



***Latino placemaking and planning: Cultural resilience and strategies for reurbanization*, by Jesus J. Lara**

Tucson, Arizona, Arizona University Press, 2018

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Overall, *Liberalism and Identity Politics* is a useful introduction for students of Puerto Rican history in the United States, New York City politics in the mid-20th century, and community development. It offers a number of touchstones that scholars can use to explore the dynamic complexity of New York's multi-layered political environment. But to get a fuller understanding of Nuyorican identity, I recommend spending a morning at El Museo and an evening at Nuyorican Poets Café.

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Latino placemaking and planning: Cultural resilience and strategies for reurbanization,
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Latinos are physically and culturally reshaping cities in the U.S. They are revitalizing cities, suburbs, and rural towns in dramatic fashion. Jesus Lara's book *Latino Placemaking and Planning* does an excellent job of describing various Latino placemaking efforts through case studies that help to improve our understanding of how Latinos are revitalizing neighborhoods. Lara's primary focus is commercial corridors, which have been transformed by Latino immigrants in their efforts to create a sense of place. Therefore, *Latino Placemaking and Planning* makes an essential contribution to the emerging Latino urbanism scholarship.

The book's primary audiences are urban planning and policy practitioners and urban designers. However, the book is also suitable for academics interested in ethnic spaces, urban revitalization, and Latino issues in general. It is also applicable to other disciplines such as geography, architecture, and sociology. Lara seeks to answer the following question:

When Latino immigrants establish new "places" in urban centers across the country, how do those places change, what are the qualities and conditions that make those places unique, and what are the implications for an increasingly culturally and demographically diverse urban landscape? (p. 3)

He answers these critical questions by highlighting these diverse landscapes via detailed visuals that help us see how these physical and cultural changes are reshaping neighborhoods.

The main strength of the book is Lara's ability to situate his case studies within the emerging Latino urbanism literature. Lara develops a substantial literature review on Latino placemaking that will be extremely useful to scholars studying these issues. He breaks up the review by making a connection between theories of urban design and the various types of scholarship within Latino placemaking. Specifically, he traces the nuanced differences within the Latino placemaking literature: Latino urbanism, which describes how Latinos reshape their physical environment, and everyday Latino urbanism, which focuses on how Latinos claim space and build social communities. He continues with the literature on reclaimed and contested spaces, studies of economic placemaking, and process-based studies of inclusionary approaches to supporting Latino placemaking. The literature presentation is clear, and he does a good job of discussing the intellectual relationships within the literature. Lara maps out the key debates within the Latino placemaking literature, such as the extent of impact of Latino culture on urban spaces and the infrastructural support necessary in neighborhoods that support Latino placemaking. He also clearly communicates the links between essential studies that speak to Latino placemaking and planning (Arreola, 2004; Davila, 2004; Diaz, 2005; Diaz & Torres, 2012; Rios et al., 2012; Villa, 2000).

Lara provides detailed case studies that demonstrate the physical changes taking place in Latino communities. In our current negative anti-immigrant political environment, it is refreshing to see the positive impacts Latino immigrants are having in revitalizing communities. The case studies are neighborhoods in Phoenix, Arizona; Detroit, Michigan; Columbus, Ohio; and Indianapolis, Indiana. Although these cities are different from each other, Lara focuses on the commonalities between the neighborhoods to draw out elements of Latino placemaking. For example, one common element in Latino placemaking in all four cities is the similar vernacular esthetic of small business façades. Another element running through all case studies is “that the most common reason given for establishing businesses and residences in these areas was the presence of jobs, family, friends, and people with similar backgrounds—‘chain migration’ [as it’s often referred]” (p. 117). Lara also suggests concrete examples of urban design strategies supporting Latino placemaking useful to planners who want to support these generative efforts. For example, in his last chapter, Lara recommends that planners, architects, and public policymakers “capitalize on destinations and attractions that celebrate the local entrepreneur spirit” (p. 127). Perhaps his most important recommendation for supporting this revitalization process is acknowledgment of the importance of Latino family values, social networks, and the use of public spaces as gathering spaces.

Unfortunately, like other books in the Latino urbanism literature, Lara fails to place Latino placemaking within both a socio-cultural and esthetic context, and the political-economic structural context shaping Latino communities. For example, to clearly understand Latino placemaking, one needs to start by understanding the specific changing labor needs of regions that are drawing Latino immigrants. In addition, it is critical to understand the historical role that racial discrimination and housing segregation has played in creating these Latino communities.

Lara also does not provide much theory to help analyze his case studies. He does touch superficially on urban design theory, but Lara does not substantively integrate it into his analysis. It was not very easy to ascertain how his analysis related to the theories presented in the book. For example, he analyzed the four case studies by using the elements of density, accessibility, safety, existing retail, and capacity building. This approach seems like a simple way of making connections between the cases. However, his short descriptions of these elements in the case studies do not provide an explanatory theory of the socio-cultural and political economic relationships that are driving these changes. Also, Lara does not devote sufficient attention to the issue of gentrification and how it is changing many Latino neighborhoods (e.g., Pilsen in Chicago, Boyle Heights in Los Angeles). Although inner-city disinvestment still occurs and is adequately treated in the book, Lara should have been aware that currently, there is much capital investment taking place in these neighborhoods. Consequently, gentrification is putting pressure on Latino communities, and communal leaders are seeking to maintain their cultural spaces in the face of these new capital investments. In the last chapter, I would have liked him to go back to the literature and clearly indicate how the book builds upon this literature. In fact, the book’s main contribution is to show how general ideas and concepts from Latino placemaking play out in different neighborhoods. In other words, Lara could have done a better job in identifying the book’s key conceptual and intellectual contributions.

Lara leaves us with two unanswered questions. First, how is Latino placemaking different from that carried out by other ethnic groups (e.g., Asian Americans)? Is there something unique about Latino placemaking that says something important about Latino culture? There is a long line of historical literature on immigrant neighborhoods that Lara could have engaged in helping answer this question, such as classic sociological literature on ethnic enclaves (Gans, 1962). Secondly, as stated previously, how is Latino placemaking changing with new gentrification, that is, the replacement of low-income Latinos by high-income ones?

Overall, *Latino Placemaking and Planning*, provides key examples to better situate and understand Latino placemaking. The book’s literature review should be beneficial to urban scholars. Lara’s case studies of Latino placemaking show Latinos playing an unprecedented role in stabilizing

declining urban and suburban communities. During a time when discussion about ethnicity and immigration is so polarized, it is vital to recognize the decisive transformative role played by Latinos in American cities.

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