

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Discussion

Vignette

Imagine: The mayor pulls up to the ribbon-ceremony five minutes past 3:00. Black and white faces mix in the crowd. The mayor's white hand and a local community activist's black hand hold the giant scissors together and cut. Promotional flyers with large bold print announcing "Boston's Black Quarter" circulate through the crowd. The smell of soul food and the sound of a local choir fill the air. The mayor climbs back into his car thinking of the tax revenues this authentic, thriving black neighborhood will bring the city.

Out of all the scenarios drawn in this thesis, this one seems the least likely.

Frances, in her opposition to Boston's Latin Quarter, asks if Boston would ever call one of the many highly concentrated black neighborhoods "Boston's Black Quarter." When asking this question, Frances conveys through her tone that the definitive answer is no. So why is it that Boston's Latin Quarter as a place-identity is marketable, trendy, and desirable, when Boston's Black Quarter is offensive, frightening, and not marketable?

As Maly (2005) suggests, the color-line between white and black people—that is, segregation based on sanctioned or unsanctioned disparities—may be too real to expect to see an integrated neighborhood without the presence of another group. To this day it does not appear that, as groups, black people and white people feel fully comfortable inhabiting the same places without another group to mediate. Thus the idea of having a place that is marketed to attract tourists based on black identity seems implausible and improbable. Black Harlem may stand as one neighborhood that breaks this barrier.

Hoffman (2003) argues that Harlem is becoming a major source of heritage tourism, based on its unique past as an important site for African Americans. However, Harlem would not call itself the Black Quarter. That name itself recalls segregation, Jim Crow laws, institutional racism, dangerous ghettos and possibly even Black Power movements that frighten the dominant culture. However, the same situation does not seem to plague

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the Latino population in HJS. Latinos, particularly relatively recent immigrants in the Northeast, do not have the same historical narrative as African Americans. While Latinos certainly faced residential and other forms of segregation along with African Americans (Greenbaum 2002), this image of Latinos is less salient in history textbooks and America's collective memory.

The title of this thesis quotes a phrase that Ronnie, a white mechanic, said about the neighborhood that I believe represents an important paradigm shift. While Ronnie was first nervous about the incoming Latino population, his fears proved unjustified and his image of Latinos changed. "The spics became Hispanics." That is, "spics" moved up in the social hierarchy. Ronnie's quote explains a certain shift within the neighborhood that makes the current debates over Boston's Latin Quarter even possible. Arguably in the 1970s and 1980s, Latinos were not seen as a group that could be marketed to promote HJS. They were feared, they were associated with high levels of crime and the drug trade. In the eyes of dominant white society, they belonged in the same category as blacks—just another minority that plagued America's declining cities. However, this image of Latino people changed in HJS. From racialized outsiders who couldn't speak the language, they became seen as hard-working immigrants who put down roots and solved problems. White residents found it desirable to live among Latino people. City planners and the board of HJSMS felt that they could market the Latino identity to tourists and outsiders. Scholars began to realize that one of the main reasons American cities are making a comeback today, despite large-scale white flight, is because immigrants come to these places, repopulating them, and rebuilding industry (Davis 2001; Winnick 1990). At the same time or perhaps because of this, Latinos have become marketable, attractive, and

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worthy of recognition. For this rebranding plan to happen in the first place, the discourse about Latinos in the city of Boston had to shift from a perception of poverty, exploited labor, and welfare dependency, to one of culture, work ethic, and entrepreneurial spirit.

While the spics were able to become Hispanic, through the stereotype of immigrant entrepreneurship, blacks—stuck in the stereotype of public dependency—remain blacks. The Latino merchant class tenaciously holds onto the narrative that they are respectable and have achieved the American Dream through their personal labors. While not explicitly stated in my interviews, Boston's Latin Quarter cannot become inclusive to African Americans because the Latinos need to differentiate themselves from blacks to remain Hispanics (Duany 1998). If blacks are no longer the symbolic embodiment of personal failure, there would be no point of comparison—no bottom of the pile to prove oneself against (Kim 1999). While only the merchant class of Latinos fulfills the image of the virtuous old-timers who represents the American Dream, they have become the overriding image of Latinos in the neighborhood. Latinos have become the model minority within this place.

However, as seen in my analysis of Boston's Latin Quarter, this may be a shallow victory. There may not even be a place for the Latinos as living and breathing people in this Latin Quarter. The true preservation of an ethnic place involves maintaining not only "authentic" people, but also their right to control their own "authentic" place. If Latinos are transformed into essentially a commodity for non-Latinos to consume, then those non-Latinos gain the ability to control Latinos through the market.

