheard of amount at that point.³⁸

Many recent in-movers have been White, as shown by the dramatic increase in Harlem's White population, from 1.5 percent in 1990 to 13.9 percent in 2010 (table 3.1). Residential changes are not solely about race but also involve class in complex ways that sometimes blur racial difference. Harlem has also become a place of resettlement for affluent African Americans, often not originally from the neighborhood or even New York City, to resettle as part of an ideology of "racial return and revival." Highly educated professional Blacks can encounter unanticipated local differences of class within Harlem's African American community.³⁹ As *New York Magazine* noted in 1997, as the economic revitalization proceeded in earnest, "aided by an infusion of public money and new interest from national retailers, a cadre of young activists [*sic*] are pushing the capital of Black America toward another renaissance—and in the process, are struggling bitterly with Harlem's old guard."⁴⁰

Harlem's banner street lies along the commercial thoroughfare of 125th Street. This dynamic corridor is home to famous African American cultural institutions and historical landmarks, including the Apollo Theater, National Black Theater, Cotton Club, Studio Museum, and Theresa Hotel (figure 3.3). The 125th Street Business Improvement District (BID), created in 1993, sponsors streetscape improvements, sanitation and graffiti removal, public safety, cultural events, and strategy planning to promote "the energy and spirit of Harlem through culture, history, shopping, music, and entertainment."⁴¹ Given its mission "to encourage the ongoing revitalization of 125th Street as a premier art, culture and entertainment destination," the BID has attempted with mixed success to resolve conflicts among established storefront businesses and sidewalk street vendors.⁴² The latter generally are immigrants from Senegal, Gambia, and other West African countries, who line the street to sell clothes, music and film recordings, herbs and skin lotions, and other products to passers-by. Despite recurrent efforts by authorities to relocate them, the street vendors have resisted displacement and steadfastly remained in this busy pedestrian corridor.

Retail establishments range from local specialty and variety stores to large national franchises. In fact, recent investments by national corporations have enhanced the status of 125th Street as a major shopping district, although local residents often express ambivalence about the disappearance of older, locally based businesses in the face of corporate competition. Businesses remain sensitive to the community's history and increasingly even market the Harlem brand, but they seek more affluent customers. A large Red Lobster restaurant franchise, for example, recently opened next to the landmark Apollo Theater. Nearby, the

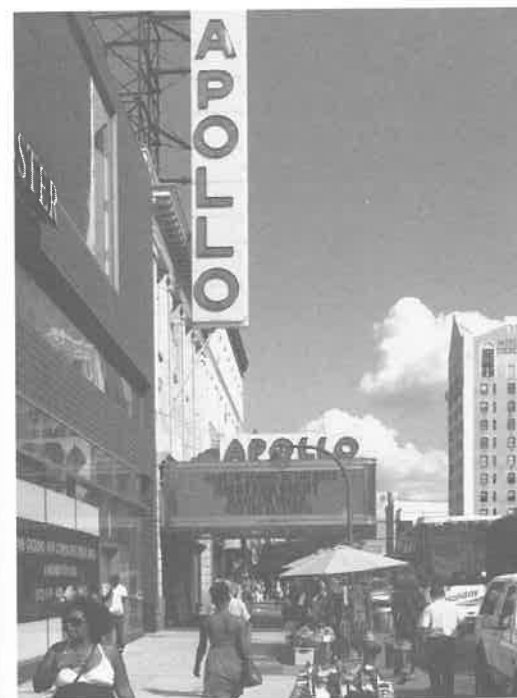


Figure 3.3. A view of Harlem's world-famous Apollo Theater on 125th Street. Note the street vendors, often West African immigrants, who line the street in what is sometimes called "Little Senegal." In the background, the landmarked Theresa Towers (formerly the Theresa Hotel, once known as "the Waldorf of Harlem") now is an office tower.

