THE LATINIZATION OF ORLANDO: RACE, CLASS, AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE

by

SIMONE PIERRE DELERME

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Anthropology

Written under the direction of

Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas

And approved by

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 2013
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Latinization of Orlando: Race, Class, and the Politics of Place

By SIMONE PIERRE DELERME

Dissertation Director:
Dr. Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas

Taking into consideration the South’s historically powerful racial binary, this project examines the Hispanic migration to Central Florida, and the ways that race and class-based identities and distinctions are formulated and experienced in new destinations of Hispanic migration. Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork, this project combines traditional anthropological methodologies with innovative textual analysis to interweave data gathered through participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviews, archival research, census data, and new media. Organized into seven thematic chapters, this dissertation addresses: Hispanic migration, community development, and homeownership; language ideologies and racialization; and social class formation and distinctions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: A Puerto Rican Levittown</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: New Destinations, Great Expectations</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Latinization of Metropolitan Orlando</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Language Ideologies and Racial Formations</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Place-Identity and the Formation of a Suburban Slum</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: The Fractured American Dream</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Social Class Distinctions and Orlando’s Hispanic Elite</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Demography Is Destiny</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure I (Page 4). The Change in the Hispanic Population, 1990-2010 (Ten Fastest Growing States)

Figure II (Page 4). The Change in the Hispanic Population, 1990-2010 (Traditional Settlement states)

Figure III (Page 5). Population Change, 2000-2009 (Florida)

Figure IV (Page 16). Racial Identification of Latinos in the mainland U.S.

Figure V (Page 36). Hispanic Population, Puerto Rican Population, and Total Population in 2010

Figure VI (Page 44). Population of Orange and Osceola Counties Page

Figure VII (Page 47). Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL

Figure VIII (Page 64). Real Estate Transactions, November 11, 1988

Figure IX (Page 65). Real Estate Transactions, February 9, 1989

Figure X (Page 71). Hispanic Population Concentration in 1990

Figure XI (Page 72). Hispanic Population Dispersion 2017

Figure XII (Page 84). Labor Force Participation (Unemployment Rates)

Figure XIII (Page 89). Unemployment, Median Income, and Poverty

Figure XIV (Page 106). Average Weekly Wages in 2011

Figure XV (Page 107). Number of workers at or below minimum wage, Florida

Figure XVI (Page 148). Osceola County’s Hispanic Elected Officials

Figure XVII (Page 149). Orange County’s Hispanic Elected Officials

Figure XVIII (Page 158). Party Affiliation Among Hispanic Registered Voters in FL, 2006 to 2012 (in thousands)

Figure XIX (Page 211). Foreign Born and Native Born Poverty Rates, 2000 and 2009 Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area
Figure XX (Page 211). Native-Born Poor Population in the Suburbs, 2000 and 2009 Suburbs of Orlando-Kissimmee, FL

Figure XXI (Page 211). Foreign-Born Poor Population in the Suburbs, 2000 and 2009 Suburbs of Orlando-Kissimmee, FL

Figure XXII (Page 239). Average Household Income by Race and Ethnicity Buenaventura Lakes, FL

Figure XXIII (Page 239). Household Income and Benefits Buenaventura Lakes, FL

Figure XXIV (Page 240). Value of Owner Occupied Units Buenaventura Lakes, FL

Figure XXV (Page 242). Occupation for Employed Civilian Population 16 Years and Over Buenaventura Lakes, FL

Figure XXVI (Page 243). Education Buenaventura Lakes, FL

Figure XXVII (Page 254). Change in Home Owner Characteristics from 2007 to 2009 Florida

Figure XXVIII (Page 265). Subprime Hot Spots

Figure XXIX (Page 266). Type and Percentage of Loans in the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Income Category

Figure XXX (Page 294). Educational Attainment, 2008
PREFACE

My initial intention was to write this dissertation about gentrification, and East Harlem’s dwindling Puerto Rican presence. I know Harlem, New York well, especially the section known as East Harlem, Spanish Harlem, or El Barrio. I spent my childhood in this community, returned to my same childhood home in 2005 to begin graduate school, and my extended family still lives in close proximity to my house on 118th street. Growing up, I was acutely aware that the place that we called home was perceived negatively. I recall my brother and I avoiding the crack vials that spotted the concrete, and the vacant lots and abandoned buildings that lined the streets on our daily walks to my grandmother’s house back in the 80s. We lied to the school about our home address so my brother and I could attend a public school on Park Avenue, in New York City’s affluent Upper East Side. Our friends from school didn’t know where we lived, and were never allowed to visit us in our East Harlem residence. I never gave much thought to the socio-economic conditions in Harlem while I lived there in my youth. We were a privileged middle class family living in what was once a notorious ghetto. During those times there were allegations of homeowners burning down their properties to collect the insurance money, and the urban poverty surrounded us. But, my parents, uncles, and aunts saw this as a real estate opportunity, and many of my family members decided to purchase property in the area, making East Harlem a place that my large Puerto Rican family happily called home.

In the early 1990s my immediate family moved to Delaware. My father’s bank underwent a serious of mergers, and to keep his job he was forced to relocate to an office in downtown Wilmington to manage the bank’s newly opened emergency recovery
operation. In Delaware I found myself living in a suburb and attending a school where I rarely encountered other Hispanics. Whites were segregated in the suburbs and African Americans were concentrated in Wilmington’s inner city. The population was clearly polarized, and Hispanics were too small of a population to have any impact on race relations or social life in the region.

It was not until May of 2005 that I had the opportunity to leave Delaware and resettled into my childhood home on 118th street to begin graduate school at Rutgers University. My brother joined me several months later. He had spent four years living in Tallahassee, Florida for college, and like me, was returning to East Harlem after being away for many, many years. When we arrived it was clear that everything had changed. A mall was being constructed across the street from my bedroom window where an abandoned factory once stood, a plethora of new luxury condos now sat on the vacant lots I once walked past, and nearby 116th street was now known as “Little Mexico.” My intention was to study these transformations for my dissertation.

Prior to beginning this project, my only knowledge and memory of Orlando, Florida were from the annual vacations my family took to “Orange Lake,” a time-share resort my large extended family visited annually. For two weeks in August my aunts, uncles, and cousins from New York City would pack into rented vans and make the drive to Orlando, Florida. We stayed at the time-share resort or with my uncle and aunt in nearby Seminole County. My uncle and aunt, like so many other Puerto Rican families, moved to Metropolitan Orlando in the late 1980s. I knew Orlando, therefore, only as a tourist visiting the spaces of International Drive, the various theme parks, or Downtown Orlando’s Church Street Station, prior to its closing.
Then, in 2006 historian Felix Matos-Rodriguez and anthropologist Jorge Duany published a policy report predicting that Puerto Ricans in Central Florida could follow a different path than previous waves of Puerto Rican migrants to the United States. Two years earlier Duany and Matos-Rodriguez participated in the Greater Orlando Chamber of Commerce’s Hispanic Summit, and provided an assessment of the population’s historical background and settlement patterns, thereby laying the groundwork for future studies. Orlando, Florida had clearly emerged as a new site of Puerto Rican migration, replacing New York City to become the number one destination for Puerto Rican migrants. More importantly, Matos-Rodriguez and Duany used the words “middle class” to describe this population. This is what attracted me to Orlando, Florida, and immediately convinced me to reconsider my East Harlem field site. I became interested in Orlando hoping to find a middle class ethnic enclave of upwardly mobile, educated professionals.

After reading many, many social scientific texts that portrayed Puerto Ricans negatively while an undergraduate student, I had little desire to recreate similar representations by focusing on poor, marginal Puerto Ricans being displaced in East Harlem. Furthermore, the poverty and marginality that I read about never reflected my experiences as a Puerto Rican or Haitian-American in New York City or Wilmington, Delaware. I became increasingly interested in the Puerto Rican migratory experience when I was isolated from other Hispanics in Delaware. One of the first books I was given to read was Oscar Lewis’s *La Vida*, one of my mother’s favorites. I too enjoyed reading the text, but I longed to write about the Puerto Ricans that more closely resembled my parents and large, extended Puerto Rican family. My parents always defined themselves
as “middle to upper middle class,” and although neither had received a Bachelors degree, they were deeply invested in the American Dream and the notion that hard work, education, and assimilation leads to success. I therefore wanted to focus on the Puerto Rican middle class presumably present in Metropolitan Orlando. Besides, the Florida landscape reminded me of Delaware’s sprawling suburbs, where my parents sought out a new, suburban destination to call home two decades earlier.

My parents were both born and raised in New York City. My father’s parents are from Puerto Rico, and my mother’s are from Haiti. My father speaks limited Spanish and my mother is fluent in Haitian Creole, but we only spoke English at home. I identify as Hispanic, Puerto Rican, and/or black, although my informants in Metropolitan Orlando frequently referred to me as Nuyorican or American during the course of my fieldwork. For most of my life I have experienced the “multiple marginalization” that Elizabeth Aranda (2009) discusses. I am clearly not an Anglo American, but my assimilation to mainstream American culture and my preference for the English language led many of the first generation Hispanics I encountered throughout my life to reject me for not being Puerto Rican enough. When I lived in Delaware I was isolated from the Hispanic population until college. As a result, I grew up interacting with African Americans and non-Hispanic whites, who perceived me as racially “mixed” or black and white. As an undergraduate at the University of Delaware, I banned together with other Hispanic students for the first time and became very involved in the Hispanic community. There was a very small population of Hispanics, and no one ever questioned my Puerto Rican ness or challenged my preference for the English language. At the University of Delaware we exhibited a solidarity and my inner circle included a diverse group of
African Americans, a few non-Hispanic whites, and several second and third generation Hispanics, many of them bicultural or Americanized like me.

Why my resistance to speaking and learning Spanish? There are a number of reasons: laziness, comfort speaking and expressing myself in English, and minimal contact with monolingual Spanish speakers, until I began my fieldwork that is. When I was confronted about my inability to speak Spanish, I would offer an excuse, “my mother is Haitian, and only speaks English and Creole.” I, however, don’t speak Creole either. As for my father, “he is Nuyorican,” I would explain, and “does not speak much Spanish.” I always placed the blame on my family’s dependence on English, even though I have taken years and years of Spanish classes in junior high school, high school, as a college undergraduate, and during graduate school. Despite my formal training, I think in English and translate in my head before uttering a word or phrase in Spanish, self-consciously double-checking my grammar. Even when I am spoken to in Spanish and understand what is being said, I habitually opt to respond in English for fear that my accent will sound strange or I will mix up the preterit and the imperfect tense. I’ve been taking Spanish classes for 15 years. Still, I am far from fluent. Over the years I learned the Spanish language through rote memorization and formulaic textbook instructions. Therefore, when it comes to conversational Spanish I get down right nervous, and communication requires a lot more mental work and anxiety than speaking in English.

I have resisted learning and speaking the Spanish language for as long as I can remember; but, unexpectedly, my inability to speak “good,” grammatically correct Spanish with fluency helped me develop rapport with non-Hispanics in Orlando. During my fieldwork, I often recalled the many conversations with my Haitian-American mother
who is commonly mistaken for a Brazilian or Hispanic. As a resident of South Florida she continues to encounter Spanish-dominated spaces where she is forced to apologize for her inability to communicate in the Spanish language, and feels frustration at being expected to speak Spanish. I found the Hispanic concentrated residential enclaves of Central Florida to be equally unforgiving, and in many ways I too was an outsider in these spaces and places. As a result, I could also sympathize with my English speaking, non-Hispanic informants that found themselves to be a linguistic minority in the community of Buenaventura Lakes. I therefore did not respond defensively when they criticized the use of the Spanish language. Instead, I tried to learn about and capture as many perspectives as possible to gauge the reaction to Orlando’s Hispanic migration. I found the non-Hispanic white population very supportive of my research almost immediately, and many individuals were willing to speak openly about their thoughts and experiences.

I don’t believe that my preference for English makes me any less Puerto Rican, just like my Hispanic informant’s preferences for Spanish does not make them any less entitled to acceptance, incorporation, and belonging in the U.S. Of course many disagree due to the deeply imbedded language ideologies that impact belonging and incorporation in the United States. Thus, my preference for communicating in English and perceived “Americaness” enabled many of my non-Hispanic white informants to open up to me about their anger and frustration with the Spanish language without fearing judgment or identification as a racist at a time when the county is at the height of linguistic transformations. Like many other instances in my life, these individuals saw me as somehow different than some of the other Puerto Ricans they encountered in
Buenaventura Lakes, many of them first and second generation Puerto Ricans.

Additionally, I found the Puerto Rican population in Metropolitan Orlando, particularly those from the island, far less likely to embrace me as fellow Puerto Rican. My language skills and preferences alienated me from some Puerto Ricans that were visually disturbed when they encountered yet another young person of Puerto Rican descent that lost the language of their ancestors in the process of assimilation. On more than one occasion interviewees have scolded me for my inability to speak grammatically correct Spanish, and Spanish speakers have certainly ridiculed me, at times humorously and at other moments cruelly, for my American accent, grammatical mistakes, and word choices that reflected the Castilian, textbook Spanish that I speak.