Even though the spics have managed to become Hispanics they still are not white. In fact, the maintenance of their difference is crucial. While Latinos may ultimately want

to hold onto their culture and resist some aspects of assimilation, white people also benefit from maintaining this cultural difference. If Latinos become white, HJS will cease to be understood as diverse, distinct, different, and marketable. If Latinos become white, they can no longer serve their purpose as model minorities who prove that the American Dream is accessible to non-whites in modern society.

Finally, while the gentrification literature may not explicitly argue this, the concept that ethnic old-timers need preservation in the first place implies that they do not have the automatic right to place that capitalism seems to grant white gentrifiers, who have more money and resources. Latinos, as a “vulnerable” less-wealthy population, do not have the right to create permanent roots and homes in a community; if wealthier people choose, they can take that community from them. Only if these more powerful gentrifiers buy into the idea that these people have a legitimate right to place is there an effort made to preserve them in it.

MAIN FINDINGS

Rebranding HJS

HJS is a neighborhood that is redefining its own place identity in the face of gentrification, a struggling business district, and a history of drugs and violence. The redesignation of the neighborhood as Boston’s Latin Quarter is a reaction to these circumstances, trying to both maintain and renew the image of the neighborhood to respond to the worries of merchants and residents. However, the neighborhood is racially and ethnically diverse. The “Latin Quarter” is not just Latino. Socioeconomically it is equally heterogeneous. A variety of perspectives lead to a variety of ideas about what HJS should look like. The messiness is reveals aspects of how power operates and shifts.

Restate
Main
Findings

Here the social negotiation revolves around gentrification and notions of authenticity, as in authentically defining a “Latin” space and deciding who has the authentic right to inhabit it. Ultimately the question is how race and class become mapped onto space and place.

Boston’s Latin Quarter can help preserve Latinos, but at a cost. The Main Street program is designed to function within the logic of capitalism, only preserving what can be marketed and sold. Main Street is not a community development model that is meant to preserve a people; it is a business development model that can sell a people.

Renewing vs. Maintaining Image

Arguably, Boston’s Latin Quarter is an effort to both market this neighborhood as a place that is desirable while holding onto a piece of its current identity. The board members of HJSMS are sincere, in my opinion, in their hopes that this schema will help the businesses, while preserving the Latino image of the neighborhood. However, as can be seen through their own internal disagreements about what Boston’s Latin Quarter should look like, and whom it should be marketed to, they still do not know just how to do this. Under the Main Street model, this board is only given the tools to preserve Latino identity and people through their commodification. While some are comfortable with this idea, others, including some board members, are not. This is a debate the board will continue to grapple with as they pursue this branding and marketing scheme.

Gentrifiers

Many white gentrifiers within the neighborhood understand their role within the process of renegotiating the meaning of place. Validating Brown-Saracino’s (2004, 2007, 2009) typology, some gentrifiers in this neighborhood do not see themselves as legitimate

within the neighborhood, and therefore support the maintenance of Latinos as the authentic defining agents of place. Other gentrifiers defend their presence in the neighborhood, claiming that they too are authentic community members. They are less concerned about preserving Latino people than they are with preserving authentic community—they do not want to see their neighborhood or Latinos turned into a tourist attraction. These two debates show the divide between gentrifiers who seek to live amongst “authentic” people, and those who wish to live in an “authentic” place. While this distinction shows that authenticity can be used to support very different agendas and ideas about how place should be defined, it also shows how these gentrifiers defend their own presence. Social preservationists counteract their negative feelings about gentrification by trying to slow the process down through preservation of old-timers. Social homesteaders counteract their negative feelings about gentrification by imagining themselves as non-gentrifiers. Homesteaders also defend their stance against the attempted preservation of Latino merchants through the rebranding as Boston’s Latin Quarter with the argument that this is not ultimately good for Latinos—it will make them inauthentic.

Latinos and Authenticity

While newer Latino residents were concerned about authenticity, the long-term residents and business owners appeared less concerned about this debate. For the most part, the long-term Latino business owners and residents were much more willing to watch their neighborhood gentrify organically. Some merchants are simply concerned about their own survival in the face of gentrification. They understand that it may be necessary to give up authenticity if they want to have customers in the future. Some of

these same people also argue that maintaining control of the space was less important than being remembered as important actors in the history of this neighborhood. This would help the next generations of Latinos who are assimilating into the dominant culture remember that Latinos had a part in shaping the city of Boston and HJS.