Harlem USA shopping mall is home to a variety of banks, sporting goods and clothing stores, fitness clubs, restaurants and cafes, and the Magic Johnson Theatres. While most of the businesses are national franchises, Harlem USA advertises itself as featuring "everything you need in one place to accommodate your busy lifestyle . . . while keeping it in the community."⁴³

The influence of such powerful institutions as the Abyssinian Baptist Church to some degree inhibits drastic racial turnover. Since 1989, the Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC), the nonprofit arm of the church, has become a large property owner and a major force in community development, social services, and housing rehabilitation. ADC's "Displacement Prevention Strategy" has renovated hundreds of units of affordable housing in Harlem, along with developing a supermarket and other commercial property, a new high school, and community space.⁴⁴ As a result, it appears unlikely that the African American population will lose its demographic, cultural, and political hold on this ethnic enclave in the near future, although the proportion of Blacks may continue to fall gradually as Harlem becomes more affluent and socially diverse (table 3.1).

The process of gentrification in Harlem is full of paradoxes. Harlem Hospital recently unveiled a new pavilion with renovated Works Projects Administration (WPA) murals of African American life during the 1930s, while just across Malcolm X Boulevard, the world-renowned Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture continues its cultural programming. Nearby, Sylvia's Restaurant prospers with its popular "soul food" fare. Yet longtime residents and businesses find themselves increasingly hard-pressed to afford the rising rents. Recently, for example, the venerable Lenox Lounge closed, as the new owner cannot afford

a new lease. One now sees much more racial diversity in Central Harlem than a generation ago. The neighborhood is changing, raising both hopes and fears among local residents.

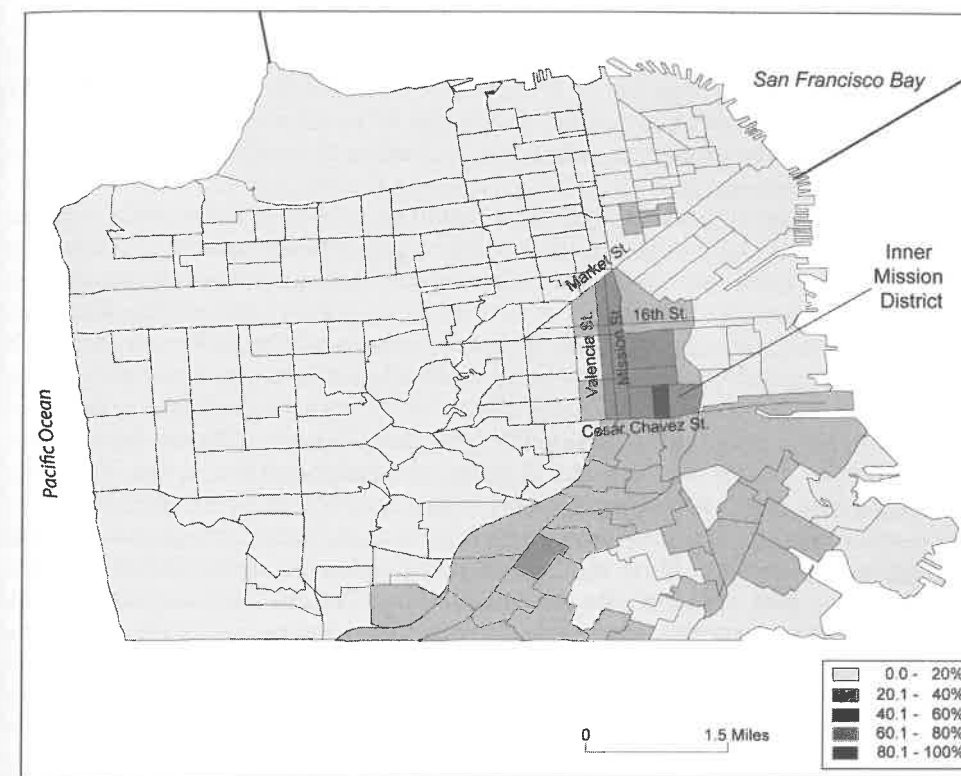
ETHNIC CONTENTION: DEFENSIVE PLACES AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