In September of 2010, for instance, I visited a predominately Puerto Rican church in the Buenaventura Lakes suburb to interview the female pastor. She looked at me disapprovingly, and gave me a lecture when I admitted my Spanish language skills were not up to par because I usually communicated in English. “Eating rice and beans doesn’t make you Hispanic,” she told me, with plenty of attitude. I stayed for the church service, and during the sermon the pastor gave me a warm welcome, mentioning my research and my presence in the community. Later that day I had a conversation with a member of the congregation. She walked over to welcome me after the service, and we began engaging in small talk. Mid-conversation she politely interjected, and asked me if I spoke Spanish. The service was completely in Spanish, including the musical numbers, and she wanted to know if I understood everything. I had to admit that there were indeed a few parts that I missed, but I assured her that I enjoyed attending and especially liked the reggaeton performance that accompanied the choir. The last time I was in church was during high
school. I attended a conservative, predominately Italian catholic high school and the lively Spanish music was a welcomed change. “Oh, you’re American. My kids are the same,” she told me. I awkwardly smiled to mask my embarrassment. She then mentioned her son’s preference for English, and his dislike of Spanish food. As time went on I realized that many of the Puerto Ricans I encountered did not even consider me to be Puerto Rican, but Nuyorican or American, since I was not born on the island, had little first-hand experience of island life, and showed a greater preference for the things they interpreted to be mainstream American. On another occasion I was discussing my music preferences with another teacher, a third generation Puerto Rican from Florida with a Masters degree. She caught me by surprise in the middle of our conversation, “you’re such a white girl,” she laughed. Seconds before I told her that I preferred the local country music station to the salsa music Spanish station, La Rumba she just laughed. I so badly wanted to tell her not to let the highlighted blond hair and fair skin fool her, because I’m black. But, I just smiled instead deciding to avoid a confrontation and I defended myself as best I could in that fleeting moment. “I like reggaeton, I just don’t like salsa music,” I told her. But to her it was unheard of for a Puerto Rican to not love salsa music. I did however feel an immediate connection to Nuyoricans and third generation Puerto Ricans like myself.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork I dedicated more and more time to improving my Spanish, I had no choice. I encountered bilingual Spanish speakers willing to translate conversations for me, and that made an effort to always speak to me in English. But, I was also a part of group conversations with bilingual and monolingual Spanish speakers that ignored my presence, and made me feel like an outsider, which at
times hurt my feelings. I grew tired of being shut out of conversations, feeling alienated from Spanish-speakers, and it became clear that Spanish was a necessity for communicating with resident’s throughout the region, not to mention the labor market advantage Spanish fluency provides. Additionally, the individuals that I lived with during my fieldwork were monolingual Spanish speakers or bilingual speakers that clearly preferred to communicate in Spanish, further motivating me to improve my Spanish language skills.

I did, however, find Hispanic concentrated spaces where I was more readily accepted and welcomed: the English-dominant spaces of business and professional organizations, like the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce or Amigos Profesionales. In these business-oriented spaces I encountered a diverse population of upwardly mobile Puerto Ricans and Hispanics from other parts of the United States, Latin America, or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. I carefully monitored my appearance, and the way I presented myself to be sure to perform the “professional” identity required of professionals and entrepreneurs in these venues. I had indeed found that population of middle and upper class Puerto Ricans that I was looking for; although, this subset of the Hispanic population was not the majority, and my interactions with the elite were mostly limited to the spaces of business networking events. The social experiences and privileged existence of these Hispanics was remarkably different from the lives of the poor and working class service sector employees that I lived with during my fieldwork. So, for two years I moved between the two worlds. I exchanged business cards and discussed sales projections with Hispanic professionals during the day, and I listened to
my roommates’ concern over their dwindling work hours, inability to pay rent, and many financial hardships during the night.

**Living in Metropolitan Orlando**

In May of 2010 I found a Craigslist advertisement for a room rental in a 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom house in Buenaventura Lakes, Florida. The monthly rental cost $350, and the room included utilities and Internet. I placed a call, and received permission to view the rental in a few hours. I met the 28-year-old owner of the house later that day, and he agreed to rent me the room. Marco came to the United States from Venezuela with a temporary visa, but through his marriage to a Puerto Rican woman he gained the right to live and work in the United States. He became a US citizen shortly before I met him. Marco first lived in Miami then Sarasota before purchasing two houses in Osceola County with his Puerto Rican wife. The couple lived in Buenaventura Lakes for 7-years, but they went through a turbulent divorce. The court awarded him both houses during the divorce proceedings. Marco was working at a General Mills warehouse when I moved in, but to maintain his mortgage payments on his sole salary he rented out two of the bedrooms in the house. One room was rented to me, and a second room was rented to Pedro, an 18-year old undocumented hotel worker from Mexico.

When Marco wasn’t busy maintaining the house, participating in church, or working he spent time with his Colombian girlfriend Wanda. He gave me his “testimony” one evening, explaining how he became involved with the church at a desperate time in his life. He was faced with criminal charges after being accused of stealing from the Home Depot where he previously worked. He claimed to be innocent of the charges, and said that a manager had set him up. Marco’s experiences with the criminal system put
him into contact with a Pentecostal preacher who helped him straighten his life out and find God. By the time I met Marco he was deeply religious, attending services at least three times a week, and committed to living his life according to the guidelines of his congregation. Marco preached to me at times, frequently mentioned God, and sometimes read me passages from the bible. He expressed a desire to help people and always insisted that he, Pedro, and I were a family, and called us brother or sister. However, his dedication to the Pentecostal church and his religiosity was at times overshadowed by his preoccupation with money and finances. His job was unstable, and he constantly worried that he would be laid off. This economic insecurity made him very dependent on his houses, which he often referred to as “his business.” The rent Marco collected from Pedro and I subsidized his income, and was enough to cover his mortgage payment and most of the utility bills. But, he often complained that he wasn’t making any money on his second property, a $40 monthly profit at most, which was rented to a non-Hispanic white family in a rural part of Osceola County approximately 40 minutes from BVL.

In BVL I had a second roommate, Pedro, who introduced me to his network of friends at his hotel job. When I first met Pedro he was 18-years-old and working as a houseman in the housekeeping division of a national hotel located 10 minutes from our house. Pedro crossed the Mexico-US border when he was 16 years old, with the help of coyotes, arriving first in Texas, before flying to Florida to meet his uncle and father that migrated years earlier. He was traumatized by his experience. The group he traveled with got lost in the desert for several days, and in tears one evening he shared a poem he wrote recounting the death of a woman while her baby lay crying. I asked him what happened to the baby, but he continued to sob unable to reply. In the United States Pedro spent a
few months living in Georgia, and he moved from place to place in parts of North and Central Florida to follow family members and work opportunities. His mother, brother, and many of his extended family members remain in Puebla, Mexico. Pedro earned the most money picking watermelons in Florida, but also worked a variety of construction jobs and spent a brief period of time in the kitchen of a local Colombian restaurant with several other undocumented Mexican workers.

Pedro had many dreams and aspirations for his life, and expressed an interest in becoming an auto mechanic, learning more about the construction industry, learning English, writing songs and poetry, having a family one day, and owning his own home. Over time, however, his hope dwindled and it became clear that Pedro was psychologically broken. He often cried for his family in Mexico, longing to see his grandmother and grandfather again before they died. He lived in fear, constantly concerned about his lack of identification and the repercussions of his undocumented status being discovered. Pedro only had a fake identification and his original birth certificate, but no Mexican passport. During my fieldwork I watched Pedro slip deeper and deeper into depression, battling alcoholism and his conflicting emotions about life in the United States and Mexico. “Why don’t you just go back home?” I sometimes asked him, thinking life in Mexico couldn’t be much worse then what he was experiencing in the United States. However, he claimed he was accustomed to life in the U.S. and the material items and spending money his small salary provided. For the first time in his life he had a cell phone, television, bicycle, and an X-Box console. He could purchase clothes, shoes, and jewelry for himself, and he loved being able to buy pizza from Domino’s and hamburgers from Wendy’s. As a child in Mexico, he explained, he stole
food for he and his brother to eat, couldn’t afford to go to school, lived in the streets, and went barefoot. I had no idea how to help him, and it saddened me to observe his suffering while I took for granted the privileges I enjoyed as a citizen.

Pedro’s life in the United States was marked by economic insecurity and a constant struggle for survival. His undocumented status prevented him from obtaining a drivers license, and severely limited his work opportunities. Furthermore, there was no opportunity for upward social mobility. I encountered several undocumented immigrants in Pedro’s hotel suffering the same fate. These immigrants secured their jobs at the hotel from an outside contractor who provides the establishment with housekeeping staff. The contractor removed $2.50 per hour from Pedro’s check as a fee, and he received $7.76 per hour after the deductions. Pedro’s job, however, was always insecure and he worried about being fired when the peak tourist season ended and staff was drastically cut. Most of the workers I met in the housekeeping division of the hotel rarely received 40 hours of work per week. These individuals described themselves as “full time workers” during our conversations, and the hotel was their sole employment. Still, their work hours and daily schedules fluctuated from week to week. When I looked at the weekly schedules of the housekeeping division, May 29th to June 4th and July 31st to August 6th of 2011, I realized that occupancy rates in the hotel were extremely low during the peak summer season. The housekeepers, all female, consistently received the fewest hours, no more than 27 per week, and when the peak tourist season ended many of these employees lost their jobs.

After living in Buenaventura Lakes for several months with Pedro and Marco, I moved to Hunter’s Creek to rent a room in Wanda’s house, Marco’s girlfriend. Wanda
was in her fifties, and had moved to the United States from Colombia in her early 20s to find better work opportunities. She came to the United States by crossing through the Mexican border, with the help of a coyote. She came with $2000 in her pocket, and a few friends of hers that also left to the United States promised to help her upon arrival. But, when she arrived she ended up alone and slept in a park for days. A woman approached her in the park, asked if she was crazy, and then offered to help her. Wanda received a job taking care of a baby for a wealthy New Jersey family. But, she left the position a month later, explaining that the husband of the family was “trying to touch her” and kept making advances. She then worked two jobs cleaning office buildings.

Wanda spent 11 years as an undocumented worker until her marriage to a U.S. citizen, and during our conversations she told me about her different run-ins with immigration. Over the years she traveled back and forth to Colombia to visit her daughters that remained with her parents in Colombia. On two different instances she was caught by immigration officers, one was Mexican another American, but they let her go. On one occasion she was trying to travel to and from Colombia to visit her daughters by assuming the identity of a Puerto Rican women. They asked her questions about Puerto Rico, inquiring about the name of a historic place and the Spanish word for the frogs found in Puerto Rico. She failed the question about the frog, using the term “rana” instead of “coqui.” She also told me about an incident that continues to traumatize her, when she and her sister tried to bring their daughters to the United States via Mexico. The two were almost kidnapped by men who stole their money and passports in an attempt to kidnap, rape them, and sell their organs, according to Wanda.
Wanda explained that her family was very poor in Colombia, but when I met her she was a wealthy restaurant owner living in a luxurious 5-bedroom, 3-bathroom home that sat along a small man-made lake. She was well traveled, kind, religious, worldly, and quite opinionated, although she had no formal education. She dreamed of returning to school to become a nurse, but her restaurant kept her busy. Her two daughters, however, had Bachelors degrees from the University of Central Florida. One daughter was in medical school when Wanda and I first met, and her second daughter was working as a psychologist after finishing her Masters degree. Both were married to non-Hispanic white males. Wanda’s brothers and sisters were also successful restaurant owners, with chains in New York, North Carolina, and Florida. Living with Wanda was my only opportunity to live in a wealthy Central Florida suburb since it is unusual to find rooms for rent in these areas. She, however, rented out several bedrooms in her large home, one to a Mexican couple that worked in her restaurant, a second room was rented to a young Mexican male in his late teens, and a third bedroom was rented to a Hispanic male in his early 30s.

I left Wanda’s house after a few months, and I rented an apartment in a gated community 10 minutes from Buenaventura Lakes. A year later I started renting a room from Maria, a room inspector in Pedro’s hotel. Maria was from a wealthy Guatemalan family. Her mother owned a clothing factory in Guatemala until the family lost the business due to financial troubles. Soon after, Maria’s mother left to New York and became a seamstress and designer for a major clothing label. Maria joined her in New York while still a young child. Maria eventually married a Colombian man she met in New York, and they have three children. They were later divorced and she moved to
Kissimmee, FL with her second husband, also a Colombian she met in New York City. On many occasions Maria described the life of luxury she once lived. She took a few courses at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology, and she and her mother once owned a small boutique in Queens, New York. Her first husband was a businessman who owned real estate in Florida and Colombia, and she described her many shopping sprees on 5th Avenue nostalgically. Her life now is significantly different now, and like Pedro, is dominated by financial insecurity, marginality, and the struggle to care for herself and her three children on her low-paid salary. While an employee at the hotel she earned under $10 per hour inspecting rooms, and when possible took on extra hours cleaning rooms to add to her income.

**Identities, Categorizations, and Inter-ethnic Relations**

How did these individuals describe their ethnic and racial identities? My roommates identified themselves based on national origin, as Colombians, Mexicans, or Cubans, for instance, but rarely used the terms Latino, Hispanic, black, or white as identifiers. On one occasion I was at dinner with Wanda and Marco and we started talking about racial identities and racial discrimination. Wanda mentioned a time when a principal tried to have her two daughters moved to a school with a larger Hispanic population during their one-on-one meeting. She told him, “I’m white, no one is going to discriminate against me,” and refused to have her children moved to a school with a larger Hispanic demographic. In response, Marco jokingly said, “Well, I’m black. Look at my hair.” I asked him if he was serious, if he really identified as black and he kept repeating, “I’m black” and pointed to his hair. Wanda rolled her eyes at him and said, “He’s just joking;” although, Marco never did respond to my question. Wanda always
told me how she responds when people ask her where she is from or inquire about her ethnic background: “I’m from Florida.” She always receives confused looks, she admits, since she speaks English with a strong Spanish accent. However, she refuses to admit she was born and raised in Colombia when asked, and explains to the person questioning her that people from Florida speak like this too. On many occasions she told me that she identifies as an American from Florida. She no longer saw Colombia as her home, expressed no desire to return, and little desire to even visit. Instead, she was heavily involved in her predominately non-Hispanic white church, remained busy at her restaurant that served Colombian food, and felt comfortable in middle and upper class spaces frequented by Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites alike. Many times, Wanda and Marco expressed their pride to be American citizens, and claimed that the United States was in fact “their country too.” In contrast, Pedro often referred to himself as part of the population of “ilegales” (illegals) or as a “fantasma” (ghost). When I asked him for the term he uses to describe his background, he said “Mexican.” But when I inquired about his race, he described himself as “indio” since he speaks the indigenous language Nahuatl in addition to Spanish, and has features that reveal his indigenous Mexican ancestry. Maria identified as Guatemalan and white.