Black Residents

Within this neighborhood the general support for the preservation of Latinos, and the general exclusion of “black” Bromley Heath, shows how Latinos have risen in the racial hierarchy as a model minority, at least when compared to black residents. While the dichotomy is clearly a fantasy, the widely held assumptions that Latinos are members of the merchant class, and black residents are members of the underclass living in Bromley Heath, allow community members in HJS to believe that Latinos are fulfilling the American Dream while black residents are not. If Latinos are simply more capable minorities, inequalities within the neighborhood and the exclusion of Bromley Heath is more palatable.

DISCUSSION

Arguably how residents define the places in which they live reflects how they define themselves. If Boston’s Latin Quarter is defined as a place that is committed to the preservation and celebration of Latino people, then community members become the people associated with this preservation and celebration. If HJS is a community that defines itself as a prosperous and trendy place, then community members become associated with wealth and style. If HJS becomes defined as a blighted declining neighborhood, then community members are stigmatized and associated with that decline. If HJSMS continues to advertise Boston’s Latin Quarter to the point that it

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becomes something recognizable and well known throughout the city, HJS community members will see their relationship with their neighborhood transform because of this branding project in ways that many probably cannot imagine.

In these renegotiations of place identity, HJS community members voiced their hopes and discomfort with the direction they felt the neighborhood would head under this new identity as Boston's Latin Quarter. These opinions were often as diverse as my sample, and reflected that everyone had their own vision of what this place should become. Policy is difficult when opinions vary, contradict each other, and represent many different agendas. However, consistently underlying this debate is the sobering message that as one group of minorities is lifted up to a state where they are truly valued and respected, another group remains at the bottom of the pile, and may actually be hurt by this new social hierarchy.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

If Boston's Latin Quarter is a policy that excludes segments of the HJS community and may turn Latino culture into a mere commodity, then is it a bad idea? Personally, I do see some benefit. As Maly (2005) and Zukin (2010) state, it is a valid goal to try and preserve the opportunity for people to stay in the communities they worked so hard to create in the first place. I do not want to see HJS turn into a homogenized and uninteresting place full of affluent gentrifiers. I do not want to see Latinos pushed out to yet another declining neighborhood, where they will have to rebuild their lives once more. I do believe that it is important to recognize that Latinos have played an important role in Boston's history, which should be celebrated and recognized. Therefore, I do have some policy suggestions.

(Not always relevant)

- The board members of HJSMS must confront the debates presented in this thesis about image-renewal versus image-maintenance, community development versus business development, and issues surrounding authenticity. They need to clearly outline their image of a successful Latin Quarter, and figure out how they will reach this goal with the current tools and resources they have.
- While Boston's Latin Quarter may create many new issues, HJS is a neighborhood lucky enough to be rich in non-profits. Some of these other non-profits have made commitments to the expansion of affordable housing and job creation that will help Latino people resist displacement. Boston's Latin Quarter should work in concert with these other organizations—supporting the business district, while these other non-profits support the residents. The board of HJSMS should continue to communicate with these groups, ensuring that their missions align.
- While it may be difficult to include Bromley Heath in their promotional efforts, I think that it is ultimately best for the neighborhood to break down some of the barriers that isolate Bromley Heath. Bromley Heath is not going away. It is an important community player. It should not be ignored or cut out. The board should make more of an effort to reach out to the leadership at Bromley Heath.

LIMITATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

While this thesis is a window into the community, I clearly was not able to study and answer all questions. Due to time constraints I was only able to interview a small subset of the population of Hyde Jackson Square, which cannot be seen as representative of all people within the neighborhood. While simply increasing the number of people

interviewed will not guarantee a sample that is more representative, increasing the number of perspectives could have added more voices to the debates discussed in this thesis.

Even more, while Bromley Heath proved to be a particularly salient part of the debate about the negotiation of place within this neighborhood, I only managed to interview one person who lived there and one other black resident within the neighborhood. Frances, my primary informant there, is an incredibly knowledgeable woman. However, it would have been nice to have additional insider perspectives of life in Bromley Heath, and a view of life for the black community outside of Bromley Heath. I would suggest that future research look further into the role of Bromley Heath within the community and its relationship with the neighborhood. I would also suggest that further research study the black residents who do not live in Bromley Heath as well as the Latinos who live in Bromley Heath. Who are they, what do they think and what role do they play in the community?