"Defensive community" refers to an urban district experiencing urban renewal, gentrification, or other socioeconomic processes in which longtime residents, fearing displacement by more affluent in-movers, struggle to maintain their homes and neighborhoods. This concept builds on what sociologist Gerald Suttles called a "defended neighborhood," where interethnic tensions result in a forbidding reputation, gang activity, petty crime, and other forms of resistance to social change.⁴⁵ The concept of a defensive community applies particularly well to contemporary ethnic and immigrant communities facing the socioeconomic restructuring common to global cities, including deindustrialization, corporate and financial-sector expansion, and tight housing markets with increasing rents and property values. In such cosmopolitan centers as New York and San Francisco, known traditionally for their multicultural diversity and receptivity to new immigrants, working-class ethnic neighborhoods undergo social polarization, interethnic conflict, political organizing, and various forms of cultural resistance, involving the community gardens, public art, murals, graffiti, and posters evident in the urban landscape.

Barrio under Siege: San Francisco's Inner Mission District

In San Francisco's Mission District, a Latino community or *barrio* has asserted an ethnic presence through activist politics, commercial streetscapes, cultural activities, and public art. Although this area originally gained its name from the Spanish founding in 1776 of colonial Mission San Francisco de Asís—popularly known as Mission Dolores—the Mission District lost its Latin American character with rapid urbanization during the late nineteenth century. The modern Hispanic community stems from the in-migration of Latin Americans, beginning in the 1930s, when local apartment rents were among the city's cheapest. Many Latinos previously lived near the South-of-Market waterfront, where they worked on the docks or in warehouses, food-processing companies, and light industry. Like previous European immigrant groups, Latin Americans followed the city's street pattern from this gritty area into the Mission District. With the continued influx of Latin American immigrants and the suburbanization of acculturated ethnic groups, especially the Irish and the Italians, the Mission District core became a Latino *barrio* by the 1960s. Along with the ethnic influx, however, came growing problems of neighborhood disinvestment, housing deterioration, linguistic barriers, and poverty.⁴⁶

Because the Mission District's Latino population dwells largely in multiapartment rental buildings, ethnicity is more evident in commercial streetscapes and community art than in housescapes. Outlying business districts on Valencia and



Map 3.3. Hispanics by census tract, San Francisco, 2010. Source: U.S. Census, 2010, SF1, table P5.

Sixteenth Streets are multiethnic, trendy, and popular with young professionals, exhibiting strong signs of gentrification. The heavily Latino Inner Mission (map 3.3) features the ethnic banner streets of Mission Street (between Sixteenth and César Chavez Streets) and lower Twenty-Fourth Street (between Valencia and Potrero Streets). These commercial streetscapes mix Latino restaurants, grocery and specialty shops, travel agencies advertising money transfers, and Latin music stores. A wide variety of regional and national origins are evident: restaurants advertise diverse Mexican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Vietnamese, Chinese, New Age vegetarian, and other cuisines. Grocery and other specialty stores also mirror this multicultural diversity. Street vendors often clog the sidewalks selling their wares in both Spanish and English. The district's Latino population is unusually diverse: Mexican Americans constitute approximately 40 percent, while a plurality comes from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and other countries. Yet over time a Latino community has formed a broad pan-Hispanic identity. Ethnic identification also results from social and linguistic ties, cultural commonalities, and community festivals.⁴⁷

Recent Latin American immigrants typically dwell in cheap residential hotels or crowd into apartments with colleagues. They toil in low-paid service jobs in restaurants, office cleaning, or as domestic servants. Informal employment in painting, construction, landscape gardening, and other household tasks is also

common, despite frequent labor abuses in such casual work. The most vulnerable workers are the male day laborers, mostly undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans, who gather at known locations and bid for jobs on a project basis. Large groups of men assemble daily along César Chavez Street, waiting for job bids from passing motorists, much to the chagrin of local residents who often summon the police.