Inter-ethnic relations in the residential spaces where I lived were marked by contradiction. At times I observed a solidarity between the different Hispanics that interacted with my roommates based on their shared economic position and circumstances. Through Pedro and Maria, for instance, I met Puerto Rican women in their social circle that were married to undocumented Mexican men. These women helped their husbands and husband’s friends mediate life in the United States without
documentation. However, despite the collaboration between Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics, during spontaneous conversations it became clear that some of the Hispanics I encountered held a low opinion of other ethnic and racial groups, African Americans and Puerto Ricans in particular.

On one occasion Wanda mentioned that the Puerto Ricans that lived in BVL were “very poor people” and not as educated about homeownership, which is how she explained the high number of foreclosures in the suburb. Although she did not know any of BVL’s Puerto Rican residents personally, she made her judgments based on what she observed driving through the suburb to visit Marco almost daily. She also differentiated the Mexican workers in her family’s restaurant based on class, referring to their poverty, lack of education, and making comments about “that kind of people” in our casual conversations. Still, because of her generosity and deep religious beliefs she felt it her duty to help others. She employed undocumented workers in her own restaurant, and she rented them rooms in her house. When one of her workers was arrested for driving without a license, she paid all of the legal fees and he returned to work at her restaurant when the proceedings finished. She also helped other undocumented immigrants find work, housing, and expressed a genuine interest in the well being of others. African Americans, however, were absent from her social networks and the social spaces she frequented.

Similarly, Marco surrounded himself with very few Puerto Ricans and African Americans. His girlfriend Wanda once suggested to me that he married his Puerto Rican ex-wife for papers. However, Marco never spoke negatively about Puerto Ricans in front of me. On one occasion, when Pedro’s bicycle was stolen from in front of our house he
began to blame the child of a Puerto Rican family living across the street. He started to criticize the family, mentioning that the father is always blasting loud Spanish music and working on his car in the driveway. But, he stopped himself and told me that he knows I am Puerto Rican, and therefore doesn’t want to say anything bad about Puerto Rican people. I encouraged him to go on, but he instead mentioned a need to go across the street and introduce himself to build a relationship with his Puerto Rican neighbors. On another occasion Marco was complaining about the family that was renting his other house. He described the family as dirty and dysfunctional, and admitted to calling social services on them since he did not think they took proper care of their child. He claimed the parents left dog feces around the house and the property, and were constantly late with the rent. He whispered to me that they are “white trash,” but immediately expressed his guilt for using the term. He mentioned that God would not like him to say bad things about people.

Pedro, on the other hand, had a diverse group of friends from the hotel. He seemed to get along well with the Eastern Europeans working in the hotel as well as the different South and Central Americans. He was also close to a few of the older Puerto Rican housekeepers that treated him like a son. These co-workers were the closest thing he had to a family in the United States. However, he often made fun of the way Puerto Ricans spoke Spanish, and would emulate their accent jokingly. He would also express jealousy when he would see a Puerto Rican male drive by in a sports car, calling them gandayás or presumidos. He desperately wanted a Honda sports car of his own, but could not obtain a license nor afford a car. He felt Puerto Ricans were very privileged to have American citizenship, but were conceited, entitled, and lazy as a result. During one text
message conversation on June 17th, 2010, only a few weeks after we first met, he first expressed his feelings about Puerto Ricans:

Pedro: si y por que tu estudiar en Florida

Simone: Por que estoy interesado en la gente Puerto Rican y hay mucho aqui

Pedro: o que vian los Puerto riquenios son gandayas

Simone: lol! Por que, dime lo que hacen

Pedro: si muy presumidos cuando regreses te explico por que

Pedro wanted to know why I wanted to do research in Florida, but when I told him I was interested in studying Puerto Rican people he made clear his dislike for Puerto Ricans. Another time Pedro and I went to the Publix Sabor supermarket, and a man from HOGAR, a rehabilitation house, approached us in the parking lot. The man asked us to purchase the flans he and another person from HOGAR were selling from their car for $5. Pedro asked if the money and the place they represented was for Puerto Ricans only or if Mexicans would benefit too. The man told Pedro that he was half Mexican and half Puerto Rican, and that the money would help both groups. So, Pedro purchased two flans. As we walked away, Pedro whispered that he wouldn’t have given any money if it was for Puerto Ricans. He explained that it is harder for Mexicans in the United States since they don’t have papers. Puerto Ricans, he said, shouldn’t need the help, and he walked away happy to be able to help other Mexicans in need.

Similarly, during informal conversations Maria expressed negative feelings towards Puerto Ricans. On one occasion she revealed a stereotype about Puerto Rican women that she holds, telling me that all of the Puerto Rican women in the area take advantage of the welfare system. They place their children on ADD medication, she told
me, to keep them calm and manageable, and increase their welfare benefits. She also expressed her distaste for Puerto Rican men, admitting that she could never be romantically involved with a Puerto Rican male since she does not like the way they talk, dress, and behave. She made a similar comment about Black men, explaining to me why she would not get involved romantically with a close Afro-Cuban friend of hers. He was a great person and great friend, she said, but “I just don’t like black men.” She went on to tell me that she does not find the black skin color attractive.

I encountered very few Hispanics involved romantically with African American men or Afro-Latinos. I recall only one Puerto Rican woman, from the Northeast, that was married to an African American man. She was an attorney involved in one of the chambers of commerce. However, I did meet quite a few Puerto Rican women from the island that were married to or involved with undocumented Mexican men. In many of those relationships I observed the Puerto Rican women displaying greater awareness and involvement in Mexican culture, not vice versa. The women learned how to cook Mexican food, and frequently prepared homemade tacos, tamales, taquitos, mole, guacamole, salsa verde, enchiladas, and other traditional Mexican cuisine. Additionally, the homes of the three married women contained visible displays of Mexican symbols like the Virgen de Guadalupe and/or Mexican flags. The women also listened to and enjoyed music by famous Mexican musicians, like Espinoza Paz. Of course I heard other genres of music, like salsa and reggaeton in their homes as well. Still, their children were being exposed to both Puerto Rican and Mexican culture simultaneously. And, I was always fascinated by how willing these woman were to adopt the many Mexican cultural practices and traditions as their own.
In all of these relationships the women were the primary bread-winners of the family, and had the responsibility of caring for their children and at times managing the household finances as well. Their husbands undocumented status meant that the women often earned higher wages, and had more secure employment. Additionally, as citizens of the United States the Puerto Rican women could access different social services to help support their families, and protect their husbands from immigration. Pedro’s father has two children with Alma, who is originally from Puerto Rico and was also employed at the hotel. While Pedro and his father were out of work, the family of 5 lived together in a hotel room and Alma provided everyone with food using her welfare benefits. In June of 2010 Pedro also introduced me to Natalia and her husband Roberto. They lived a short distance from my house in BVL and I visited their house frequently during my fieldwork. Marco, Natalia, and Roberto initially met at the hotel. They worked together in the housekeeping division. Natalia has two other children from her previous marriage to a Puerto Rican man from the island, and got pregnant a third time soon after she and Roberto started dating. A woman from Mexico watches their youngest child while they work. Natalia is originally from Puerto Rico, but lived in Texas with her ex-husband before moving to Kissimmee after the divorce.

On August 11, 2010 Natalia texted me, asking me to come with her to the Department of Children and Family Services’ (DCF) office to take care of her food stamp paperwork. She mentioned that the food stamps really help her a lot. Natalia has three sons and she claimed that they are constantly eating. She can only budget about $300 per month to feed her family of five. She was anxious on the drive to the office, explaining that they make you show proof of everything: income, rent, etc. “Maybe I make too much
now,” she worried, “but my rent went up $50.” On the car ride she mentioned the couples legal and financial troubles, and described the time that she and her husband were discriminated against. They were driving down Royal Palm Drive, in BVL, when they passed a cop. Roberto was driving, but he is an undocumented Mexican immigrant without a Florida license. She claimed to have a feeling the cop was going to pull them over, so they turned into a development, pulled over, and quickly switched places so she could continue to drive. The cop found them moments later and pulled them over. “We were treated like criminals,” she said, “the car was searched and everything.” They were lucky, she explained, in the end they were only fined $1000. She did not elaborate on the court proceedings or the charges.

As Natalia and I continued our drive to the DCF we passed the villas where she and Roberto used to live, and she complained about the bed bugs and roaches that infested the house. “Before,” she said, “things were really bad, but now in comparison we are rich.” Natalia explained that she cooks for her husband every day to save money, preparing breakfast, lunch, and dinner. “Once I only gave him rice, beans, and corn for lunch, and he made a comment about us being poor. If I don’t prepare a lunch for him and he doesn’t have money then he won’t eat, plus he knows the money can be used for bills,” she told me. When I met Natalia her financial situation was better than in previous years. She was employed as a room inspector in Pedro’s hotel, and her husband found work painting houses. The couple were living in a large 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom house in BVL that cost them $900 per month. At times the couple struggled to come up with all of the rent money, however the interior was nicely decorated, modern, and always immaculately clean. Initially, the interior of the home did not have anything distinctly
Mexican or Puerto Rican, but they eventually placed a large portrait of the Virgen de la Guadalupe on their living room wall. On once occasion Natalia proudly told me how she bargain shopped for all of their beautiful furniture, and spent only $700 for the very large flat screen television. Another time she proudly showed me her $2000 set of pots as I stared at her in shock. They have a lifetime guarantee, she explained, and nothing ever sticks to them. This was her one splurge, and it was for a material item that she used more than anything and that would last her a lifetime. All other luxuries, getting her hair done or going out to dinner, for instance, were contingent on their being a little extra money after the necessary expenses were covered. Everyone agreed that Natalia was an amazing mother, wife, and an extremely hardworking and dedicated worker. But, many of the other women I encountered in the hotel complained about her gossiping, attitude, and cruelty to the housekeepers she oversaw.

I learned a great deal about the daily struggles that a segment of the Hispanic population faces in Metropolitan Orlando. Their lives were very much determined by their legal status in this country and their dependency on the low-wage, insecure jobs they held in the service sector industry. Economic struggles fostered other social problems that I observed in the families and individuals I lived with, and came into contact with in these homes. Prostitution, theft, and drug dealing were the most common criminal actions individuals resorted to in an effort to make ends meet. The effects on families were severe. Financial struggles strained familial relations since individuals were constantly forced to borrow money from one another, and at times take advantage or manipulate others for financial gain. Erratic work schedules also meant that children were neglected, and the renting of rooms led to crowded houses and a number of distractions.
for younger and older children alike. Additionally, children were exposed to and sometimes got involved with some of these criminal practices and destructive habits.

During the time I spent renting rooms in other people’s homes, I observed a great deal of negativity. The women were resorting to prostitution, using men for money, manipulating friends, shoplifting, and selling drugs to support themselves financially. Even my wealthy landlord had criminal charges for serving alcohol to a minor, for shoplifting, and was once the victim of physical and emotional abuse. I was astounded by the amount of back-stabbing, gossiping, and petty conflict I observed between co-workers, friends, family members, and in romantic partnerships. I also witnessed alcoholism and the consequences, which included domestic violence to more than one woman I encountered. Furthermore, several of the people I lived with had criminal records or were with spouses that were imprisoned. What saddened me most was to see the impact on their children. I knew the teenage kids were doing drugs, cutting school, stealing from the other tenants, and starting down the wrong path at entirely too young of an age. The most recent incident in 2013 involved a 13-year old boy stealing from his mother to acquire drugs, and a 22-year old disappearing with his mother’s car.

These Hispanic migrants opened their homes to me and shared their lives with me as we developed friendships that continue to the present day. Their stories, trial, tribulations, and experiences in Metropolitan Orlando helped me understand what life was like for undocumented immigrants and low-paid, low-skilled laborers working in Orlando’s service sector economy. I also had the chance to see how differently wealthy Hispanics lived. I came to realize that many of the people I lived with were barely scraping out an existence, and welcomed me, a researcher, into their homes because they

xxx
needed the steady source of income that my rent money provided. I observed and documented the marginality, poverty, and dysfunctionalism in the spaces where I lived all the while aware that these stories mirrored the negative depictions that I so hoped to avoid in the writing of this ethnography. My informants inevitably became my friends, even though I do not agree with many of the choices they have made. But, I know their decision-making ability has been constrained, at times, by their financial circumstances. As a result, I found it impossible to write about the harsh details of their lives, and I only occasionally reference my different roommates throughout the text to protect their privacy and avoid hurtful judgments about the details of their lives.
INTRODUCTION

During a 2010 interview with the sheriff, a Central Florida native, he thought only for a brief moment before responding to my question about the transformations to Metropolitan Orlando: “We went from a rural county to mouse house, sea world, and the large influx of Hispanics.” In his mind Disney World and Sea World, part of Orlando’s tourist empire, and the migration of Hispanics were the two forces transforming the Central Florida region. The migration of Hispanics and resulting Latinization is the focus of this ethnography. Taking into consideration the South’s historically powerful racial binary, this project examines the migration of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics to the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical area, and the ways that race and class based identities and distinctions are formulated and experienced in new destinations of migration. I begin by chronicling the massive influx of Hispanics, the development of a county-sized Hispanic enclave, and the ensuing Latinization of Metropolitan Orlando. I document how these demographic changes are perceived, and how the interactions in the contact zones, where Hispanics and non-Hispanics meet, impacts racial meanings and identities. Since the Orlando migration included both low-paid, service sector Hispanic laborers and professionals, I explore not only the tensions between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, but also the social class distinctions and inequalities that divide the Hispanic population. Thus, this dissertation addresses migration and community formation; racialization processes; and social class inequalities and distinctions.

