

Introduction

BARRIO BUSINESS,
BARRIO DREAMS

“This is not an antipoverty program,” repeated New York City congressman Charles Rangel to a beleaguered audience of East Harlemites, mostly Black and Puerto Rican, in an informational forum on Empowerment Zone (EZ) legislation. Once again, the initiative he himself had helped design to revitalize distressed inner-city communities through economic investment and incentives was the subject of much reproach and criticism. In particular, East Harlem Latinos felt that they and their community had been neglected by the initiative. But Rangel was adamant: “This is not about your dreams. This is about business, profit, and jobs.” Only projects that prove to be profitable and “entrepreneurial” would be considered for funding. But he was speaking at the Julia de Burgos Latino Cultural Center in March 2002, itself the product of previous struggles, not to mention state distribution programs to quench polit-

ical claims. The audience could still remember a time when cultural demands commanded economic resources and political valence. But there was little that could be done. Coffee and biscuits had been served, the meeting was called back to order, and break-out sessions were about to start. Some sat anxiously through the forum while others swiftly departed in protest.

One of the central contradictions in East Harlem is the treatment of culture as industry to attract jobs, business, and profits and the simultaneous disavowal of ethnicity and race as grounds for equity and representation. Meanwhile ethnicity and race are in fact the bases on which urban spatial transformations are being advanced and contested. The resulting struggles around space, representation, and identity not only reveal strategies of contemporary Latino cultural politics but also the place of culture in the structuring of space.

This book examines the cultural politics of urban space in New York's East Harlem (also known as El Barrio or Spanish Harlem) in the context of rapid gentrification and social change. I foreground gentrification and the neoliberal policies that favor privatization and consumption alongside the increasing "Latinization" of U.S. cities. These processes are overtaking cities throughout the United States and beyond, and are vividly at play in New York City, a global center of culture and consumption, where Latinos, at 27 percent of the population, now constitute the biggest minority group. Put simply, Home Depot, Starbucks, and Soho-like museums are coming to El Barrio, confronting residents with disparate and competing agendas for their future. Spurring these contests is an increasingly tight real-estate market, which has attracted new residential and commercial tenants to predominantly Black and Latino Upper Manhattan neighborhoods such as Harlem, East Harlem, and the South Bronx. State and federal government policies, such as the Upper Manhattan EZ, have served as catalysts for outside development, displacing in the process local businesses and residents.¹ Even the politics of multiculturalism have arguably helped erode the borders that once maintained these communities as ethnic enclaves, rendering their once despised differences into potential ethnic or historical attractions. At issue is the meaning of the ostensible "Latinization" of U.S. cities when the displacement of Latino populations is simultaneous and even expedited by

this very process. At stake is whether El Barrio remains primarily Latino, becomes gentrified, or—in the eyes of many, and wistfully offsetting this binary vision—develops into a gentrified but Latino stronghold.

In part, these dynamics are not at all new. Latino/a communities have long been outcomes of struggles between developers and residents' resistance practices for space (Acuña 1988; Villa 2000; Leclerc et al. 1999). This is true of East Harlem, a major target of urban renewal policies since the 1940s. After all, gentrification—whether called renewal, revitalization, upgrading, or uplifting—always involves the expansion and transformation of neighborhoods through rapid economic investment and population shifts, and yet it is equally implicated with social inequalities (Delaney 1999; Logan and Molotch 1988; Neil Smith 1996; Williams 1988). While a complex and multifaceted process, it is also characterized by the re-signification of neighborhoods to be rendered attractive and marketable to new constituencies through the development of museums, tourist destinations, and other entertainment venues that characterize global cities like New York (Zukin 1995; Judd and Feinstein 1999; Lin 1998). I suggest, however, that the specificity of contemporary processes of gentrification and neoliberal policies pose challenging questions about the operations of culture in the spatial politics of contemporary cities, and about the growing interplay between culture as ethnicity and as marketable industry. Moreover struggles over El Barrio can help reveal the place and prospects for Latinos in the neoliberal city, particularly in communities where they have had a long history and continue to be a visible majority.

I am especially concerned with the intersections between current development initiatives and people's dreams and aspirations to place. I suggest that veiled in culture—and intricately invested in issues of class and consumption—proposals for tourism, home-ownership programs, and even the EZ become implicated with people's ethnic and class identities in multiple and contradictory ways. As such, they prompt questions about the intersection of culture, ethnicity, class, and consumption in development debates, while underscoring that so-called race-neutral policies are never devoid of racial and ethnic considerations. For instance, central to current transformations in El Barrio is the cleansing and disassociation of the area from its marginal past, processes that many residents

have in fact contributed to as part of their upwardly mobile aspirations for themselves and for El Barrio. By supporting consumption and entertainment projects, such as museums and home-ownership programs, residents are furthering gentrification and increasing prices in East Harlem, thereby hindering their own future claims to the area. A closer look at people's embrace of these projects, and of the same discourse of marketing and business that seem to threaten El Barrio and its history, however, shows motivations and aspirations at play that are different from those promoted by current developments. For one, it is the prospect of bridging culture as industry and as ethnicity that heartens residents' efforts, that is, a longing to align economic empowerment with particularized identities. Despite neoliberalism's supposedly race- and ethnicity-free tenets, dreams of economic empowerment are thus never devoid of distinct racial and ethnic aspirations. People's engagements with contemporary projects reveal as much about the intricacies of gentrification and the neoliberal policies that currently fuel it as they do of this community's history and aspirations (cultural, political, economically, and otherwise) in a rapidly changing landscape. This work sorts through similar disjunctions in order to critically assess the workings of the neoliberal city in light of East Harlemites' continuous claims for representation and place.