Public art is an important sign of Latino ethnicity. Since the 1970s, vibrant artistic movements have arisen in this multicultural barrio, animated by a spirit of social and political activism. The Mission District now boasts a remarkable concentration of over a hundred community-based murals, painted by local artists on buildings, walls, and fences. Inspired initially by Diego Rivera and other great Mexican muralists, the street art gradually grew to incorporate graffiti, underground comics, and avant-garde forms to form an iconoclastic mixture of genres. Local cultural centers, influenced by the Chicano political movement, have sought to define the Mission District as Latino cultural space. The *Mujeres Muralistas* collective, for example, began in 1971 to paint murals on the fences and garages of Balmy Alley, often depicting political struggles in Central America and elsewhere. Now more than thirty colorful murals line Balmy Alley (figure 3.4). Not far away, the street art along Clarion Alley has, since 1993, taken a more avant-garde stance with a focus on contemporary political and so-



Figure 3.4. Inspired by Mexican muralism, public art in the Mission District often depicts political struggles in Latin America and beyond. Here artists restore a mural on Balmy Alley, thirty years after first painting it in 1984. Obscured by the artist, the political slogan reads "Culture contains the seed of resistance that blossoms into the flower of liberation."

cial themes in San Francisco. Spectacular public murals adorn many large public buildings, such as the Women's Building on Sixteenth Street or St. Peter's Catholic Church on lower Twenty-Fourth Street. These and other artists have given rise to what is sometimes called the "Mission School," which combines classic Mexican mural styles with a range of postmodern sensibilities.⁴⁸

Poster art also has been a controversial form of cultural politics. The San Francisco Print Collective, an activist group formed in 1999, has created polemical political posters satirizing the trendiness of the "ethnic" Mission and taking aim at local politicians, landlords, and developers. As fears of displacement intensified during the 1990s' Internet "dot-com" boom, anger at luxury housing development, rising rents, evictions of long-term residents, and loss of nonprofit space led to an explosion of neighborhood activism. Demonstrations by the Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition, an alliance of community organizations, have made local headlines and highlighted the presence of an activist community committed to neighborhood preservation at all costs.

These issues still reverberate locally, even as citywide politics evolve in other directions. San Francisco, long known as a haven for progressive politics, was among the most receptive destinations for Central American asylum seekers during the 1980s and 1990s. San Francisco officials extended Sanctuary City provisions to other undocumented immigrants in 1989 and generally opposed federal efforts to target, punish, and deport undocumented Latino immigrants during the extended crackdown after 1996. Since 2008, however, a backlash has emerged to contest the meaning of Sanctuary City. Several high-profile cases involved juvenile undocumented immigrants who committed serious felonies after having been freed from jail for previous crimes. In addition, some Mexican and Central American youth were involved with gangs and drug dealers.

As a result, the mayor and other local politicians, mainstream media, and some elements of public opinion viewed Sanctuary City as "protecting" undocumented juvenile criminals. A controversy arose regarding whether the city would share information with federal authorities about undocumented juvenile immigrants when they were first arrested and *charged* with committing a crime, or only at the time of their actual conviction, in order to protect their due process rights. In 2011, a new mayor compromised to preserve due process for many, but not all, undocumented juvenile arrestees. At this point, unconditionally proimmigrant policies can no longer be taken for granted in San Francisco.⁴⁹