This ethnography contributes to three bodies of literature, the scholarship on “new” destinations of migration, critical race theory and critical white studies, and social class inequalities. Traditionally, Latin American and Caribbean immigrants have settled
in particular gateway cities; however, since the mid-1980s Hispanics have dispersed in massive numbers, moving primarily to rural towns and large cities in the South and Midwest, and to smaller cities in the Northeast.¹ In addition to hyper growth in particular rural areas is a shift toward suburbanization.² My research introduces a migratory pull factor—real estate opportunities and marketing—that spurred the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida; consequently, as the Hispanic population continues to grow, becoming the majority-minority and changing demographics across the nation, spaces and places throughout the United States are being transformed. In these social spaces Hispanics are challenging the racial order, racial meanings, and therefore racial formations. Ethnic identity is increasingly perceived and treated as a racial identity and the language ideologies—beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions people have about a language and its usage—that respond to bilingualism and the United State’s changing soundscape leads to the conflation of nativism and racialization processes.³ My research, therefore, contributes to a growing body of literature in about the globalization of the South and the way this region of the United States is being impacted by the massive influx of Hispanic migrants. I also draw upon and contribute to critical race theory and critical white studies by showing how language ideologies mediate Latinization and racialization processes, and lead to the formation of a white racial consciousness. Finally, this project is an attempt to analyze social class formation through an anthropologic lens. I draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1987) and a conceptualization of social class that focuses on embodied cultural capital, social networks, and the performative aspects of class identities to reveal how social class inequalities are understood, perpetuated, defended, and contested during everyday life situations.
“The Nuevo New South”

Hispanic settlement patterns in the U.S. have historically been associated with urban or “inner-city” life, but this trend has changed as more Hispanics settle in rural or suburban areas instead of traditional gateway cities. Hispanic migration to urban, gateway cities—such as Mexicans and Central Americans in Los Angeles, Houston, and Dallas; Puerto Ricans in Chicago, New York, and New Jersey; and Cubans in Miami—are well documented. Historical accounts do in fact document early waves of immigration to non-traditional destinations, such as Julie Wiese’s discussion of Mexican cotton pickers in the Mississippi Delta during the 1920s and New Orleans’ Latin American population, which numbered 1,400 in 1930 and included middle-class professionals, agents for shipping companies, and refugees from the Mexican revolution. Yet, despite the presence of Hispanics in the South since the early twentieth century, as World War I workers in Nashville or Bracero workers in Arkansas during the 1940s, the Hispanic presence has not remained in the collective memory of local populations. But, contemporary demographic changes that reveal large Hispanic settlements in the Southern United States have demanded attention.

The South has registered phenomenal population increases in a relatively small period of time. These settlements are much smaller than the communities that formed in traditional gateway cities; however, the rate of population growth and community formation is what sets these settlements apart. Hence, it is speed, not size, that is defining Hispanic population growth in southern states. Figure I. shows the ten fastest growing states between 1990 and 2000, most of which were located in the South. Figure II. shows the change in the Hispanic population in the traditional settlement states between 1990
and 2010, and Figure III. shows the population changes in Florida between 2000 and 2009 by racial and ethnic group.

### Figure I. The Change in the Hispanic Population, 1990-2010 (Ten Fastest Growing States between 1990-2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Change (%)</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Change (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>76,726</td>
<td>378,963</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>800,120</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>19,876</td>
<td>86,866</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>186,050</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>108,922</td>
<td>435,227</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>853,689</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>32,741</td>
<td>123,838</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>290,059</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>124,419</td>
<td>393,970</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>716,501</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>30,551</td>
<td>95,076</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>235,682</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>24,629</td>
<td>75,830</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>185,602</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>21,984</td>
<td>59,939</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>132,836</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>53,884</td>
<td>143,382</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>250,258</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>36,969</td>
<td>94,425</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>167,405</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>22,354,059</td>
<td>35,305,818</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50,477,594</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations from 1990, 2000, and 2010 Census Summary File 1

### Figure II. The Change in the Hispanic Population, 1990-2010 (Traditional Settlement States)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Change (%)</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Change (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>7,687,938</td>
<td>10,966,556</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14,013,719</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>2,214,026</td>
<td>2,867,583</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3,416,922</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>904,446</td>
<td>1,530,262</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2,027,578</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>739,861</td>
<td>1,117,191</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1,555,144</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations from 1990, 2000, and 2010 Census Summary File 1
The increasing Hispanic migration in the South coincided with robust economic growth. From the late 70s to early 90s the Southern economy outperformed all other regions of the country, as well as the aggregate national economy. Some counties added manufacturing jobs, while others experienced growth driven by the service and financial industries, for instance. This is where the specificities of place and the context of each locale drives the Hispanic experience in each settlement area. In New Orleans, for example, you have guest workers recruited from Bolivia, Peru, and the Dominican Republic for post-Katrina reconstruction, living and working in exploitative conditions; whereas, in Memphis you have FedEx and the distribution sector attracting Hispanics that
are accessing employment opportunities through temporary staffing agencies. An examination of the geography and demography of “new destinations” reveals that the initial population of immigrants settling in non-traditional places tended to be foreign born, young, undocumented, Mexican, and attracted to the employment opportunities.\(^6\) However, “in less than two decades, this migration has transitioned from a seasonal, agricultural migration of young *mexicanos* into Georgia and North Carolina to a regional settlement of Latino families from other US cities and towns, all parts of Mexico, and much of Central and South America.” \(^7\) These immigrants are generating new social, cultural and political dynamics in the region.

The existing literature on the “new Latino diaspora” or “new destinations of Hispanic migration” has several recurring themes. First, authors attempt to explain the shift from traditional locations of settlement by measuring, documenting, and describing the push-pull factors, demographic changes, and features of the Hispanic population in new destinations. These push-pull factors include (1) industrial transformations at a local, national, and global level (2) perceptions of increased socioeconomic opportunities (3) the effect of social networks (4) professional recruitment strategies, and (5) policy changes.\(^8\) Authors are also concerned with immigrant’s reception by and incorporation into the local community, and the ways in which Hispanics are challenging the South’s historic black/white racial binary.\(^9\) These researchers show that once immigrant populations become visible, they become a source of public protest due to anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobia. Additionally, the native populations perceive newcomers as a drain on public resources and a threat to the homogeneity of the residential population.
Finally, the author’s are concerned with the newcomer’s incorporation into the labor force and their everyday life experiences.10

The effects of the Hispanic migration to the South are far-reaching, and the term “Latinization” has been used in a variety of case studies to describe the population’s economic, political, and cultural influence. Terms like “Nuevo New South” have sprung up and been critiqued in the attempt to convey the ways in which Southern spaces and places have been transformed, and are being re-transformed before our eyes by globalization, neoliberalism, and this wave of Hispanic migration, that although not completely new, is indeed reshaping locales throughout the region. While the term “Nuevo New South” has been used to denote the culturally hybrid, globalized American South that is home to a growing population of Hispanic immigrants, Julie Weise (2012), for instance, critiques the use of this term as a product of the scholarly and popular imagination that marks a break with the South’s historic past. The historical record, Weise reveals, provides evidence of Hispanic migration in the region, which has been consciously and subconsciously forgotten.

Metropolitan Orlando has indeed become a new destination for Puerto Rican migrants not only because of the non-traditional geographic location of settlement, but also because of the class position of the migrants, and the suburban spaces the population is occupying. Although Florida is often excluded from the literature on new destinations, the Puerto Rican migration to Metropolitan Orlando is quite unique in comparison to other Hispanic migratory flows to the South. Central Florida’s Puerto Rican migration contains both professional migrants and low-paid, service sector workers, and can be characterized as much more than simply a labor migration. Additionally, Puerto Ricans’
status as US citizens makes their labor market experiences and everyday lives different than the undocumented Mexican laborers that initially arrived in the South, for instance. Still, the state of Florida is continually omitted from the body of literature that is developing about new destinations of migration because of the substantial Cuban migration to South Florida in the 1960s. Additionally, both Texas and Florida are often excluded from the literature and the discussions about “new destinations of migration” because they are believed to have different histories of race relations and racial formation than other Southern states, and a longer history of Hispanic settlements.

According to geographer Jamie Winders and sociologist Barbara Smith (2012) the South’s history of African American enslavement, the strong presence of black labor in southern agriculture, post-bellum labor practices (hostility to unionism and the absence of industrialization), colonial histories, and limited voluntary immigration yielded a binary racial configuration that was different than in Texas and Florida, and differentiates the Hispanic experience in these two places. But, it is important to recognize that Florida is a “cultural patchwork,” and the panhandle, for instance, has more in common with the neighboring states of Alabama and Georgia than Fort Lauderdale or Miami. And, in Orlando, Florida a racial binary prevailed and race relations mirrored that of other small, Southern agricultural towns. Slavery existed in the decades preceding the civil war and Orlando was the last city in Florida to deny blacks the right to vote. That right was only extended in 1950, as a result of statewide legislation. According to Kevin Archer and Kris Bezdecny (2009):

Before Disney established its World some 20 miles to the southwest of downtown, Orlando’s real world was Black and White like most other small agricultural towns of the South. Blacks and Whites lived and worked in relative close proximity but in strict isolation from each other, socially and spatially.
Racial boundaries were strictly enforced and hierarchies maintained from slave times through those of Jim Crow all the way to Disney times (Kassab 2003). It is argued that the “good ole Southern White boy political tradition” reigned in Orlando, and that Post-Disney World Orlando “still retains a Black-White foundation of socio-spatial isolation and mutual suspicion.” Orlando is described as a city divided between rich white neighborhoods to the East with high-rise condos and boutiques, and poor black neighborhoods in the West with deteriorating material and social conditions. Thus, like other Hispanic migratory waves to North Carolina or Georgia, the Puerto Rican migrants arriving in Central Florida confronted the South’s enduring racial binary as they settled into this new destination, disrupting the social fabric and transforming social life. Hence, this ethnography documents the racialization process, as Puerto Rican migrants, who primarily claim a white racial identity, arrive in Orlando, Florida and both complicate and challenge the existing black/white racial binary.

Racial Formation

This ethnography examines the processes of racial formation and racialization in the United States by asking how Hispanic migration and incorporation in a new, Southern destination impacts racial meanings and understandings. In other words, how does migration affect the way people think about race, and classify themselves and others? First, the Orlando case study reveals that the migration of Hispanics and the Latinization of Orlando has made non-Hispanic whites a minority in some spaces and places, which has led to the development of a white racial consciousness. Non-Hispanic whites in Osceola County, in particular, were no longer part of the unmarked, racial majority, and this led to contestations and tensions when their white privilege was challenged and defended, and their color-blind ideologies were revealed. Second, this research shows the
multiple ways in which Hispanics are being racialized. Non-Hispanics increasingly perceived the Hispanic population as a distinct, non-white racial group, and these judgments are based not only on phenotypical differences, but other markers of difference like language, social class, and national origin. In contrast, the majority of Hispanics residing within these spaces claimed to be part of the white race, and rejected a black racial identity, potentially expanding the white racial category. The Orlando case study, therefore, provides evidence that Hispanics are indeed challenging the South’s traditional racial binary. Before discussing the United States’ enduring racial binary, I want to define a few key terms that are used throughout this ethnography.

My discussion of racial formation and racialization draws on the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994). Racial formation refers to “the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meaning.” Thus, this ethnography looks at the forces—migration, Latinization, language use, economic power, and political power—that create and reinforce racial categorizations, differences, and inequalities. According to Omi and Winant, racial categorizations are “an intensely political process” since such matters as access to employment, housing, social programs, local, state, and federal funds, the organization of elections, and many other issues are “directly affected by racial classification and the recognition of ‘legitimate’ groups.” I use the term racialization to signify the extension of racial meanings to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group. My ethnographic vignettes show that Hispanics, an “ethnic group” that the census defines as persons of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin of any race, are racialized as non-white; furthermore, not only is the
Hispanic population racialized as non-white, their social practices, such as language usage, and their places of residence are also racialized. Thus, this ethnography reveals the ways in which spaces, places, languages, and people are racialized by focusing on the linguistic, aesthetic, and social practices, instead of perceived phenotypical differences, that impact social relations between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, and influence racial formations.

Where do Hispanics fit into the US racial classification system, and how have they been counted? Federal standards mandated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) 1997 Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity claim that “race and ethnicity (Hispanic origin) are separate and distinct concepts.” That is the current position of the US Census Bureau. Hispanics are an ethnic group that can be of any race. However, the indicators that the US census bureau used to count members of the “Hispanic” population have evolved over time, and a brief history of the classificatory schema is necessary to understand the complexity and ambiguity surrounding racial and ethnic identifiers. Between 1850 and 1920 Mexicans were coded as “white” for the census. During that time period, indicators such as country of birth, parent’s birthplace, mother tongue, or Spanish surname were used to determine if someone was of “Spanish origin.” In 1930, there was a separate category in the race question for “Mexican.” However, Mexican American civil rights groups, with the support of the Mexican government, demanded that this designation be changed. In 1940, Mexicans were once again classified as white.