Strategies of marketing and re-signification are as central to the transformation of landscapes as they are to people's negotiations and contestations of space. Culture will thus surface as an important resource of development, and as a significant challenge. In this way, I wish to complicate dominant frameworks used to talk about gentrification and displacement, where culture and discourses of identity are primarily seen as defiant challenges to gentrification, not as resources that can be situationally put to its service. In particular, I explore how Puerto Rican and Latino culture and discourses of *Latinidad* figure as both objects of and challenges to entrepreneurial strategies and processes of gentrification.² These are dynamics that have reverberations wherever "Latinized" cities are pitted against processes of gentrification, where there is little choice but to maneuver among entrepreneurial-based urban developments, whose control, this book shows, is beyond people's everyday influence.

My focus on Latinos is purposeful and part of a growing literature intended to disturb the dominant tenet of urban studies, where issues of race and ethnicity are consistently subsumed to a black-and-white paradigm that veils the complex multiethnic/multiracial dilemmas of contemporary cities. Public discussions of gentrification in Harlem, for instance, continually subsume East Harlem into Harlem, erasing the significant number of Latino populations in the greater Harlem area, not to mention the centrality of El Barrio's Latino history among Puerto Ricans and Latinos, who, at more than 52 percent, are the largest population segment in East Harlem.³ Indeed, the meaning of East Harlem to Latinos, especially to Puerto Ricans, is similar to African American perceptions of Harlem, the "Black capital of the world," even if this meaning is not as widely known beyond the borders of El Barrio. Geographical definitions of East Harlem, however, vary according to political or planning designations, though for the purposes of this work East Harlem will be defined as it was understood by most of my informants: bounded by Ninety-sixth and 142nd streets, Fifth Avenue, and the East River.⁴ This is a section that is included in the Manhattan Community District designations, but is not defined solely on these administrative bases.⁵ But beyond its geographical limits, El Barrio is defined in relation to its Puerto Rican, and increasingly, Latino history, as well as in relation to West and Central Harlem, the well known Black culture stronghold to the west, and in relation to the upscale and mostly white neighborhood of the Upper East Side to the south. These rigid racial/spatial identifications prevailed in people's discussions even though in practice these boundaries were always more fluid. This work focuses primarily on Puerto Ricans and Latinos and their claims to El Barrio, but as I am also intent on elucidating the intersection of race, ethnicity, and processes of gentrification, I will also touch on intra-Latino relations, and relations among Latinos, African Americans, and other residents of El Barrio. I am concerned mostly with the specificity of current racial, ethnic, and spatial conflicts in the area, which I suggest become exacerbated by the cultural bases of many contemporary development initiatives at the very time that intraethnic and racial alliances among minorities are most impending and most needed.

El Barrio/East Harlem is a key site to examine these dynamics, given

the area's renown as a symbol of Latinidad and its contested public meanings disseminated in the social science literature and in the media at large. A community with a long, multicultural immigrant history, as formerly a Jewish, Eastern European, and Italian enclave, East Harlem's Latino/a identity spans the early 1900s and peaks in the 1950s with the massive immigration of Puerto Ricans spurred by the island's industrialization program and the government-sanctioned migration of destitute agricultural workers into the States (Andreu Iglesias 1984; Sánchez-Korrol 1983). Soon thereafter East Harlem became a chief example of ghetto culture, an identity consolidated through representations in the media and in the social sciences literature. The archetype ethnic enclave, or the "island within the city" and the paragon of Puerto Ricans' "culture of poverty," East Harlem is also the site of numerous anthropological studies of lower-income urban enclaves, as well as of journalistic exposes of crime, urban blight, and poverty.⁶

Conversely, El Barrio is also the nostalgically celebrated barrio of Puerto Rican fiction writers, and the site of transnationally important Puerto Rican events, such as Puerto Rican festivals and landmarks ranging from *casitas* (brightly colored "little houses" evoking Caribbean architecture) to murals to fiction, each serving as a recourse of identity for Puerto Ricans in and beyond New York.⁷ El Barrio is also home to key images of "urban" Latino culture, often appropriated as background in Jennifer Lopez music videos or *Sports Illustrated* modeling shoots, and most recently, the backdrop to Fox's controversial new ghetto-centric Latino-themed comedy show *Luis*. Most important, the area continues to serve as a reservoir of immigrants and vulnerable workers. It is home to one of the largest concentrations of Mexicans, the fastest growing immigrant group in the United States. The neighborhood's past and present thus provide key sites in which to explore the re-signification of ethnicity and marginality as well as the different interests now vested in struggles over El Barrio/East Harlem, which involve claims to physical space and the shaping of the past, present, and future meanings of the area. Such struggles are already evident in the emergent names circulated for the area, each registering contesting claims to space, a common index of the gentrifying process (Mele 2000). Names as varied as "Upper Yorkville"

and “Upper Carnegie Hill,” which link East Harlem to the bordering upscale neighborhood of the Upper East Side, or alternatively, “Yukieville,” which mocks such attempts, increasingly complement the more traditional and still debated names of El Barrio, Spanish Harlem, and East Harlem. This work will use the area’s official and colloquial name of East Harlem and El Barrio interchangeably, though a recurrent concern is to sort through the politics and the claims embedded in the growing preference among Puerto Rican and Latino residents for “El Barrio” as part of political statements of assertion in the face of gentrification.