The increasingly divisive political debates over immigration reveal the fault lines of San Francisco's twenty-first-century political economy. The largely low-wage Latino immigrants have faced significant socioeconomic difficulties and have achieved only limited upward mobility, while new biotech and high-tech jobs have changed the electoral demographics of San Francisco. While gentrification has been an issue for decades in the Mission District, an influx of affluent high-tech workers has exacerbated community tensions in recent years. Many of the newcomers work in San Francisco startup companies or commute to Silicon Valley jobs in the South Bay via privately run "tech buses," contracted by companies like Google, Apple, Facebook, and others. Meanwhile, local residents of the Mission District and other parts of San Francisco have struggled to keep up with increasing rents and housing costs. Community activists, who have held

demonstrations and blocked the employee buses in the Mission, have proposed increasing the transit fees for private firms and taxing developers in order to promote more affordable housing. Urban planning to promote public safety, walkability, and transit-oriented development has sometimes led to charges of bias by authorities against poor people of color. For example, the city's "Clean Up the Streets" campaign, which sought to wash streets with disinfectant and steamers, as well as to pick up litter and human waste in the streets, has been criticized for insensitivity to homeless residents on the streets.

The high-tech employee buses have become a symbol of gentrification among many San Francisco citizens, blamed for the city's loss of racial and class diversity, increasingly upscale character and image, and domination by corporate interests in shaping city policy. For example, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) has responded to the use of public transportation facilities by private high-tech employee buses with the introduction of a policy that would charge these buses a dollar fee for using MUNI bus stops (a common practice for these private buses). Antigentrification activists were quick to point out the overtones of lax policy toward the city's major economic boosters: the high-tech companies. Ordinary public drivers would still be subject to a \$271 fine for blocking a public MUNI stop, a stark contrast to the low cost for the high-tech buses, whose parent companies' profits likely outweigh the costs of paying for MUNI bus facility usage many times over.

The Mission District's Latino population has long defied predictions of its demise through community organizing.⁵⁰ In public demonstrations during late 2013 and early 2014, local activists physically blocked high-tech buses and called for the technology companies to take responsible actions and to ameliorate their role in the gentrification of San Francisco's ethnic enclaves. These demonstrations fueled local and nationwide media coverage and encouraged wider awareness, discussion, and education on these issues. Still, for low-wage Latino immigrants, the future looks uncertain with regard to their economic survival and residence in neighborhoods like the gentrifying Mission District of San Francisco.

New York's East Village, Lower East Side

New York's Lower East Side or East Village is another neighborhood in which a defensive urban ethnicity has confronted urban renewal, gentrification, and displacement. Like the Mission District, the Lower East Side was long a working-class neighborhood of European immigrants that further declined in socioeconomic status during the mid-twentieth century. As the district developed a forbidding reputation as a crime- and drug-ridden slum after World War II, White families increasingly fled the Lower East Side for more affluent neighborhoods, and Puerto Rican migrants to New York City often took their vacancies. By the 1960s, Puerto Ricans called the Lower East Side—the area between Houston and Fourteenth Streets, from First Avenue to the East River—Loisaida, a "Spanglish" adaptation of the district's name (map 3.4). Although Loisaida never surpassed El Barrio of East Harlem as a Puerto Rican neighborhood, the Latino population reached about 50 percent of the Lower East Side



Map 3.4. Hispanics by census tract, Manhattan, 2010. Source: U.S. Census, 2010, SFI, table P5.

total in 1970. After a decade of housing abandonment, arson, and demolition that decreased the district's population considerably, the proportion of Latinos rose to 68 percent of Loisaida's total in 1980.⁵¹

Since the 1980s, the Hispanic population in Loisaida has fallen in both absolute and relative terms. Puerto Ricans could not retain a hold over this area, in

part because their migrations were more dispersed in spatial and historical terms than the previous Eastern European immigrants. Puerto Ricans also faced drastic urban service reductions and landlord disinvestment during the city's fiscal squeeze of the 1970s without the political weight to counter subsequent urban renewal, which eliminated thousands of housing units. As indicated in table 3.1, the Latino population of the East Village/Loisaida fell from 62 percent in 1990 to 34.5 percent in 2010. The Lillian Wald and Jacob Riis Public Houses—massive public housing projects, once mainly White working-class families and now overwhelmingly Puerto Rican—became Loisaida's main Latino bastion in the face of massive displacement from the adjacent private housing.⁵² Similarly, in the larger Manhattan Community District 3—the city planning district that encompasses the entire Lower East Side and East Village, Chinatown, Little Italy, and the “Two Bridges” area between the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges—the Latino population fell from 52,217 in 1990 (32.3 percent of the total) to 40,194 in 2010 (24.6 percent).⁵³