Migrations from the Caribbean then made it necessary to begin counting Puerto Ricans and Cubans as well. It was not until the 1950s, when Puerto Ricans began
migrating to the United States in massive numbers, that the Census Bureau began publishing information on people of Puerto Rican descent. Then, in 1970 the bureau began tabulating information on people of Cuban birth or parentage as well, as a result of the Cuban migrations that followed the 1959 Cuban Revolution. During this particular historical moment, with Latin American and Caribbean migration increasing and civil rights activism on the rise, new federal legislation was introduced requiring accurate statistical documentation of minority groups’ disadvantages. Additionally, there was growing concern over census undercounts, and organizations were demanding better data about their groups.

In 1976, The US Congress passed Public Law 94-311, the only law in the country’s history that mandates the collection, analysis, and publication of data about a specific ethnic group, “Americans of Spanish origin or descent,” and defines the population to be enumerated. How did the government justify singling out this population in a move that would later alter the census bureau’s racial categories? The law asserted that:

‘more than twelve million Americans identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuban, Central and South America, and other Spanish-speaking countries”; that a ‘large number’ of them ‘suffer from racial, social, economic, and political discrimination and are denied the basic opportunities that they deserve as American citizens’, and that an ‘accurate determination of the urgent and special needs of Americans of Spanish origin and descent’ was needed to improve their economic and social status.’

As a result, the law mandated a number of initiatives, and developed a government wide program overseen by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to collect, analyze, and publish data on people of “Hispanic origin.” In 1977, the US congress required the implementation of Directive 15, which specified a minimal classification of four races
(“American Indian or Alaskan Native,” “Asian or Pacific Islander,” “Black,” and “White”), and two ethnic backgrounds (“Of Hispanic origin” and “not of Hispanic origin). The more detailed data collected in the census was to be aggregated under those particular categories, but the Hispanic identifier that is used today emerged from these political conversations.26

The creation of the Hispanic identifier, however, inevitably led to the alteration of the “white” and “black” racial categories. Since Hispanics could be of any race, the terms were changed to “non-Hispanic white” and “non-Hispanic black” so the Hispanic population could be disaggregated. Peter Guarnaccia (2009) points out the irony of these new racial categories “since Hispanics are the reference category against which Whites and Blacks are compared;” additionally, there is no category of Non-Hispanic Asians or American Indians. According to Ruben Rumbaut (2009), in the media, academic studies, government, and in popular usage the ethnic categories Hispanic and Latino “have come to be used routinely and equivalently alongside ‘racial’ categories such as ‘Asian,’ ‘Black’ and ‘non-Hispanic White,’ effecting a de facto racialization of the former.”27

Additional changes have followed Directive 15, which dramatically altered the collection of racial and ethnic data in the US. Prior to 1980, census questionnaires were filled out in conjunction with an interviewer.28 During that time period Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and other Hispanics were classified as white unless the interviewer thought differently. In 1980, for the first time ever people had the opportunity to classify themselves without an interviewer present through a new mail-back questionnaire. The shift from census takers classifying other people’s race to self-
reporting revealed some discrepancies. For instance, a variety of smaller censuses taken before 1980 indicate that about 90% of Hispanics/Latinos were white. However, subsequent self-reported censuses showed the proportion to be substantially lower. In 2000 another option was introduced: respondents could select one or more racial designations. For the first time in its history, the bureau was acknowledging that people could belong to more than one racial group, altering the “long-standing hypodescent or one-drop rule.”

Indeed, Hispanics are complicating racial meanings and classification in the United States, and arguably challenging the deep-rooted racial binary that has prevailed in the South. Sociologists have introduced three models as a possible replacement to the historic black/white racial binary in an attempt to predict how immigrant populations will be racialized in the US. First, is the white/nonwhite model, where whites are divided from all others. In this case Asians and Hispanics are racialized as nonwhite “due to common experiences of colonialism, oppression, exploitation, and racialization.” The racialization of Hispanics as non-white is furthered by inclusion in civil rights policies that label the population as “racial minorities,” and by language that describes Hispanics as “people of color.” Finally, the white/nonwhite model predicts that Hispanics will exhibit greater social and material distance from whites than blacks. This has not been the case in Orlando, Florida due to the rejection of blackness and residential segregation from African Americans, not whites.

The second model, the black/nonblack binary, has developed as a result of the enduring separation of blacks, which contrasts with the ability of formerly nonwhite European immigrants to “become” white. Under this model, the white racial category
will expand, as it did with European immigrants, to include Hispanics. In this model Hispanics are located closer to whites than blacks, and scholars point to residential patterns and intermarriage rates that reveal greater social distance from blacks. However, the Orlando case reveals a much more complex relationship where factors such as language, national origin, and class position complicate the black/nonblack divide.

The third triracial model is closer to the racial meanings generated in Latin America and the Caribbean, which emphasize national unity, class, and skin color over racial ancestry. In this model assimilated Hispanics will become white, a select group of light-skinned Hispanics will become “honorary whites,” and the vast majority will be racialized as non-white and relegated to the position of “collective blacks” due to their dark skin and/or racialized incorporation as colonial subjects, refugees from wars, or illegal migrant workers.” In the Metropolitan Orlando case study it was evident that social class position and language usage were central determinants of how Hispanics were racialized, and mediated their relationships with other Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

This ethnography provides evidence pointing to the social construction of a distinct Hispanic race, situated hierarchically between whites and blacks. In Metropolitan Orlando Hispanics were talked about and perceived as a separate, non-Hispanic race of people by non-Hispanics. These Hispanic individuals described themselves as white, “other,” part of a distinct Hispanic race, or identified their race as their national origin or ethnic group. They rejected any notion of a black racial identity. My findings in Greater Orlando are consistent with the racialization of Hispanics in other parts of the South, and in the larger United States. Figure IV. reveals that the majority of Puerto Ricans and Hispanics identify as white alone or as some other race.
Ruben Rumbaut (2009) points out the significance of place in the formation of a white racial identity, pointing out that Hispanics were far more likely to identify as “white” in Florida than in New York and New Jersey: in Florida 67 of Puerto Ricans reported that they were white compared to only 45 percent in New York and New Jersey; Cubans were 92 percent versus 73 percent; Dominicans 46 percent versus 20 percent; Colombians 78 percent versus 46 percent; and Peruvians and Ecuadorians 74 versus 43 percent. This spatial influence on racial formations can be attributed to the “more rigid racial boundaries and ‘racial frame’ developed in the former Confederate states of Texas and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Puerto Rican</th>
<th>All Latinos</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of all Latinos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>2,632,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>3,400,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>3,985,058</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1990 Census 5% PUMS, 2000 Census 5% PUMS, 2006 American Community Survey Compiled by Wendy Roth (2012)
Florida,” which can lead to “defensive assertions of whiteness when racial status is ambiguous.”

The introduction of the Hispanic identifier and the shift to self-reporting has revealed the variation in racial reporting, and has certainly led to confusion since these governmentally constructed designations are not always consistent with how individuals describe themselves. For the 2010 Census, a new instruction was added that immediately preceded the questions on Hispanics origin and race. The instruction read “For this census, Hispanic origins are not races’ because in the federal statistical system, Hispanic origin is considered to be a separate concept from race.” However, this added instruction “did not preclude individuals from self-identifying their race as ‘Latino,’ ‘Mexican,’ ‘Puerto Rican,’ ‘Salvadoran,’ or other national origins or ethnicities; in fact, many did so.”

In similar instances, Hispanics have expressed confusion when asked to choose a race category in a question separate from the one about their Hispanic ethnicity. “They ask why no Hispanic/Latino category exists among the race and national origin questions,” and convincingly point out that the majority of Hispanics are a mix of races, depending on the particular country of origin. Prior to the 2000 Census a proposal was advanced to include “Hispanic” as a category in the race question, but “no Hispanic group enthusiastically endorsed this proposal.” The OMB tested this format in a series of studies involving over 200,000 households, but their findings revealed that this particular format, making “Hispanic” a racial category, resulted in the counting of fewer Hispanics and whites. As a result, the proposal to create a Hispanic racial category was abandoned.
The Census Bureau continues to define Hispanics as an ethnic group of any race, but how do these individuals, labeled as Hispanics, understand and define themselves? Two decades of community research reveals that people think about their own identities with much more specific categories, and use national origin and cultural practices connected to their families to make sense of who they are.\(^{40}\) Thus, we should be asking them to self-identify as opposed to forcing an external schema on them, which can only prove to be inaccurate for data collection.\(^{41}\) In Helen Marrow’s (2009) North Carolina-based research, the black/white racial binary was challenged in favor of a tripartite model: “Hispanic respondents both self-identified and reported external identification by southern natives most strongly as something other than whites or blacks- particularly as Hispanics, Latinos, or people of some ‘other race.’”\(^{42}\) In many instances these North Carolina Hispanics were referred to as “Spanish people” or people of the “Spanish race” indicating languages’ role in racial categorizations and signifiers of identity, whether or not these individuals were speaking or actually spoke the Spanish language. In Metropolitan Orlando there was evidence of a growing portion of Hispanic elites that are on the path to “becoming” honorary whites, particularly amongst the second and third generations that were not as easily identified as Hispanic. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Hispanics were seen as a distinct Hispanic race due to linguistic practices, national origin, and other “cultural” identifiers.\(^{43}\)

This dissertation begins to grapple with these inconsistencies by examining how Hispanics are being racialized, how they self-identify, and the extent to which the Census Bureaus’ racial schema is being enacted in everyday life interactions and internalized.
In this ethnography, I draw particular attention to the ways that language ideologies—the ideas, perceptions, and beliefs about the nature and usage of languages—mediate Latinization and racialization processes, impacting resident’s racial understandings and classifications. First, the physical features of some of the Hispanic residents I encountered made it difficult to place them in a racial category based on phenotype alone. Elizabeth Aranda (2004) points out that, “when racial markers such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape are not enough to identify the other, ethnoracial markers such as language, accent, culture and national origin serve as proxies.” As Aranda notes, for light-skinned Puerto Ricans, their phenotypical appearance can alter their experience with racism and allow them to pass for white in some instances, however “their white privilege is surrendered when considering other factors such as accents,” or their Puerto Rican identity. Consequently, this ethnography examines the ways that language usage is racialized, and how language ideologies impact racial understandings along with other practices and signifiers of identity.

**Social Class Distinctions**

The Orlando Metropolitan region presents a unique opportunity for understanding not only racialization in new destinations of migration, but also social class formation, social class distinctions, and social class inequalities within the Hispanic population. What makes the Hispanic migration to Metropolitan Orlando distinct from other case studies examined by the new destination’s literature is the class diversity of the Hispanic population. Since the early twentieth century, the Central Florida region has experienced the simultaneous migration of Hispanics from Latin America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and different U.S. states that are military personnel, low-paid tourist industry
workers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. This includes a large portion of Puerto Ricans, entitled to political and legal rights as US citizens by birth, as well as the undocumented laborers—Mexican, Dominican, Guatemalan, and Colombian, for instance—that I encountered in the construction, agriculture, and service sector industries. This ethnography reveals that class and racial ideologies, cleavages, and inequalities were not abandoned with migration. Instead, as Laura Lopez-Sanders (2012) points out, “they are reproduced in contexts in which immigrants of diverse class and racial characteristics converge.” Although many Hispanics hoped that Orlando would offer them a “better quality of life” and better economic opportunities, class inequalities do indeed persist and the desires for upward social mobility were only achieved by a segment of the Hispanic population.

This research examines the articulation and performance of social class distinctions, embodied by people and embedded in spaces, and the basis for those judgments. By discussing the different residential and social spaces where these distinctions are articulated and embodied, I document how individuals make sense of and discuss class inequalities. In Chapter 5, for instance, I describe the negative reputation and place-identity of a Hispanic-concentrated suburb, Buenaventura Lakes, to show that Hispanic suburbanization and homeownership does not necessarily indicate upward social mobility, and can challenge popular conceptions of middle-class suburban living. The vignettes in Chapter 7, about the formation of a Hispanic elite of professionals and entrepreneurs, examine how social class identities and positions are performed, defended, and contested. During my fieldwork it became evident that social class distinctions were
often understood in terms of lifestyle differences, tastes, and other forms of cultural capital.