Adding to my interest in East Harlem is the recent development and expediency of social transformations in the area amid continued poverty and inequality. Some numbers are illustrative here. Following a consistent decline since the 1970s, East Harlem’s population grew for the first time throughout the 1990s to stand at 117,743 in the 2000 census; the number of housing units built in the area also increased. And while still lagging behind the medium household income for New York City (\$38,293), East Harlem’s medium grew to \$21,295. This represents the most significant rise in a figure that had been lagging in the low and mid-teens for decades. Similar increases are seen in residents’ levels of educational attainment: Although lagging behind greater Manhattan rates, high school graduation rates (56 percent of the population in 2000) show steady increases since the 1980s. The inequalities are particularly stark the closer one gets to the affluent Upper East Side, with some census tracts displaying among the greatest income gaps in the entire city between the affluent and the poor (Scott 2003). Once known as a decaying neighborhood, East Harlem is no longer an overflow of vacant lots and buildings. Nevertheless, poverty rates in the area have remained high, at 36.9 percent in 2000, as opposed to 21.2 percent for the city, with 36.7 percent of population in income support, as opposed to 19.3 percent for the entire city, and unemployment at 17.1 percent as opposed to 8.5 for the city. These numbers are likely to show increases in years to come as a result of New York City’s growing fiscal crisis and ensuing cuts in social services. A major target of urban renewal policies, East Harlem has one of the largest concentrations of public housing in New York and the fewest number of homeowners: 93.6 percent of the population are

renters, among the highest numbers in Manhattan. Overall, East Harlem's population is highly vulnerable to diminished social welfare and the privatization of government services and highly susceptible to shifts in rents and to changes in public housing legislation.⁸ Such is the context in which these chapters unfold.

NEOLIBERALISM: CULTURE, CONSUMPTION, AND CLASS

There is now a significant amount of work on the many interrelated global, social, and economic forces affecting transformations in urban environments and the processes of gentrification. Neil Smith, in particular, has been central in assessing how housing rental markets create rent gaps that trigger cycles of disinvestment, reinvestment, and gentrification; "frontier" metaphors are crucial to sustaining these developments (Neil Smith 1996). Research has pointed to the characteristics of different housing stocks available (for instance, brownstones versus tenements), and how a neighborhood's history may influence its ensuing development (Plunz 1990; Abu-Lughod 1994). Attention has also been focused on the role of governmental policies as catalysts for gentrification (Sites 1994; Smith 1996). New York City policies favoring the privatization of public land and housing stock, for instance, have been extremely influential in East Harlem. Indeed, spatial transformations involve varied and complementary processes affecting the built environment: social control through legal/judicial implements and ideological control through cultural and informational institutions and representations. These are all part of the *barrioization* processes impacting everyday *barriology*, recently described by Villa (2000), always at play though taking on distinct manifestations in everyday economies. Unchanged is their unequal nature: far from a natural process, gentrification is fueled by specific policies and forces favoring some groups, forces, and entities over others.

I am especially concerned with neoliberal policies favoring the deregulation and privatization of social services, including public housing, education, welfare, the arts, and thereby favoring the middle classes and

a consumption ethos that is increasingly pressuring residents in El Barrio. By “neoliberalism” I am referring to the rubric of economic and urban development policies that favor state deregulation, that is, a decrease in state involvement accompanied by privatization and free market approaches, all in the guise of fostering more efficient technologies of government.⁹ Since the 1980s, similar policies involving tax incentives to the private sector, as in today’s EZs, have consistently replaced publicly financed community-based development strategies as the dominant urban development strategy. The preeminence and diversity of these policies is evident today, ranging from those encouraging partnerships between nonprofit and private entities, as in the merge between nonprofit companies sponsoring private developers in housing projects (discussed in chapter 1), to those that aim at reshaping nonprofit organizations along business lines, as in the EZ’s Culture Industry Investment Fund (discussed in chapter 3). Likewise, they may involve the transfer of managerial and decision-making services to private corporations, as in the involvement of for-profit educational corporations in the development of charter schools (discussed in chapter 4). In each case, a business mantra and discourse of sustainability, viability, profits, and results trump those of social equality, promising much while leaving East Harlem’s residents with higher rents and fewer services, though never with fewer dreams for themselves and for El Barrio.

Within this larger context, I am especially concerned with the material uses of “culture,” and with the claims to space established and contested on its bases. Neoliberalism is often connected with homelessness, poverty, residential segregation, and other indexes of inequality, yet “culture,” a well-known instrument of entrepreneurship used by government and businesses, a medium to sell, frame, structure, claim, and reclaim space, is closely implicated in such processes and always in demand of closer scrutiny (Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Gregory 1999; Sassen 1998; Rotenberg and McDonogh 1993; Zukin 1995). I place culture in quotation marks to foreground the variety of manifestations within the range of cultural entrepreneurial strategies and discourses promoted by corporations, residents, and government policies. These are not fully problematized and distinguished in the literature, where culture is oftentimes con-

flated with such disparate domains as heritage, architecture, high art, advertising, malls, and entertaining venues, in ways that do more to veil than to expose the different dynamics affecting its production, circulation, and consumption. Obviously, *culture* is an extremely contentious term, and my purpose is not to document each and every one of this concept's reverberations or definitions.¹⁰ Instead, I call attention to two central treatments, both of which are constituted and deployed materially and discursively to frame and contest space, and are recurrent in debates over gentrification, as they are throughout U.S. cities. First is the equation of "culture" with manifestations of ethnic or racial identity, such as Black or Puerto Rican or Latino, and treated as a goal or an end in itself that can and should be safeguarded, promoted, marketed, or undermined in regards to specific interests. This is culture as articulation and "boundary of difference" (Appadurai 1996) among other accounts of culture that treat it not as a given but as socially constituted, objectified, and mobilized for a variety of political ends. Second, "culture" is treated as an object of entertainment and industry and a conduit of progress and development devoid of distinct identifications, though always enmeshed in specific ends. This is the definition at the heart of Zukin's insightful discussion of the symbolic economy of finance, media, and entertainment that dominates contemporary urban economies (Zukin 1995), akin also to Yudice's description of culture as an "expedient resource" for socioeconomic amelioration (Yudice 2003). This is "culture" masked in attending discourses of globalization and treated as a medium of uplift, industry, entrepreneurship, and progress. The parallels with the abiding tension between particularizing and universalizing definitions of culture—the former evoking plurality and difference and the latter a civilizing project, or more specifically for the case at hand, an entrepreneurial project—will not be lost to anthropologists.