As artists and countercultural elements trickled into this transitional area during and after the 1960s, the in-movers began to call it Alphabet City or the East Village—labels to many residents of outsiders, gentrifiers, and Whites.⁵⁴ The proliferation of such appellations in itself illustrates a century-long tradition of land conflict and social activism in what is widely considered the city's politically most organized district.⁵⁵ As the area gradually overcame its image as a dangerous neighborhood of drug dealing and poverty to become a chic area for the young, hip, and professional classes, real estate interests and governmental agencies battled working-class and minority residents for control. Once developers determined they could profit from neighborhood redevelopment, they promoted the arts as a strategy to draw in more affluent residents. In fact, Mele asserts that the main reason for reinvestment lay in the “symbolic representation of the East Village as an alluring arts district.” Artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s created a “rebellious art genre” that appealed to wealthy patrons and developers, leading to a steady gentrification and displacement of original residents.⁵⁶ East Village artists, such as the late Keith Haring, have inadvertently popularized the area and sparked a local real estate bonanza. On the other hand, the local history of activism inspired street demonstrations, protests, and the harrowing “police riots” in 1988 and 1991 to evict squatters from Tompkins Square Park.⁵⁷

As the city reduced such basic neighborhood services as police patrols, garbage pickup, and street cleaning during the 1970s, many buildings were abandoned by landlords and burned by hired arsonists for the insurance money. By some estimates, more than 3,400 housing units were demolished, and at least 70 percent of the population was displaced.⁵⁸ In the resulting “bombed-out war zone,” neighborhood residents began squatter gardens in the overgrown empty lots strewn with trash. The community-garden movement can be traced to the Liz Christy Garden, started in 1973 by a group of women activists, who pressured the city until it granted permission to garden there. That group later formed the Green Guerillas, which now provides support for community gardens and collaborates with the city's GreenThumb program.⁵⁹ This movement gained financial and temporary legal status when in 1976 the Department of Housing Preservation and Development recognized gardens as an appropriate “interim

use” for city-owned vacant lots. This designation of the gardens as temporary became a source of conflict by the 1990s, when a booming real estate market encouraged the city to sell the vacant lots to private developers. While the city claimed it needs land to develop new housing, community activists argued that the gardens provided valuable open space in a dense urban neighborhood. The struggle escalated to pitched battles in some cases, such as in the emotional showdown between protesters and police at the bulldozing of Esperanza Garden in February 2000.⁶⁰

By the mid-1980s, approximately seventy-five community gardens existed in Loisaida,⁶¹ most of which still remain three decades later. The gardens range from the carefully tended to chaotic and overgrown, and they represent a variety of ethnic and social groups. The spaces are used for a variety of social purposes besides gardening, including picnics, parties, outdoor performances, and sitting and talking. Weekends are most active as most gardens post “open to public” hours on Saturday and Sunday, or “whenever gardeners are present.” Such public visiting hours are required at least twice a week for gardens leased on city-owned land and supported by the Operation Green Thumb program, which provides gardening supplies and program assistance. While the gardens are locked and fenced when not in use, the public is permitted to enter during open hours as long as people stay on the paths and do not pick flowers or vegetables. The gardens are locked at night and when no gardeners are present for reasons of security and to keep out vandals, the homeless, and drug users. Some of the older and better-maintained gardens have been designated official New York City Parkland, thus achieving permanent status.