While the four commonly used criteria for gauging social class is education, income, occupation, and wealth, an interdisciplinary literature reveals the significance of behaviors, tastes, lifestyle, consumption patterns, capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic), and power to social class. In addition, mobility, status, and success are decidedly relational concepts. These different elements add to the complexity of social class identification, complexities that cannot be addressed through socioeconomic data alone. Can social class be determined by the clothes someone wears, the car someone drives, the home they own, someone’s English-language skills, educational credentials, profession, salary, amount of money in the bank, or accumulated wealth and investments? These indicators are further complicated by a banking industry that extended credit to low-income families, so that owning a home or driving a luxury car is no longer evidence of a middle class identity. It has been argued that this understanding of class is inadequate since it looks at individuals in terms of their consumption patterns, instead of focusing on what the consumption is based on, how the lifestyle is financed and supported. Sources of income and conditions of employment undoubtedly influence social class formation, but I am looking at a different dimension of class, the things that deceptively appear superficial—like playing golf verses dominoes—that have a social meaning and therefore influence social class formation. Social class position is incredibly significant to social life, and therefore inter-ethnic social relationships, because class shapes an individual’s sense of self or personhood, as well as their tastes, behaviors, worldview, as well as the possibilities for upward social mobility, and success.
My conceptualization of class, based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1987), recognizes the overlap between objective, quantitative, economic determinants of class positionality and the subjective, qualitative, performative requirements necessary to maintain and defend that position. Bourdieu’s analysis in *Distinctions* highlights the significance of four different types of capital in the process of social class formation: economic, symbolic, social, and cultural. Economic capital is quantitatively measurable and usually refers to an individual’s wealth and income, which is directly related to an individual’s position in the labor market (occupation) and their accumulated assets and investments. Economic capital is key to social class formation, although, economic, social, symbolic, and cultural capital are entangled, and both reinforce and challenge one another. Symbolic capital refers to the resources available to an individual on the basis of honor, prestige, or recognition, while social capital is based on the value of networks. Finally, cultural capital is the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners due to their economic resources. In other words, it is not only what you do for a living and how much you make that is important for class formation, what you do with those wages and how you behave and act in society also matters. Thus, as Sherry Ortner argues, “we may think of class as something people are or have or possess, or as a place in which people find themselves or are assigned, but we may also think of it as a project, as something that is always being made or kept or defended, feared or desired.”

In addition to having an economic component, social class position is an embodied identity, like race or gender, although it is less visible in the United States and becomes naturalized. Class is internalized, and therefore works in conjunction with other
categorical identifiers: race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and/or nationality. One reason class is unconsciously internalized and naturalized in our society is because we can presumably change these positions and become upwardly mobile through education and skills. The invisibility of social class is partly due to the different ideas of class in American public discourse, but also because of the personal embarrassment in talking about money, personal income, and family resources. For high-income people there are cultural taboos on ostentatiousness, although conspicuous consumption is quite present, and for low-income people there are feelings of shame and failure. The taboos about discussing personal finances presented a challenge throughout my research since it was difficult to ascertain an individual or family’s economic resources during informal interviews and conversations. Still, individuals signal their capital during everyday life conversations, both consciously and unconsciously.

Social classes are not real, bounded groups; rather, class represents a relationship between individuals in social space and has a relational nature. This does not always suggest group solidarity or collective action; although, in the Metropolitan Orlando case study I did indeed find association amongst individuals that shared similar class positions, embodied in their practices, dispositions, worldview, values, ideas, and tastes. This association or relatedness is what constructs or enables class-consciousness and class formation, a relational position in the market consciously and unconsciously recognizable to others. Throughout the course of my research, the individuals in this ethnography generated and articulated class distinctions between themselves and others based largely on economic differences, which were reflected in their embodied cultural capital and differing social experiences.
Still, I want to emphasize that although individuals articulate class distinctions, there is still an ambiguity to class positionality, and the lines demarcating different class positions are unclear. Thus, the difficulty in deciphering if a family is working class or middle class at times. For instance, one member I met from a chamber of commerce was a mechanic with his own auto body shop. He showed up to events with dirty nails from working, jeans, and a simple collared shirt. The mechanic was not embraced as warmly as the Disney executive present in the room, and spent most of the time socializing with his wife. However, during an interview he revealed to me that his business generated upward of one million dollars in 2010, placing him amongst the upper echelons of the economic stratification system, although his appearance was deceiving and easily mistaken for that of a working class laborer. There are no existing criteria that can definitively place us into a particular category and the class labels we use—lower class, poor, working class, middle class, upper class, rich—can be deceptive and inaccurate; hence why so many individuals will identify as middle class despite earning an income well above or below the median income. This ambiguity is because economic factors do not determine class positionality alone. It is a combination of qualitative and quantitative factors that impacts class consciousness and class formation. Still, I use these labels throughout the text to show how class positions and class distinctions are articulated and deployed in everyday life, despite the ambiguous nature of these terms.

Methods

This dissertation is based on traditional anthropological methodologies and innovative textual analysis. I use a mixed-methods approach to interweave data gathered through (1) participant observation, (2) informal and semi-structured interviews, (3)
census data, (4) newspaper archives, (5) and new media (Internet blogs and forums). In conjunction these sources allow me to capture the voices of close to 200 Florida residents. The data collected from interviews and participant observation is based on dissertation fieldwork carried out between June 2010 and August 2012, and one month of preliminary dissertation research in 2007.

When I began preliminary fieldwork during the summer of 2007, I lived in the house of my aunt and uncle in Longwood, Florida (Seminole County), which is part of the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area. They live in a quiet suburb, where I observed very few Hispanics, about 45 minutes away from Buenaventura Lakes (BVL). My aunt and uncle moved to Central Florida in the 80s, after selling their house in Bronx, New York. They arranged my first interviews from within their network of Puerto Rican friends and family members living in Metropolitan Orlando. My aunt works as a teacher’s aid in the Orange County public school system, and has a large network of Hispanic friends and colleagues. When I returned to Orlando two years later, I went directly to my fieldsite, BVL, and moved into a small three-bedroom, two-bathroom home on Floral Drive.

As I mentioned in the forward, while conducting this research I lived in the homes of Venezuelan, Colombian, Guatemalan, and Puerto Rican migrants in Buenaventura Lakes (Osceola County), Hunters Creek (Orange County), Kissimmee (Osceola County), and Longwood (Seminole County). I also spent time living alone in a gated community off of U.S. Highway 192, a commercial strip and tourism hub that employs many of Osceola County’s service-sector workers. With the exception of my aunt and uncle’s house in Seminole County, I always paid a monthly rental fee for a room, which ranged
between $350 and $450 per month. I learned a great deal about inter-ethnic relations, race-relations, social conditions, and economic struggles from the individuals that opened their homes to me. By renting rooms in other people’s houses, I had the opportunity to live with different Hispanic families in a variety of suburban locations. This gave me the opportunity to interact with them on a daily basis, meet their family and friends, observe their everyday life activities and interactions, and these individuals helped me expand my network of informants. For instance, my roommate Pedro introduced me to his supervisors and co-workers at the hotel where he worked, and over the two year time span I got to know many of the staff from the hotel’s housekeeping division and their families. The names of my interviewees and the many other people I encountered and spoke with during my two years of fieldwork show up throughout this ethnography, and I will introduce each of them as I come to their contribution to this text. I have changed the names of these individuals in this text and altered identifying characteristics to protect the privacy of my informants and interviewees.

My closest friends, who are all connected to the hotel, are Hispanics that worked as low-paid laborers in Orlando’s service sector industry; although, my interviewees and some of the other contacts I generated outside of my hotel network included non-Hispanic whites, Puerto Ricans, and other Hispanics that range from high-paid, well-educated professionals to minimum wage, hospitality industry workers. To recruit willing participants, and to learn about the lives of as many Orlando residents as possible I regularly participated in local cultural, political, social, and professional events, and I spent time in the social spaces of restaurants, shopping centers, and cafes.
I regularly attended events and meetings sponsored by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Amigos Profesionales, the Osceola/Kissimmee Chamber of Commerce, and the Osceola County Commission. Additionally, I attended pageants, fairs, festivals, and car shows sponsored by local churches, cultural organizations, and businesses. I was always very social at these events, taking every opportunity to introduce myself, say a quick one liner about my project, and collect the contact information of the people that I met.

During my fieldwork I conducted 30 formal, structured interviews, asking prompted questions and taking notes to capture the response. When possible, and with permission I tape recorded interviews. Of the 30 interviews, 11 were with Puerto Ricans that were born on the island, 5 were with Puerto Ricans that moved from New York, 9 interviews were with non-Hispanic whites, 4 were with other Hispanics, and 1 interviewee identified as Jamaican-American. Twelve of the interviews were with females, and 18 were with males. During interviews I asked a broad range of questions depending on who I was speaking with and what information I was looking for. For instance, when I interviewed a long time resident of BVL I asked about the character of the community and its residents, the transformations the resident has witnessed, and about their experiences living and working in Metropolitan Orlando. In contrast, when I interviewed a local teacher, I was more interested in the ways her students, from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, interact in the classroom, and the ways in which the schools have adapted to the influx of Spanish-speaking students.

In addition to structured interviews with prompted questions was the immense amount of data that I gathered through informal interviews, my preferred method of data
collection. I often found that the most revealing data was shared during unprompted conversations, and during my informal interviews, when I invited a resident to a local restaurant for lunch, for instance, and we spent hours chatting about our lives. During my more formal, structured interviews, when I began asking questions about race and class my interviewees often tensed up or censored their responses to my questions about race and class. I too felt uncomfortable asking individuals how much money they made, about the details of their financial situation, and why they considered themselves to be white and not black as I glanced at the device recording the conversation. Amongst my closest informants I did learn about their finances and the ways they made sense of race, over time in bits and pieces. Since I am interested in the ways that race and class based identities and distinctions surface during everyday life interactions, a question-answer format was not as revealing. For instance, I was driving with Wanda through BVL one day; I rented a room in her large, luxurious Hunters Creek home. During the drive, she glanced out the window of the car, observing the houses we passed along the streets of BVL. She then made a comment about the community, claiming that the people who live here are very poor. The conversation that resulted from that comment allowed Wanda and I to discuss the class based distinctions that are manifested in residential spaces and are evident in the community’s landscape aesthetics. She was making sense of her environment and the people in it spontaneously and unprompted, as we casually drove, and a formal, structured interview would not allow me to capture this type of data. Thus, in my fieldwork I often followed a method used by both Paul Stoller (2002) and Robert Desjarlais (1997).
In his ethnography *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York*, Paul Stoller provides a complex portrait of West African immigrant spaces to show how globalization is changing urban cities. To generate information from West African informants working in the streets of New York, in this instance, Stoller focused on the free flowing conversations that take place in market places. Similarly, in the award winning study *Shelter Blues*, Robert Desjarlais, working amongst a homeless population, found that unassuming participation in daily activities helped develop lasting informal ties with people, and outweighed the benefits of data gathered through more formal, recorded interviews or surveys. Thus, like Stoller and Desjarlais, “I spent much of my time hanging about, listening to conversations, and when finding a place to write down the gist of these exchanges . . . my notes on these conversations which typically contained quasi-verbatim accounts, lacked the precision that tape or audio recordings could have provided.”  

But, my fieldnotes captured the sensitive and sometimes hostile opinions, perceptions, and discourses about migration, race, and class in Central Florida, which were censored during my formal, recorded interviews.  

In addition to using data gathered through traditional anthropologic methods, like interviews and participation observation, I incorporate newspaper articles and blog commentary into the narrative. I turn to newspaper articles to chronicle the increasing presence of Hispanics in Central Florida, and the ways in which this migration was presented to the public. “Media owners do not directly control the news. Rarely do they interfere with the production of news or dictate to reporters what they should or should not say.”  

Thus, journalists “report what they see and what they know.” The news, reported by journalists, shapes readers’ and viewers’ ideologies, despite how truthful the
representation. For instance, the press, through their characterization of welfare recipients, contributed to and perpetuated myths about single mothers on welfare as “flawed and therefore responsible for her poverty.” In other words, the media can influence what we believe and how we act. Since I am interested in the reaction to the influx of Hispanics and the region’s Latinization, the media’s discussion of and representation of this population provide insight into future race and ethnic relations.

Additionally, newspaper reports were particularly helpful since they could provide information about a specific historical moment. Thus, I also use these newspaper articles to expand the number of voices captured in this ethnography and retell some of the situations and stories captured by the press, which complements the data I gathered through interviews and participant observation. Of course there is a degree of inaccuracy in media accounts, which can be sensationalist; nevertheless, during interviews I quickly realized that individuals’ memories and accurate retelling of past events, emotions, situations, and interactions can be limited as well. In comparison to ethnographic fieldwork, journalists have a different engagement with the interviewee, different methods of capturing information, and different ways of representing information to the public. Anthropologists, unlike most journalists, often gather information by developing rapport with their research subjects, especially through participation observation and by engaging in personal interactions over an extended period of time. Still, newspaper articles are useful since the content can reflect dominant ideologies, and has the capacity to shape the way people think about race and class. Indeed, since the media is perceived as reporting reality, or some form of truth, it has the power to both represent and shape public perceptions of Orlando’s Hispanic migration.
Throughout this ethnography I also use material from Hispanosphere, the *Orlando Sentinel* blog that reports on Hispanic affairs in the region. I am interested in the content of the Sentinel posts, but also the responses to these posts to see the ways that ideologies about race, social class, language, and migration circulate in the spaces of the Internet. The Hispanosphere blog reports on the Hispanic experience in Metropolitan Orlando, but also creates a conversational forum by providing a section where readers can comment on the story being covered. The text of the story alone does not tell us how readers are interpreting, responding, and making sense of the information they are accessing. However, the comment section does in fact give us a glimpse into the mind and perceptions of an individual. After all, news stories are not read in isolated contexts, but are part of, reflective of, and influential in the formation of ideologies and worldviews. Thus, I use not only the text of the posted articles throughout this ethnography, but more importantly I focus on the responding comments. While attention to new media, in this case blogs and internet forums, does not follow traditional anthropologic methods, I follow anthropologist Tom Boellstorff’s assertion that: “To demand that ethnographic research always incorporate meeting residents in the actual world for ‘context’ presumes that virtual worlds are not themselves contexts.”