These different treatments of culture are easily more complementary than contradictory. Even when mobilized for opposing ends, they can become equally caught up in the same dynamics of privatized development. After all, manifestations of ethnicity and cultural difference within a given state are never entirely free of its dominant ideological canons, which, this work shows, increasingly prioritize what I describe here as

“marketable ethnicity.” What is very different, I suggest, are the aspirations and identities that sustain such different uses of culture and the claims and politics that are communicated by these different treatments. I contrast, in particular, the goals and objectives of marketing culture for economic development that favors ethnicity cleansed from ethnic memories and politics with those that are part of larger assertions of El Barrio’s identity of place in resistance to gentrification. Part of persistent struggles over the use- or exchange-value of space, which are always at play in gentrifying contexts, these contestations remind us that people and places are never easily reducible into commodities, even in a heightened privatizing context (Logan and Moloch 1988). I further expose the inequalities regarding who can or cannot participate more or less easily in the economy of culture, as will be evident when I contrast the ease and profitability of racially unmarked developers and projects with the difficulties encountered by East Harlemites seeking economic control of their culture. In other words, I seek to expose the hierarchies that are fostered and maintained in the creation of value, and to complicate class with processes of racialization, and vice versa. My goal then is not to impugn marketing and consumption—realms I have elsewhere recognized to provide openings and spaces to marginalized groups (Dávila 1997, 2001a)—but rather to delve deeper into the politics behind the marketing of space. In contrast to the uncritical promotion, celebration, and emphasis on culture as a tool of local/national and even global economic development, I expose the contradictions and inequalities that characterize the production of marketable ethnicity. Ultimately, I show that despite the growing emphasis on the marketing of culture for economic empowerment, not all manifestations of culture are so easily rentable or consumable. In fact, El Barrio’s “collective symbolic capital” (Harvey 2001) revolves around a marginalized identity that is not generally considered profitable to all parties involved in its economic development, but rather poses a hindrance to be overcome.

This predicament is clearly evident in debates over the application of the Cultural Industry Investment Fund Heritage Tourism initiative, a component of the Upper Manhattan EZ legislation. Geared toward transforming Upper Manhattan communities into tourist destinations with

cultural, entertainment, dining, and recreational attractions, this initiative has been an impetus for current discussions about how and in what ways the area should be marketed and redefined for these ends. In reality, however, "culture" surfaces here as a veil of industry, and lacking in cultural industries and entertainment infrastructure, Upper Manhattan residents, particularly East Harlemites, have faced difficulty in obtaining approval for smaller initiatives that promote the ethnic and historical identification of their neighborhood. Discourses of economic growth, marketing, and business, even when mobilized in preservation of El Barrio's Puerto Rican and Latino history and identity, are never free of contradictions.

In seeking to understand these disjunctions I start by acknowledging that the ascendancy of neoliberal discourses and policies alongside a lack of development alternatives have begotten especially beneficial conditions in which to align the interests of capital with the aspirations of particularized groups. In this tenor, current urban entrepreneurship initiatives will decidedly be questioned in relation to the new forms of privatized governmentability on which they are predicated as well as foster. Specifically, I highlight the preeminence given to consumption-based developments within these policies, that is, to developments whose access presupposes acquisitive power, furthering exclusions around those with resources and those who lack them. But most significantly, however, I point to how these policies reproduce a distinct worldview, or the belief in what Jean and John Comaroff have recently termed a "millennial capitalism," because it "presents itself as a gospel of salvation; a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 292). This occurs simultaneously with a decrease in government services, total disbanding of welfare and support services for the poor, rendering neighborhoods like East Harlem ripe for furthering privatization as the only recourse for social services and entitlements. In other words, I consider the material context of contemporary transformations, but given the particularities of the current neoliberal moment, I primarily foreground the symbolic realm and its multiple entanglements in the selling of El Barrio.

Nothing is more central to these dynamics than issues of class and consumption. This coupling, as contemporary research repeatedly explicates, is extraordinarily relevant given consumption's preeminence for defining and projecting class identities and aspirations (Daniel Miller 1995; McCracken 1988). For as many debates as have been sustained and triggered by the concept of class, we know that class is foremost about social inequalities, and about the distinctions that are mobilized to express and maintain the boundaries that sustain them. Ethnographic studies of class have documented that contrary to the dominant view that class distinctions become irrelevant, leveled in advanced capitalist economies, people do operationalize and define class distinctions in myriad ways and actively perform and discuss class on a daily basis (O'Dougherty 2002; Prince 2002b; Jackson 2001). But even when people are not willing to discuss class or define themselves in this manner, such as by favoring nationalist or panethnic forms of identification as Puerto Ricans and Latinos, this does not imply that they do not experience, perform, and define class memberships through their actions or that it does not affect their outlooks and aspirations. Consumption is critical to such operations, though I suggest not solely in terms of actual acquisition, which is always affected by income and purchasing power, but also in terms of position, outlook, and openness to specific types of consumption. Here I am in agreement with Maureen O'Dougherty's observation that analyses of middle classes "suffer from excessive realism and inattention to the social imaginary. Unlike class in theory, a good part of the middle-class experience seems to be immaterial, a state of mind" (2002, 9). This is where the realm of dreams and the imagination come in. As we shall see, consumption-based developments (charter schools, home-ownership programs) were repeatedly equated with choice, entertainment, and upward mobility, associations that in turn coalesced with people's upwardly mobile aspirations, many times independently of whether people could realistically purchase these "benefits." I call attention to these disjunctions, not to impute Puerto Ricans' and Latinos' desire to consume, or even less to invoke the tired and totalistic critiques of consumer culture as the greatest threat to social equity. As Elizabeth Chin (2001) explains, the involvement of disenfranchised groups in consumer culture has long been pathologized as aberrant