About half of the Loisaida gardens reflect Latino ethnicity, primarily serving Puerto Ricans. Their gardens are typically small fifteen-by-fifty-foot lots, which often display the Puerto Rican flag and murals on the bordering walls with colorful pictures and messages in Spanish. The better-organized gardens are oriented to Puerto Rican families and tended primarily by women, who often watch children while gardening. Gardens dominated by Latino men can be distinguished by a *casita* or “little house” on the lot, which harkens back to the mountains of Puerto Rico (figure 3.5). While some vegetables may be cultivated, along with the inevitable chickens and roosters, these *casitas* serve mainly as male gathering places to drink beer, play cards or dominoes, socialize, relax, and even sleep. As Schmelzkopf notes, “men of the casita-based gardens articulate their own personal benefits. The casita is a place where they can relax, where they can recreate a lifestyle similar to that of Puerto Rico, and where they . . . at least are able to remain a part of the community.”⁶²

As an example of a thriving community garden in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, one can visit El Jardin del Paraiso (The Garden of Paradise), located on twelve lots on East Fourth Street between Avenues C and D. Originally established in 1981 through a lease with the city's GreenThumb program, El Jardin del Paraiso transformed the site of nine arson-destroyed tenement buildings into what is now an active multiethnic community space with a strong Latino presence. The space now features a variety of events, including films and performances for children, environmental education projects, and after-school programs. As the local community struggled to maintain its right to the space

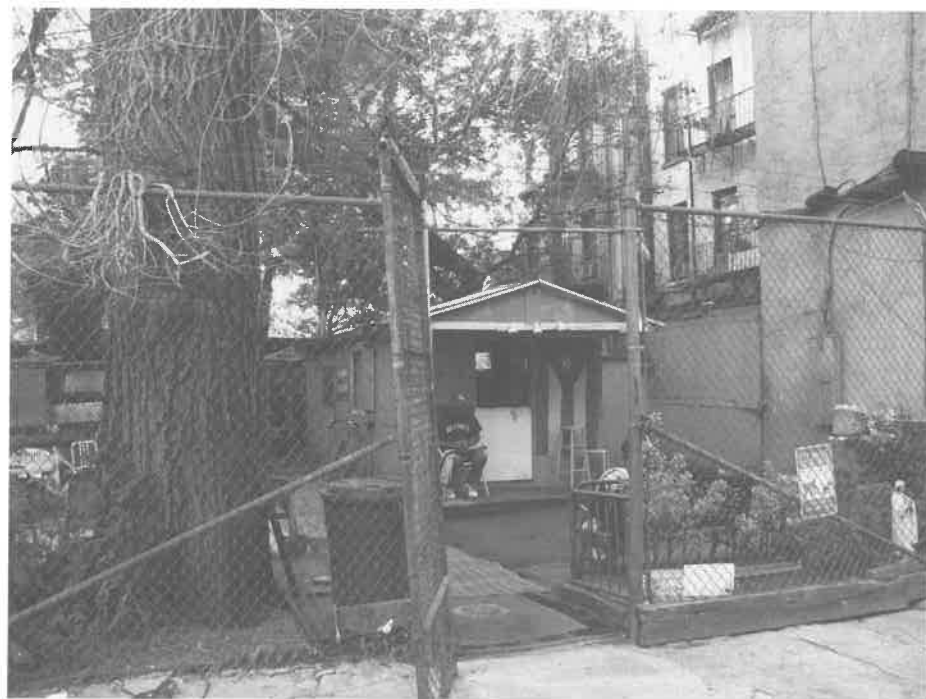


Figure 3.5. A Puerto Rican casita in the East Village, New York, symbolically reasserts transnational ties as part of the community gardens movement and antidisplacement neighborhood politics.

through legal processes, resistance to gentrification and neoliberal privatization of space animated the spirit of ethnic place making. In good weather, one finds a place for family barbecues and social gatherings. The space illustrates the value of *casita* gardens in Puerto Rican culture. As Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny write, "casitas traditionally have been a gathering place for Puerto Rican farmers, the social aspects of community gardens are emphasized more in Latino than in other neighborhoods," and "the most important role of Latino gardens appears to be in community development, even though they are also important as open space, and to a lesser degree as sites for food production."⁶³