Blog commentary often took the form of a discussion between several individuals where a number of personal opinions, experiences, topics, and situations were brought up, and were at times unrelated to the initial post. I never interjected as respondents commented on the article or commented on other responses. This allowed me to follow free flowing conversations that were archived without prompting individuals with a directed set of questions. Thus, these conversations reveal how Central Florida residents,
and other individuals throughout the United States respond to Hispanic migration, and to other issues affecting Hispanics. 56 In addition to using the Hispanosphere blog, I also use responses from City-data.com, a website that includes statistical data and conversational forums about different US cities. On this site I was able to locate archived conversations about Buenaventura Lakes and other Central Florida residences, which discuss the community’s character, desirability, and residential population.

New media is particularly important for interrogating how racial subjects are created and how racial anger is circulated since users are able to voice their ideas and feelings about Americanness, Hispanic migration, and belonging without revealing their identity and suffering the consequences of being labeled a racist or politically incorrect. Likewise, “race talk has largely retreated to occasions where speakers are among trusted intimates . . . or to contexts like radio chat rooms where they can remain anonymous.” 57 Indeed, these online conversations can reveal the thoughts and feelings surrounding everyday life encounters with “the other” that are usually more subtle and masked during in-person interactions. Sometimes I could not determine the identity, race, and/or ethnicity of the respondent unless they included their full name or mentioned information about themselves in their post. As you will see throughout the text, many respondents did in fact circulate information about their racial and ethnic identity as they posted comments on Internet blogs and forums. Finally, this dissertation also draws on data from the American Community Survey and from the US Census to track population growth, and the demographic changes.

Throughout this text I use the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably, although there is in fact a difference. The term Hispanic was coined by the US Census
Bureau during the 1970s and refers to all people in the United States whose ancestry is from one or more Spanish-speaking countries. Hispanic, from the Latin word “Spain,” therefore emphasizes language as the commonality without emphasis on geographic origin. In contrast, the term Latino is a grassroots alternative, originating in the Hispanic community instead of imposed by the government. The term Latino describes a geographically derived national origin group, and is “an attempt to embrace all Latin American nationalities, including those which neither have ties to Spain nor are necessarily Spanish-dominant groups.”

A national survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center in 2008 found that 36% of respondents prefer the term Hispanic, 21% prefer Latino, and the rest have no preference; while, a poll taken by Orlando Sentinel journalist Victor Manuel Ramos, which focused on Central Florida’s population, reveals that 48% of respondents prefer the terms Latino or Latina, and 44% prefer to be known as Hispanic. The remainder preferred some other term. During my fieldwork my interviewees and informants used the term Hispanic more frequently, and I too have a preference for the term Hispanic, which I use more often than Latino/a. This is partly since I use many of the census bureau’s terms and categorizations, like non-Hispanic white or non-Hispanic black, throughout the text to remain consistent when transitioning from a discussion of the statistical data to ethnographic vignettes about specific individuals.

One of the challenges was deciding on a term to use consistently when talking about the “non-Hispanic white” population. It needed to be clear that many of the Hispanics in Central Florida are American citizens, and a large percentage of this population describe their race as “white” on the census questionnaire. Therefore, some of
the emic terms used by my Hispanic informants to describe non-Hispanic whites in everyday life conversations—“blanquitos,” “americanos,” or “white people”—could apply to Hispanics as well. On some occasions the term “gringo” was used by both Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, and less frequently “Anglo,” or “Caucasian.” However, the Census Bureau was now referring to this diverse population as “non-Hispanic whites.” In Metropolitan Orlando, the individuals that fell under the “non-Hispanic white” category used a variation of terms to describe their identities in daily encounters: “Italian-American,” “Jewish,” “Russian,” “redneck,” “Southerner,” or simply “white.” So, I decided to use the Census Bureau’s etic term in my own language, although it felt awkward to use a negated term to describe a population. However, the direct quotes throughout the ethnography reveal the descriptors that different people use to self-identify in daily life interactions, which differ from the census categories.

The Metropolitan Orlando Fieldsite

In the 1990s, Orange and Osceola Counties became the leading destination for Puerto Rican migrants, displacing New Jersey to become the state with the second largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in the continental United States. The Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area, also referred to as Metropolitan Orlando, is comprised of Orange, Osceola, Lake, and Seminole Counties. Buenaventura Lakes, located in Osceola County, is one of the largest Puerto Rican communities in the region, which is why I selected this suburban subdivision as my fieldsite. At the time of the 2010 US census, of Buenaventura Lakes’ 26,079 residents, Hispanics numbered 18,160 (69%) of the total population, non-Hispanic whites 3,947 (15.1%), and Non-Hispanic blacks 2,750 (10.5%). Puerto Ricans are the largest Hispanic group comprising 44.5% (11,618) of the total
population, while Mexicans were 2.2% (585), Cubans 3.1% (799), and Other Hispanic or Latinos 19.8% (5,158).

While I did spend one month living in Seminole County and two months in Orange County, I spent the majority of my time in Osceola County, a county with 276,163 people. Thus, Osceola County is the focus of this ethnography, and is better represented throughout the text; although, some of my interviewees and informants lived and/or worked in Orange or Seminole Counties, and were by no means isolated within county boundaries. Instead, individuals traveled throughout the region for work and leisure. Nonetheless, I was particularly interested in Osceola County because Hispanics have grown substantially, making up almost half of the total population at the time of the 2010 census. Hispanic residents in Osceola County rose from 2 % of the total population in 1980, to 12% in 1990, 29% in 2000, 42% in 2009, to 45.5% of the total population in 2010. The Puerto Rican community in Osceola County made up 27.2% of the total population, and the 2007 Survey of Business Owners reveals that 37.6% of Osceola County’s businesses are Hispanic-owned. Figure V. lists the Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and total Population in the four counties that make up the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area in addition to the Buenaventura Lakes suburb, which is located within Osceola County.
Figure V. Hispanic Population, Puerto Rican Population, and Total Population in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hispanic Population and % of the Total Population</th>
<th>Puerto Rican Population and % of the Total Population</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seminole County</strong></td>
<td>72,457 (17.1%)</td>
<td>34,378 (8.1%)</td>
<td>422,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lake County</strong></td>
<td>36,009 (12.1%)</td>
<td>12,960 (4.4%)</td>
<td>297,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orange County</strong></td>
<td>308,244 (26.9%)</td>
<td>149,457 (13%)</td>
<td>1,145,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Osceola County</strong></td>
<td>122,146 (45.5%)</td>
<td>72,986 (27.2%)</td>
<td>268,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buenaventura Lakes</strong></td>
<td>18,160 (69%)</td>
<td>11,618 (44.5%)</td>
<td>26,079</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census 2010

County officials describe Osceola County, a 1,506 square mile area located in Central Florida, as the “gateway to Walt Disney World and other Central Florida attractions.” The northwest quadrant of Osceola County includes most of the residential population and encompasses the communities of Poinciana, Buenaventura Lakes, and Celebration (the master-planned development that is the creation of The Walt Disney Company). Ranch lands, undeveloped prairies, woods, and marshes dominate the Southern and Eastern quadrants of the County, with the exception of several small, rural towns like Holopaw, Kenansville, and Yeehaw Junction. The counties economic base is dominated by tourism, being in such close proximity to major tourist attractions, although the areas’ historical investments in ranching and citrus remain strong. In July of 2010, I met with one of Osceola County’s commissioners to discuss the influx of Hispanic residents and the impact on the county. The governing body of the county is a Board of
County Commissioners composed of five elected members serving staggered terms of four years. During our interview, the commissioner used the term “rocky road” to describe the challenges of transitioning from an “old school rural service provider” to a global metropolis that attracts international tourists and migrants. The commissioner mentioned population growth and how things really took off in the late 80s and early 90s before stating that, “there weren’t more than 25,000 people here!” During the conversation he used the word “desperate” to describe Osceola Counties current condition, certainly a reference to the issues the county currently faces: increasing unemployment, an abundance of low-skilled, low-wage jobs, low occupancy rates in the hotels, poverty, homelessness, and foreclosures.59

**The Sunshine Economy**

Of course the massive Puerto Rican migration to Orlando would not have been sustainable without a plethora of job opportunities. Orlando’s economic history, with its bifurcated economy, dependence on the tourism industry, and polarized labor force helps explain the simultaneous migration of low-skilled, low-paid service sector workers and professionals. Orlando is described as being “sleepy” before the arrival of Disney in 1969, only to be awoken by the progress and development resulting from the corporation. In the 1900s Florida was similar to other Southern states with a low population density and a strong agricultural sector. Almost 60% of the Southern labor force was employed in agriculture at this time. During the 1900s the economy of Florida was based on four industries: traditional southern export agriculture, frontier industries, maritime industries, and sunshine industries. Cotton and tobacco dominated traditional southern export agriculture, while sugar and rice processing accounted for a small share. The frontier
industries, phosphate mining, cattle-herding, lumber products, and naval stores, made possible by the low population density and resource-rich land, accounted for more than 60% of Florida’s economic base. Some counties had more cattle than people; in fact, Osceola County had more than 20 animals for every person, and during my fieldwork it was not uncommon to hear long-time residents nostalgically remember a time when cattle dominated the landscape. Maritime industries, concentrated at the state’s seaports, included sponge fishing, cigar production, and the state’s defense payroll. Finally, sunshine industries, based on the region’s favorable climate, included semitropical agricultural products (ex. citrus), winter and spring fruits and vegetables, and winter tourism. As early as the first decade of the 1900s, tourism was the largest sector of the sunshine industries, and accounted for more than 50% of production.

The dominant industry during the early years of the 19th century, frontier industries, declined in significance in later years while the sunshine industries grew to dominate the state’s economy in the 20th century. By 1930 sunshine industries became the second largest sector of the economy, and tourism generated the most capital followed by vegetable and semitropical agriculture. The frontier industries declined to about 50% of the state’s economic base by 1930, and dropped to 32% by 1940. In contrast, the sunshine industries rose from 24% in 1930 to 42% in 1940. “By 1960, Florida had truly become the Sunshine state, with tourism-retirement accounting for more than 80% of the sunshine sector.” By 1980 the sunshine industries accounted for 58% of the states economic base, and retirement-tourism dominated the industry.

While sunshine industries dominated Florida’s economy, the maritime sector became the second largest component of the state’s economic base. The cruise industry
helped expand the maritime sector, but military payrolls dominated. An increase in the national defense budget resulted in increased spending on personnel and equipment, which was sold by manufacturing companies. Defense contracts and military engineering contracts, therefore, were significant and Florida was amongst the prime contractors. Orlando’s close proximity to the Kennedy Space Center and the military bases that operated during World War II and the Cold War—Orlando Air Force Base 1940-1949, 1951-1966; McCoy Air Force Base, 1940-1947, 1951-1975; and the Naval Air Station Sanford, 1942-1946, 1950-1968—attracted military personnel to the region and led to the development of a polarized labor force, employed not only in the service sector industry, but in manufacturing and technical positions as well. Martin-Marietta, an American aeronautics company, successfully secured military defense contracts. In the 1960s, Martin-Marietta was Florida’s largest industrial plant, employing over 10,000 workers. During the 1980s manufacturing employment grew by 15% in the state, while falling by 12% in the North and remaining stable in other southern states. However, employment in manufacturing decreased in the 90s when international competition increased, affecting manufactures nationally and regionally. Additionally, there was a decrease in the military budget after the Soviet Union’s breakup in the 90s, making the state’s reliance on tourism that much greater.

Orlando’s dependency on tourism has continued to grow. In 1977, the state adopted a county-optional tourist tax, which the City of Orlando swiftly implemented. The local government was not only dependent on Disney tax revenues, but they were now generating their own funds through tourism, which could in turn only be used towards tourism and convention business: “These developments marked the county’s
deepening dependence on tourism.” In 1989 and 1996, the generated tax revenues were used to expand the Orange County Convention Center, owned and operated by the Orange County government, which is located in the heart of the tourism district. The money generated from tourism taxes was being re-invested in the low-wage economic sector. But, Orlando’s dependency on tourism has its origins in the late 1960s/early 1970s, when the Disney Corporation selected the region as the site for its newest amusement park, thereby impacting the economy, population growth, and the place-identity of Orlando for centuries to come.

“Married to the Mouse:” Orlando’s Company Town

It was 1965 and Orlando was buzzing with speculation. Those that knew the identity of the mystery buyer, who purchased 27,500 acres of land, remained silent. The co-conspirators were Governor Haydon Burns, Miami land companies, and land brokers from the Florida ranchlands. Experience in Anaheim, California, the site of Disneyland, taught Walt Disney an important lesson that would transform the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area. Walt Disney only purchased 230 acres of land for his California amusement park, thereby hindering his ability to expand and control the tourist empire that would inevitably develop outside the park. This time he was going to secure the periphery by purchasing 27,500 acres of land, a tract about twice the size of Manhattan, to begin the development of his empire.