or apolitical, rendering any critique of consumption that is blinded of the structural forces that mediate such consumption largely misguided. In this vein, my goal is to extrapolate the intersection of culture, class, and consumption, foregrounding the premises consumption seemingly entailed for the attainment of dreams and visions of place, particularly of the past and future of El Barrio. These dynamics affected people's stances to different projects, including their reasons for staying in, or for leaving or relocating to, El Barrio. Thus following Gregory (1998), I am also concerned with whether contemporary projects and urban policies are aligned with globalization, progress, localized pasts, and identities, and with how these framing patterns affect the ways in which people maneuver among the many state, private, and local forces affecting livelihood, the built environment, and even their identities. Conversely, I explore whether East Harlemites are articulating their identities and advancing their concerns as Puerto Ricans, Latinos, or in class, community, place, or global terms. I suggest that these modes and positions reveal the orthodoxies about culture, identity, and development, and about the area's state and future that are currently being advanced and contested in East Harlem.

Since my primary focus is on Puerto Ricans, I should note that as U.S. citizens—part of the island's colonial history—their migration to the United States and to El Barrio has been constant and ongoing, though many have migrated back to the island or moved elsewhere beginning in the 1960s, peaking in the 1970s, and continuing throughout the 1980s (New York City 1994). Changes in New York's economy, such as a move toward service jobs providing fewer opportunities to unskilled workers, have been linked to this trend (Cordero-Guzmán et al. 2001). A key, though less-documented, impetus for this out-migration that is especially relevant to this study is the dominant association of El Barrio with urban blight and of upward mobility with moving away from El Barrio to Puerto Rico or the suburbs of Connecticut, New Jersey, Florida, and elsewhere, leading to the decentralization of the Puerto Rican community. As such, it is important to keep in mind that El Barrio's role as the symbolic stronghold for Puerto Ricans is intrinsically bound up with the contradictory evaluation that ethnic neighborhoods have historically commanded

among the upwardly mobile. Similar dynamics are documented for the Black middle class in West and Central Harlem (Monique Taylor 2002). Interestingly, while the Black middle class has been the subject of important studies, the Latino middle class is only beginning to receive comparable scholarly consideration, a void that is undoubtedly tied to the hyperprivileging of "culture" and language as a defining element of Latinidad.¹¹ Lessons from studies on issues of class and gentrification among Puerto Ricans and Latinos in Chicago and on the Black middle classes, including some focusing on neighboring Harlem, however, are illustrative here. These include: (1) the importance of appreciating internal diversity; (2) their ambivalent position to ethnic-and racially specific communities coupled with the overt and covert racism that often motivates relocation and interest in these very communities; and finally, (3) the continuous conflation of racial and class identities mediating the relative value of "status" (Jackson 2001; Patillo-McCoy 2000; Pérez 2001; Ramos-Zayas 2003; Gregory 1998; Prince 2002a; Monique Taylor 2002). Similarly, these works point to the relevance of class and cultural capital as important variables shaping how Puerto Ricans experience, consume, and interpret El Barrio. In particular, the ways El Barrio is experienced by Puerto Rican and Latino intellectuals and activists and the most destitute workers can sometimes converge but at other times be sharply at odds. These positions have implications for people's awareness of, and experiences with, the state's distribution policies, with the promises seemingly offered by new entertainment and consumption venues, and with their stance toward different development projects and transformations in the area.

THE ECONOMY OF RACE

Feeding the current interest in the transformations of U.S. cities is the realization that cities are central to understanding the cultural politics of multiculturalism, the formation of new forms of participatory politics, and the potential realization of a just multicultural society (Holston and Appadurai 1999; Gregory 1998; Sanjek 2000; Sassen 1998). These issues are especially brought to the forefront by Latino populations, given their

rapid growth, their concentration in cities, and their public visibility as the “new majority” in places like New York. However, not until recently have scholars paid attention to Latinos in their study of contemporary transformations in the global metropolis. The result is the problematic disjunction that currently exists between Latino studies, urban studies, and the anthropological literature on the city (Davis 2001). Which is not to say that Latino scholars have not been informed by urban studies literature, but that the latter have less often taken Latinos or Latino studies into account. Consider, for instance, that while some of the most theoretically influential studies on gentrification have focused on New York City, most notably, the Lower East Side, seldom have these studies focused on the fate of Latinos or the uses of *Latinidad*, even when Latinos have maintained a historical and continued presence in the areas under study (for example, Abu-Lughod 1994; Mele 1998).

There is nevertheless a growing literature examining the city as the space of Latinization, pointing to how urban economic and political transformations affect or contribute to such processes (Cordero et al. 2001; Davis 2001; Lao and Dávila 2001; Cruz 1998; Jones-Correa 1998; Haslip-Viera 1996; Pérez 2001; Portes and Stepic 1993). Rather than as background to larger studies, cities and neighborhoods are increasingly considered as spaces/places in and of themselves, whose social structuring should be studied in relation to the range of wider social processes affecting Latinos’ place in the broader society (Ševčenko 2001; Aponte Parés 1998, 1999; Villa 2000). Most specifically, work on Latino Los Angeles has alerted us to the local and global processes affecting urban community development and the politics of space (Leclerc et al. 1999; Valle and Torres 2000). Work in Chicago, where Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have historically lived side by side, has also revealed the intra-Latino relations that are increasingly central to their politics and exchanges with the many state and private forces involved in urban policy planning and community development. In particular these writings have exposed some of the struggles these groups have engaged in to claim their right to space and to their communities, showing the centrality of discourses of *Latinidad*, race, and ethnicity to these claims (Flores-González 2001; Pérez 2001; Ramos-Zayas 2003; Toro-Morn 2001). A similar interethnic focus is demanded by the

context of East Harlem, a neighborhood that has been undergoing rapid change and a growing diversification of its Latino populations, rendering it, as other New York neighborhoods, into a key site for analyzing the inclusions and exclusions of contemporary Latino politics.