In both the Mission District and Loissaida, defensive communities favoring preservation have employed the built environment and public space to make political statements. The creation of livable and aesthetically attractive areas, however, paradoxically encourages gentrification. Creative place making in the form of ethnic murals, community gardens, and cultural activities enhances neighborhood appeal, but as Manuel Castells noted three decades ago, ethnic cultural capital does not necessarily translate into political-economic power.⁶⁴ These two case studies suggest that while place making enhances urban livability and promotes certain forms of community activism, the approach has had mixed results in terms of a strategy of community preservation and resistance to displacement.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of urban ethnic landscapes is inextricably bound to a broad range of social, political, economic, and cultural developments. To "read" the urban landscape requires that we analyze the "text" in terms of the dynamic interaction between society and space. The interlocking human and physical factors, analyzed together, help explain the diversity of ethnic landscapes. A knowledgeable observer can discern ethnic flux through landscape clues—ranging from blatant to subtle and even hidden signs—suggesting dynamic processes of in-migration, resettlement, adaptation, and place making. As a result, we find a coherent ethnic sense of place through the social and spatial construction of urban communities in America.

Poughkeepsie's Main Street illustrates the emergence of a *landscape of ethnic arrival*. The low-income, largely renter status of immigrants here largely inhibits the emergence of Latin American housescaping, but the commercial streetscapes proclaim the unmistakable signs of ethnic flux. Poughkeepsie's immigrant entrepreneurs have developed businesses in run-down areas as the ethnic populations grow. The case study shows how commercial streetscapes often are the first areas to proclaim the arrival of new groups. In Poughkeepsie's Middle Main district, Hispanic and other recent immigrants have begun to revive a long-depressed area of the central city, as in many other urban centers across America.

Consolidated landscapes of ethnic enclaves feature a wide array of businesses, churches, social spaces, cultural centers, and architectural adaptations of ethnicity. In San Francisco's Chinatown, landmarks such as the Dragon Gate and the many Chinese restaurants and stores catering to both local residents and tourists suggest a thriving business district. In Harlem, the renovation of the Apollo Theater, other African American cultural institutions, and neighborhood churches provide evidence of community pride, even as the main thoroughfare of 125th Street has witnessed the proliferation of national business chains targeting a niche market of affluent African Americans and other residents. Both Chinatown and Harlem now face the challenge of how to preserve a long-dominant ethnic community in the face of urban redevelopment and socioeconomic change.

Defensive landscapes of ethnic contention illustrate the social struggles of neighborhoods facing transformative urban renewal, gentrification, or displacement. In both the Mission District and Loissaida, the Hispanic populations have declined significantly in recent years as local real estate markets have heated up with the arrival of more affluent in-movers. In response, a sense of Latino territoriality has arisen that is defensive in its cultural landscape and assertive in its political activities. Antidisplacement initiatives in both districts have fueled larger political coalitions and resulted in cultural landscapes of community art and community gardens. Such political activism draws meaning and sustenance from the urban landscape, but ethnic preservation efforts have also made low-income areas more attractive and in this sense inadvertently contributed to gentrification.

These examples suggest the importance of understanding the effects of space and time in ethnic community change. Rather than serving as merely a passive

contextual "background" for ethnicity, the dynamic currents of geography and history help to shape ethnic and social identities. Accurate interpretation of urban landscapes thus requires an analysis of how built forms, commercial functions, and ethnic symbols acquire meaning over time. Ethnic districts associate migrant histories, urban forms, and social spaces to create a geographic sense of place. Group identities emerge out of these interactions among people, places, and historical memories. Through historical-geographical analysis of urban ethnic landscapes, we may ponder the fate of particular communities as sites for social mobility or struggles for community preservation in urban America.

NOTES

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