My sample includes a high number of neighborhood leaders and well-known merchants. Nevertheless, I was able to interview some residents who may be less involved in the community, I had a much easier time reaching major players. Although this is typically thought of as a shortcoming, as Brown-Saracino (2009) points out, there is much that we can learn from the study of power holders, of those whose beliefs and choices are of particular import for the less powerful, such as those at risk of displacement” (p. 20). In other words, it is also enlightening to better understand those who so often project their voices and opinions on others. Nevertheless, a study of the less vocal people in this community could add a new dimension.

selection bias

As I pointed out in the beginning of this work, this study cannot speak about end results. Since Boston's Latin Quarter is in its beginning stages I cannot tell how it will impact this gentrifying neighborhood, and if "authenticity" of the community and of the Latino people will be maintained within the process. I can only discuss how people within the neighborhood frame the debates and analyze their values and perspectives. A longitudinal study that watches the neighborhood over years could add useful knowledge that bridges these more theoretical arguments with analysis of real-world results. Also, comparative work that looks at this plan along with similar plans elsewhere might highlight important similarities and differences between places.

Further Research

Finally, with more time, I would also like to look at gentrifiers within the community as a more diverse group. Some of the Latino people in the neighborhood are doing very well for themselves and it would be interesting to get a better understanding of how this middle-class Latino population understands gentrification and the preservation of Latino people.

FINAL REMARKS

When entering HJS for the first time, I never imagined that I would spill so much ink over the wide range of topics covered in this thesis. Being new to Boston, my personal attraction to HJS was motivated by my desire to find somewhere that felt like home. I was not alone in this. The people I interviewed also saw in this small community, which lies between two squares, as an opportunity to build a home for themselves. For them home did not look like the white-dominated Disney version of Main Street. In their home, Main Street is called Centre Street, Mr. Perez owns the bodega, Mrs. Rivera owns the beauty salon, and Mr. González owns the restaurant that serves the best fried

plantains in town. Centre Street is the center of life in this neighborhood; the heart and soul of the community.

However, Centre Street is in the process of becoming someplace else. Residents notice small changes: solar powered garbage cans, for-sale signs on salons and barbershops, Zagat-rated restaurants. Places change. Some shrug their shoulders and patiently watch. Some find themselves driving away from this place they called home in moving vans filled with furniture and photographs. Some fight the change with rallies, innovative marketing plans, and the creation of affordable housing. Some simply adapt. This thesis is a story about place: a changing place, that is hesitant about becoming something too foreign from what it is now; a place that worries about staying authentic; a place, like all others, built on socially constructed ideas about race and class. No one in this place can predict the future and what this place will be years from now. Still, the community members of HJS do have agency, and will certainly leave their mark on this place.

Appendix A: Documents

Doc. A.1

Basic Interview Guide for HJS members

Identification Questions:

- 1) What year were you born? And where?
- 2) When you are asked what ethnicity you are, what do you say?
- 3) Are you married?
- 4) If married) Are you married to someone of your same race or ethnic background? If not, what is their background? Has this ever become an issue?
- 5) Do you have any children?
- 6) When did you first come to Boston and why?
- 7) When did you first come to JP and why?
- 8) When asked where you live what do you normally say?
- 9) Can you tell me about your job?
- 10) How did you end up at this job?

Questions Regarding the Latin Quarter

- 11) Are you familiar with Hyde/Jackson Square Main Street?
- 12) Are you aware of the name "Boston's Latin Quarter?"
- 13) Does the name make sense to you?
- 14) Do you like the name?
- 15) Do people in the community use the name Boston Latin's Quarter? Why or why not?
- 16) Why do you think a group would want to rename this neighborhood?
- 17) Why do people come to Hyde/Jackson Square?
- 18) What needs to happen to ensure that the business district of the community can be successful?
- 19) Do you think certain people feel uncomfortable or do not want to shop in this area?
- 20) If so, why? And what could be done to make these people feel more comfortable? Would anything be lost in the process?
- 21) Would a movement to make the Latino parts of the community more accessible to tourists and possible non-Latinos make sense?
- 22) How might the name impact the image of the surrounding community?
- 23) Do you think the name the Latin Quarter will change who chooses to live here? Please explain.
- 24) Are there benefits to having a Latino community that is recognized in a name? How might the name influence future generations?
- 25) Other than the Latino population what other groups of people live and shop in HJS?
- 26) How do they fit in with the Latin Quarter?
- 27) Some past interviewees have made an argument that the rebranding is ten years too late, what do you think about this argument?
- 28) What would a successful Latin Quarter look like to you?
- 29) How do you feel about this place being comparable to the North End? To Chinatown?
- 30) Do you see divisions within the community along class, racial or any other lines?