An important point worth considering here is the meaning of power and politics on which the debates are being waged. Students of cultural politics are well aware that the institutionalized settings for debating issues of urban planning and policies—such as community boards, public hearings, and the EZ workshop with which I started this work—are not the only spaces for defining politics. In fact, this work shows that they are questionable for bringing about participation and representation of minority populations. Neither are they conducive to examining racial and ethnic convergence among groups, or to exposing their give and take and cooperation. As an important and growing literature on intra- and interethnic relations shows, these dynamics have long been present though they are oftentimes most evident in the realm of popular culture and everyday life (Burgos 2001; Flores 2000; Rivera 2003). However, institutional spaces are not only the ones that most affect and translate to access to urban policies and economic resources, but also those least likely to be the subject of ethnographic and critical analysis. Readers are therefore warned. Competition and particularized ethnic assertions, not cooperation and openings, far abound in these pages, all connected to the institutional space and neoliberal context where these discussions take place. Examining these spaces is central, I believe, not only for elucidating the specific challenges posed by neoliberal policies to particular ethnic and racial groupings, but most important, for fostering and maintaining future coalitions.

Pivotal in this regard is the exchange between Puerto Ricans and African Americans. As said, Blacks and Puerto Ricans share important points of interaction, activism, and collaboration at the level of cultural creation and political activism in New York City and beyond (Burgos 2001; Cruz 1998; Flores 1993, 2000; James 1999; Rivera 2003). Because of their African legacy, many Puerto Ricans stand at the crossroads of U.S. racial/ethnic boundaries in ways that make it difficult, if not oftentimes irrelevant, to differentiate between the two, as is also the case with

Dominicans and other Caribbean and Black Latinos. Puerto Ricans' colonial status and history of racialization in the city also render them a racialized minority closer to African Americans than to other Latino groupings in the city's racial and ethnic hierarchy, a position increasingly shared by Dominicans (Flores 2000; Grosfoguel and Georas 2001; Urciuoli 1996). This is why, against what I call marketable ethnicity, I have repeatedly made reference to treatments and manifestations of race and ethnicity in El Barrio without clearly differentiating among these two social constructs. I recognize that idioms of race and ethnicity signal opposing forms of insertion into the nation: ethnicity is recognized to index a "safer" form of inclusion, whereas race is always about hierarchy and historically persistent and unredeemable difference (Omi-Winant 1994; Williams 1989; Urciuoli 1996). Yet the valence of these distinct categories is ultimately predicated on the ability of particular groupings to incorporate into normative conceptions of race/class/nation that have historically limited the "safe" incorporation of the least assimilable, and hence more racialized groupings. Such is the case, I argue, for my primarily Puerto Rican and Latino/a informants and for the particularizing idioms of identity (be it around ethnicity or nationality) they deploy against the preference for more marketable and safe manifestations of culture. This is so, notwithstanding that on account of class, cultural capital, citizenship status, education, color, and race among other variables, different members of these groupings are more or less subject or likely to free themselves from particularized practices of racialization and political and economic subordination.¹² My usage of "Black" and "white" responds to this reality. In this text I capitalize "Black" but not "white" because "Black" and "Latino" operate in a similar manner in East Harlem: as marginalized identity categories blurring ethnic and national identifications—as well as other social differences of class, education, citizenship status—that, while historically and socially prescribed, are politically activated to denote associations, establish political alliances, and wrest shrinking resources within the neoliberal city.¹³

Yet Black and Latino relationships have never been exempt from contention, tensions that a general lack of documentation have made even more difficult to ascertain, understand, and supersede.¹⁴ Writers have

repeatedly documented how racial and nationalist ideologies at play in Latin America and the United States have affected Black and Latino relations in the United States (James 1999; Jones-Correa 1998; Herbstein 1978). Most relevant to this work is an area that is well recognized to have mediated relationships between Blacks and Latinos since the 1960s: the consolidation of cultural pluralism and distributive programs (Jennings and Rivera 1984; Torres 1995; Aponte Parés 1999). By providing the infrastructure for local control of resources, ethnic-based distributive programs were pivotal to the development of Puerto Rican politics in New York, and to the control of local electoral politics by Puerto Rican politicians in East Harlem throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The consolidation of the racial-based paradigm has polarized the groups' relationship since the start of urban renewal projects and still mediates debates over space and development in the area.

In the past decades, however, while both groups continue to lag behind whites, Latinos have achieved considerably less power and influence in New York City electoral politics relative to Blacks (Sales and Bush 2000). Again, these are not mutually exclusive groups or categories, as shown by the growing circulation of the categories of white non-Hispanic or Black Latino after the last census. Nevertheless, important differences have been documented in the electoral realm, where as a group, New York Latinos are repeatedly shown to lag in political representation relative to their numbers.¹⁵ On this issue, writers point to African Americans' earlier involvement in the city's economy and local politics, their attainment of federal and government jobs, and their development in the city of strong politically indigenous institutions, such as Black churches, social agencies, housing groups, and local economic development corporations (Torres 1995; Falcón 2001). Issues of language and citizenship have also impaired Latinos' political power, especially among recent and first generation immigrants. Last but not least, the U.S. dominant Black-and-white racial binary, where Asian Americans and Latinos continue to be rendered forever foreign, is also not unrelated to the existing exclusions and lack of recognition Puerto Ricans and Latinos have attained at the level of electoral politics. All of these factors coalesce in the lower voter registration and turn-out patterns of Latinos vis-à-vis "Blacks" and

“whites.”¹⁶ This situation is evident in East Harlem where at the time of this writing, African Americans held leadership positions in all areas involved in urban development (the chair of the community board, the district councilman, borough president, and congressman are all African American), bringing about important tensions between these communities. A caveat here, and a little-known fact instructive of the complex exchange between Puerto Ricans and African Americans, is that two of East Harlem’s most important politicians, Assemblyman Adam Clayton Powell IV and Congressman Charles Rangel, are in fact—or at least locally reputed to be—of mixed Puerto Rican and African American parentage. However, each has nonetheless become strictly associated with different constituencies: Rangel is the preeminent and nationally recognized Black politician, while Powell, who was born in Puerto Rico, is locally recognized as Puerto Rican. However, as the son of the legendary Black Harlem politician Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Powell is also situationally associated with both constituencies.¹⁷

Relations between Puerto Ricans and other Latinos are not less complex. As one of the oldest Latino subgroups in New York City, Puerto Ricans are considerably familiar with *Latinidad*, a category that they have long helped further and use strategically for political purposes. Yet the use and subjective acceptance of categories so invested in cultural struggles never correlates so easily. The case of Puerto Ricans in *El Barrio*, for instance, shows that those most implicated in struggles to create what are now primarily conceived as “Latino” institutions and spaces are also the most compromised when subsumed into a Latino construct, particularly in the current neoliberal context so adverse to politicized ethnic claims. Still, Puerto Ricans are not the only ones mistrustful of *Latinidad* in *El Barrio*. This will be evident in my discussion of Mexican residents, who I chose to focus on because of their rapid population growth and visibility in *El Barrio*. For example, the section of 116th Street that has been named after Puerto Rico’s first elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, is now brimming with primarily Mexican businesses and flags, a vivid example of the rapid transformations in the area’s demographics and landscape. These transformations have been accompanied by tensions between Mexican and Puerto Rican populations, traced to their different

histories, citizenship status, and/or self-conception as residents, racialized minorities, or temporary immigrants (Bourgois 1995; González 2000; Robert Smith 1997). The relationship between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, however, echoes that of Blacks and Puerto Ricans, at least in regards to a history of cooperation and competition. Pressures to adjust to dominant categories of *Latinidad*, on the other hand, make Mexicans and Puerto Ricans experience analogous political losses as a result of the area's gentrification.

In this work I am unable to address the myriad variables affecting contemporary relations across Latino groups or between Blacks and Latinos in El Barrio, but I hope I can nonetheless elucidate aspects of these multiple and complex relationships as they pertain to current policies for urban development, and these communities' continuous demand for space, representation, equity, and empowerment. One goal is to expose the effects of the neoliberal context, where in contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, struggles are waged insidiously in the arena of consumption and national and international recognition in culture and tourism, as minority communities are being asked to reconstitute their public identity for tourist aims. In this context, careful considerations of the multiple manifestations of culture and of the objectives and politics for which it is deployed are most needed. Thus while in full agreement and recharged with current calls to supersede race relations paradigms, in which benefits to one group are seen to entail losses to another, I maintain that a disavowal of race and ethnicity, or of the "messiness" of identity politics, is not yet warranted. After all, it is not the eradication of race or ethnicity *per se*, but their organization, management, and direction that are the ultimate aims of all hegemonic processes (Williams 1989; San Juan 2002). And this management can differ widely according to time, context, institution, space, and location; neoliberalism has been known to foster multiculturalism throughout Latin America (Hale 2002), while the celebration of ethnic difference in U.S. marketing is commonplace (Halter 2000; Dávila 2001a). Generally in the present context, however, writers have pointed to the ascendancy of the ideology of color blindness as the dominant U.S. post-civil rights public stance and discourse on race. Accordingly the existence and institutional bases of racial inequalities are denied,

as is the political significance of race derided as exclusionary identity politics (Bonilla Silva 2001; Guinier and Torres 2002). The contradictory disavowal of ethnicity as discourse of political representation in favor of culture as enterprise is intrinsically tied to this position. But so is the rise in nationalist and ethnic revivals in El Barrio that emerge as primary resistance strategies, responses that may simultaneously hamper the prospects for cross-ethnic and cross-racial identifications based on mutual experiences of inequality. Still, I suggest that it is not ethnic politics per se that present the greatest perils to East Harlemites' longing for place. They in fact represent an important recourse against trends prioritizing marketable ethnicity. Instead, I question the ascendancy of neoliberal tenets and logics that not only attempt to erase race and ethnicity as variables of social inequality, but also promote a general distancing from the poor, the destitute, and working classes, and always with little consideration of ethnicity and race. Only by foregrounding this larger framework can the prospects for lasting intraethnic and racial coalitions in East Harlem, or the implications of the so-called Latinization of U.S. cities, be considered.

As is the case for many New York-based Puerto Ricans, East Harlem/El Barrio is a community I have long gravitated to for cultural, political, and social events. The writing of this book is therefore informed and motivated by my previous experiences with a community I consider to be politically and symbolically important for the history of Puerto Ricans and Latinos both in New York City and beyond. Yet the material for this book is necessarily more narrow. Specifically, I draw on ethnographic research carried out intermittently from May 2001 to December 2002, which is based on attendance at community board meetings, public hearings, and activities of different cultural and civic organizations; I have also interviewed past, current, and new residents of East Harlem, focusing on gentrification and change.¹⁸ I conducted follow-up interviews throughout the summer of 2003. All quotations cited were made during this time unless otherwise noted. In particular, I focused on sites of strategic importance for looking at current development initiatives in El Barrio, and for exposing the nuanced discourses and operations of power as manifested in decisions over development. The community board,

whose volunteer members are appointed by the borough president and by the local city councilman, was especially relevant as the local representative body to the city on matters of land use, zoning, municipal service delivery, and planning. It is in these forums that developers present their proposals, that politicians address East Harlem as a “community,” and that invitations to other events, such as hearings, electoral debates, and cultural activities, are circulated. In this way, what follows is not an account of East Harlem’s many layers of undocumented histories attesting to the different ethnic groups, political movements, and trends evolving inside it. I do not pretend to represent the totality of East Harlem’s history, whether at the level of representations or practices; nor is this a much needed history of Puerto Rican politics in the area, though traces of those stories will surface here. Instead the book is organized around a series of interconnected chapters focusing on a range of sites where current struggles over space are simultaneously, even if disparately, taking place from debates over housing policies to tourism to advertising. My goal, nonetheless, is that the book will provide an entry point into contemporary struggles over space and representation taking place in traditionally Latino/a neighborhoods like El Barrio and will perhaps be an incentive for others to take on more historical and ethnographic work on the largely undocumented history of Puerto Rican and Latino/a neighborhoods in and beyond New York.

I start with a brief overview of Puerto Ricans’ struggle for housing equity in East Harlem to establish how a key index of gentrification—a diminishing market for affordable housing—is affecting their dreams of place in the area. I pay close attention to how the area’s history and cultural identity is being deployed by developers and residents and how, despite their differing aspirations for the area, they end up advancing a similar development vision and ideology. New governmental policies favoring the privatization of land and property simultaneously intersect with and depart from Puerto Rican and Latino dreams of empowerment and tap into these dreams in multiple ways.

Chapter 2 establishes the symbolic value of East Harlem as a putatively “inalienable” space for Puerto Ricans and Latinos in and beyond El Barrio in order to delve deeper into the stakes of current development

strategies from the perspective of my primarily Puerto Rican informants. Space is never immutable or fixed, but an outcome of social relations and processes of social contest to stabilize meaning and particularize identities, that is, to secure “the identity of places” (Massey 1994). This chapter discusses how these dynamics take place in El Barrio, such as through its historical representation and objectification as a Latino space, and through the work of Puerto Rican activists intent on marketing and promoting El Barrio as a direct response to the area’s gentrification. The ensuing inclusions and exclusions that result from definitions of “community” are part of these place-making strategies, which I nevertheless suggest are key resources against attempts to de-ethnicize the areas that accompany most current developments. Conceptual linkages of culture and place, that is of “Latin culture” and “El Barrio,” are never the sole product of processes of cultural objectification, but of material inequalities and historical exclusions in housing policies, jobs, and services that have long shaped ethnic and working-class enclaves throughout U.S. cities. By calling attention to the symbolic and representational processes that have tied race, ethnicity, and place in East Harlem within the public imagination, I do not deny the multiple material processes shaping El Barrio as a Latino space, but rather, account for the value of these representations in the symbolic economy of contemporary cities.

Chapters 3 and 4 describe two cultural projects that foreground the multiple reverberations of culture in contemporary development initiatives: the Cultural Industry Investment Fund of the Upper Manhattan EZ legislation; and the failed Edison Project, which involved the development of East Harlem’s first corporate headquarters, the move of the Museum for African Art from Soho to East Harlem, and the development of a new charter school. Both of these projects aroused considerable contestation over the identity and public representation of East Harlem, providing good examples of the different endeavors that increasingly favor marketable ethnicity, not as a medium of inclusion or assertion but of co-optation or economic development. Specifically, these chapters expose how culture-based development initiatives adroitly build on and dissipate discourses of heritage, culture, quality, and national recognition in ways that triggered racial tensions while furthering the gentrification of



Figure 1. Flag flying above El Barrio's landscape. In the background is "Barrio Renacimiento" (Barrio Rebirth), a mural by Manny Vega, 1980. It was painted next to a former community garden on 103rd Street that has since become an empty lot awaiting future development. Photo by Rebecca Cooney.

the area. Discourses of Puertorriqueñidad and Latinidad operated both in the strategies for obtaining acquiescence to these projects and as a basis for rejecting them as ethnicity surfaces as an always lingering and strategic component in debates and approval of these projects.

El Barrio's Mexican residents were not part of the public hearings and debates I attended, and while central to current events in El Barrio, they were largely absent from urban development debates. This situation

speaks to the exclusionary bases of the planning process, and to the national and transnational scope of their concerns and politics as recent immigrants, a pattern well documented in the social science literature (Cordero et al. 2001; Jones-Correa 1998; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Yet immigrants are also actively, and necessarily, involved in urban politics, and in forging intraethnic alliances, even if these are often tested by the transnational character of their politics and the type of concerns at the center of Mexicans' struggle for empowerment. Chapter 5 centers on this growing community: how it stakes claims to particular spaces and the alliances it makes in East Harlem. This population is also affected by neoliberal policies, though not solely those exerted upon the city by private developers or government policies, but also by the transnational policies of two nation-states for whom immigrants are both a resource and a peril. By examining debates over control of the New York Mexican Independence Parade (*Desfile Mexicano de Nueva York*), this chapter proposes that as recent players in urban cultural politics, immigrant groups help recharge ethnicity as political recourse and ends by considering some of the conditions and goals in which such claims may be more or less effective in the neoliberal city.

Chapter 6 examines street art and outdoor advertising in relation to the marking and marketing of *Latinidad* in *El Barrio*. It highlights a central aspect of the ethnicity/business cultural quandary that accompanies processes of gentrification: that when properly marketed, culture as ethnicity continues to be a vital recourse for particular culture industries, such as ethnic-driven advertising. It is the different ends to which "culture" is deployed, the politics that are advanced and the people and interests that are involved in the different economies that it sustains, that we should listen and pay attention to as we sort through the intricacies of contemporary cultural politics in the neoliberal city. Lastly, I offer some final words, an attempt to synthesize what the disparate projects discussed in the book may suggest about the place of culture and identity in the execution of and resistance to neoliberal strategies.