The selection criterion for the site of Disney’s new theme park was based on climate, expansion, and transportation. A climate that supported year-round, outdoor entertainment was ideal. A cold season would make the venue seasonal, hindering profits and the quality of laborers. Coastal sites interrupted 360-degree expansion and were
reminiscent of the old boardwalk amusement park genre. Walt Disney considered both the boardwalk and carnival scenes to be dirty and unsafe, and quite distinguishable from the solidly middle class identity of Disney World. The carnival and boardwalk amusement parks were fashioned for the urban working classes in the 1880s and 1890s, but Disney World was a cleaned-up version, designed for a middle-class “family” audience.\textsuperscript{64} As Margaret King (1981) notes:

\begin{quote}
The parks are middle-class and family-oriented as opposed to the lower-class ‘carney’ atmosphere of traditional amusement parks, which Disney called ‘dirty, phony places, run by tough-looking people.’ He wanted to replace the risk-taking, sense of danger, commercialism, salaciousness, and morbidity associated with the amusement parks’ standard ‘thrill rides,’ barkers, concession stands, games of chance played for prizes, and sex and freak shows, with safety, wholesomeness, patriotic and educational values.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

The limited class spectrum of Epcot Center’s visitors, for instance, points to the elite audience the company attracted in the 1980s. Epcot’s visitors come from the groups with the most power on the job and the highest pay. Epcot is not a working-class attraction, and few Hispanics or Blacks visited the park. In the 1980s, the median income of attendees was $35,000, and three-quarters of visitors were professionals or managers.\textsuperscript{66}

Finally, Disney’s criteria demanded a highway network to enable national access to the site. Orlando’s infrastructure made Central Florida an optimal site for Disney’s empire, particularly since it had a road system that radiates outward. The city and its officials were distinguished for their ability to secure road funding despite taxpayer’s opposition. City development is dependent on a good road building strategy, and although it appears that city size determines road size (ex. the larger cities have larger roads), it often works in reverse. Cities grow large because they build big roads, and Orlando is located at the conjoining of the state’s major highways: I-4, I-75, and I-95.\textsuperscript{67}
95 runs along the Atlantic Coast from Key West to Maine, and I-4 connects with I-95. I-10 spans the country from Florida to California and links with Florida Turnpike I-75. In an industry that relies on motorists for attendance, an already established network of roads was important for the Disney project. From early in Florida’s tourism history Northerners often traveled via plane, while the automobile was the favored means of transportation for Western tourists. Hence, a large road system allowed Disney to cast their net nationwide, while the invention of the airplane and the construction of the Orlando International Airport allowed the company to gain both national and international tourists.

Once Walt Disney committed to Orlando, silence was necessary to prevent land speculators from bidding up the price. Five “dummy corporations” were created to assemble the land with assistance from Miami attorney Paul Helliwell, a rumored operative that secured funding for covert operations in Latin America. The company ended up paying less then $200 per acre for the land that sits in Orange and Osceola Counties. Once an Orlando Sentinel reporter broke the story, Disney confirmed the newspaper headline that read, “It’s Official: This is Disneyland.”68 Walt, the “modern Merlin” was to “wave his magic wand” over Orlando.69 Consensus was in favor of the Disney Corporation’s arrival, and the business community saw nothing but the potential for economic returns.70

Still, the greatest impact is reflected outside of the Magic Kingdom theme park where the population, hotel industry, and service sector continues to develop in conjunction with the corporation. In the following decades Disney World would shape the image, place-identity, and labor market in Orlando, Florida, creating a global city
with regional, national, and international consumers and partnerships. For EPCOT Center’s World of Nation’s pavilions, for example, an attraction that showcases “the essence of different nation’s culture,” Disney worked with a variety of nation-states and created corporate partnerships with Coca-cola, American Express, Kodak, General Motors, AT&T, and Exxon, amongst others. Indeed, the intertwining of Orlando’s economy and Disney World reflects how much Metropolitan Orlando became dependent on the Disney Corporation.

Disney World would not only affect Central Florida’s economy in the coming years, but also the region’s residential population, the number of tourists that visited the region, and consequently, the construction industry. In 1969, prior to the opening of Disney World, 3.5 million people visited the region. In 1971, after the Magic Kingdom’s first year, the number soured to 10 million. Following EPCOT’s opening, attendance at the Disney complex rose 81% in the first year, from 12.5 million in 1982 to 22.71 million in 1983. These numbers continued to increase to 30 million in 1989, with the opening of MGM Studios, and 55 million in 1998, with the opening of the fourth theme park, Animal Kingdom. With the increasing tourism, hotel construction in Orlando boomed. In its first year, EPCOT generated 500 million dollars in new hotel construction. In 1982, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties had 33,800 hotel rooms, and two years later the number increased to 44,500 rooms. During this time hotels had an unprecedented 83% occupancy rate. The number of hotel rooms in the region expanded from 8,000 before Disney to over 100,00 by 2000. This rate continues to make Orlando second in the nation for number of hotel units, with Las Vegas ranking first.
Indeed, the growth of the tourism industry and the number of regional visitors has contributed to residential population growth since laborers were necessary to fuel the growth and service the tourists. Orange and Osceola Counties, for example, grew from 263,540 and 19,029 persons in 1960, prior to Disney’s arrival, to a population of 471,016 and 49,287 in 1980 (See Figure VI). The population in Orange County grew by almost 50%, while Osceola County’s population more than doubled after the opening of Disney World in 1971.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange County</td>
<td>263,540</td>
<td>344,311</td>
<td>471,016</td>
<td>677,491</td>
<td>896,344</td>
<td>1,145,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola County</td>
<td>19,029</td>
<td>25,267</td>
<td>49,287</td>
<td>107,728</td>
<td>172,492</td>
<td>268,685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census

By 2006, the Disney Corporation was the largest private sector employer, providing 34,600 jobs. Disney’s impact reached far beyond economic and population growth; the company’s presence in the region impacted Orlando’s place-identity and binded the metropolis’ future to the company.

Tourism promotion changes the meaning and structures of places as it commodifies and remakes a city to conform to market demands instead of residential preferences. Theme parks and tourism were in fact prevalent in the state of Florida before Disney’s arrival; but, the theme was “purely and unapologetically Florida.”

Nature-based tourism was originally part of the Florida vacation until there was a shift
towards tourism based on human improvements to nature and manufactured images that are carefully crafted and packaged. The new tourist landscape that developed after Disney World provides evidence of the “tourist bubble” or hyper reality that separates real cities and reality from tourist constructed spaces. A city symbol is a major sign of a people and of a place. According to Dennis Judd (1999), “cities that lack powerful symbols or historical and architectural signifiers must devise them, whereas cities that have them risk becoming subsumed by them.” Arguably, Walt Disney World has become Orlando’s city symbol, and the region has become subsumed by and dependent upon the tourism industry that developed around the corporation. The tourist spaces became the principal signifier of the Orlando locale. Moreover, what Disney’s tourist bubble created were “islands of affluence” that are differentiated and segregated from the surrounding urban and suburban landscapes. Thus, the safe, pleasurable, middle-class spaces controlled by the Disney Corporation and enjoyed by tourists are a sharp contrast to the residential spaces populated by Disney’s service sector employees. The region’s service sector jobs attracted low-skilled, low-paid Hispanic workers to the region at the same time that Hispanic professionals and entrepreneurs were lured by the region’s high-tech industries.

A Polarized Economy, A Bifurcated Migration

The tourism industry, with its plethora of low-wage jobs, is a sharp contrast to the region’s high-tech, professional industries. At the core of the high tech manufacturing industry are aviation, electronics, and communications, accounting for over 15,000 local jobs. Companies such as Lockheed Martin, Siemens, Stromberg-Carisin, Westinghouse Electric, the Kennedy Space Center, Tupperware Company, and Sentinel Communication
shape the professional sectors of the labor market. There is, however, a binary between the low-paid service sector and the higher paying professional jobs, with the service sector and tourism industry largely representing and defining the region.

These high-tech manufacturing jobs, which attracted a segment of upwardly mobile Puerto Ricans, can be contrasted with the low-skill, service-sector jobs resulting from the development of tourism industries after 1970. Between 1970 and 1990, jobs related to tourism and population growth grew by 468% and accounted for almost 40% of all jobs in the metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{76} These jobs tended to be near minimum wage. One commentator in political scientist Richard Foglesong’s (2001) text, \textit{Married to the Mouse}, compared Orlando’s economic dependence on tourism to Cuba’s dependency on sugar, concluding, “the economy is diluted by the rapid creation of low paying jobs in the service and retail sectors without a corresponding increase in high wage jobs reducing the level of the economy.”\textsuperscript{77} One of the goals of the region’s economic developers is to expand industries other than tourism (ex. high tech industries, film and TV, health care, international business, and sports).\textsuperscript{78} Still, Orlando is described as “a place of rising affluence in a sea of low-wage jobs.”\textsuperscript{79} Figure VII. reveals the structure of jobs and wages in the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford Metropolitan Area in 2011. The sectors with the highest employment numbers, Office and Administrative Support (168,850), Sales and Related Occupations (134,990), and Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (120,240), provide some of the lowest median hourly wages, $13.56, $11.55, and $9.21 respectively. This is a sharp contrast to the wages earned by those in Management (33,250) or the technical field of computers and mathematics (23,500), $48.20 and $33.52 respectively.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Median Hourly Wage</th>
<th>Mean Hourly Wage</th>
<th>Annual Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>973,320</td>
<td>$14.21</td>
<td>$18.90</td>
<td>$39,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and Administrative Support</td>
<td>168,850</td>
<td>$13.56</td>
<td>$14.69</td>
<td>$30,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Related</td>
<td>134,990</td>
<td>$11.55</td>
<td>$16.57</td>
<td>$34,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation and Serving Related</td>
<td>120,240</td>
<td>$9.21</td>
<td>$10.71</td>
<td>$22,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Material Moving</td>
<td>54,620</td>
<td>$12.86</td>
<td>$15.42</td>
<td>$32,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Practitioners and Technical</td>
<td>49,990</td>
<td>$25.94</td>
<td>$32.55</td>
<td>$67,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Finance Operations</td>
<td>49,100</td>
<td>$26.30</td>
<td>$28.47</td>
<td>$59,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Training, and Library</td>
<td>47,920</td>
<td>$21.30</td>
<td>$23.46</td>
<td>$48,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Installation, Maintenance, and Repair</td>
<td>46,280</td>
<td>$9.50</td>
<td>$10.84</td>
<td>$22,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care and Service</td>
<td>41,110</td>
<td>$17.33</td>
<td>$18.79</td>
<td>$39,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and Extraction Management</td>
<td>34,600</td>
<td>$9.32</td>
<td>$10.99</td>
<td>$22,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Occupations Protective</td>
<td>33,390</td>
<td>$16.23</td>
<td>$17.50</td>
<td>$36,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Occupations</td>
<td>33,250</td>
<td>$42.24</td>
<td>$48.29</td>
<td>$100,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Occupations Protective</td>
<td>32,830</td>
<td>$13.29</td>
<td>$14.88</td>
<td>$30,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>25,530</td>
<td>$15.05</td>
<td>$16.82</td>
<td>$34,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>23,500</td>
<td>$31.38</td>
<td>$33.52</td>
<td>$69,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Mathematical Healthcare Support</td>
<td>20,760</td>
<td>$12.49</td>
<td>$13.08</td>
<td>$27,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media</td>
<td>16,490</td>
<td>$17.96</td>
<td>$20.89</td>
<td>$43,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Engineering</td>
<td>15,160</td>
<td>$29.96</td>
<td>$31.87</td>
<td>$66,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Occupations</td>
<td>8,980</td>
<td>$28.91</td>
<td>$44.70</td>
<td>$92,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Social Service</td>
<td>8,670</td>
<td>$17.96</td>
<td>$19.74</td>
<td>$41,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical, and Social Science</td>
<td>5,300</td>
<td>$24.11</td>
<td>$30.35</td>
<td>$63,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, Fishing, and Forestry</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>$8.77</td>
<td>$10.02</td>
<td>$20,840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The economic polarization of Hispanic professionals and service-sector workers leads to varying experiences of incorporation and differing social dynamics in the respective populations.

Chapter Breakdown

This ethnography is divided into seven chapters. In chapter 1, I turn my attention to Buenaventura Lakes (BVL) to examine the impact of one particular pull factor, real estate marketing. I describe the development and marketing of BVL to explain how a predominately Anglo community, originally marketed to non-Hispanic, working class retirees and first time homebuyers, attracted so many Puerto Ricans. By forging alliances with a real estate agency in Puerto Rico, and targeting Puerto Ricans on the mainland and
on the island in their marketing campaigns, Landstar Homes, the developers of Buenaventura Lakes, were instrumental in fostering an awareness of Central Florida’s real estate opportunities, and directing the flow of mainland and island Puerto Ricans towards Metropolitan Orlando.

Chapter 2 documents the Puerto Rican migration to the larger Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area, and the push-pull factors—Puerto Rico’s economic crises, a fear of crime, employment opportunities and labor recruitment practices, social networks, and the opportunity for a “better quality of life” — that spurred the massive Puerto Rican migration to a new destination, the suburbs of Metropolitan Orlando.

Chapter 3 examines the Latinization of Metropolitan Orlando, and the impact of the Puerto Rican migration on the region’s institutions and social spaces. I track the increasing Latinization by tracking the political, economic, and cultural transformations to a sample of societal sources: schools, landscapes, government, and economic markets.

In chapter 4, I explore the “contact zones” where non-Hispanic whites encounter Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics and confront the Latinization of the region. The discourses surrounding these encounters allow me to interrogate the ways in which social actors generate and share categories that produce racialized subjects. I argue that the Hispanic migration and the hyper-presence of the Spanish language leads to the reaffirmation and strategic deployment of a white racial identity by non-Hispanic whites, and the racialization of Hispanics as non-white. At the same time, the Spanish language, Hispanic people, and the places they occupy are racialized as non-white, in sharp contrast to the white racial identity claimed by most of Central Florida’s Hispanics. Thus, theories and attitudes about differences are not only refined in these physical and social spaces,
they also provide an opportunity to understand the creation of a white racial consciousness, and the ways that language ideologies get mapped onto race, ethnicity, and geographies.

Chapter 5 chronicles the discourses that reveal how residents and non-residents perceive and talk about the Puerto Rican concentrated community of Buenaventura Lakes. By examining the connections that are made between the growing presence of Hispanic residents, their social practices, and the aesthetic transformations to the suburb, I reveal the place-identity of BVL, and the race and class based distinctions that evolve from the perceptions and meanings attributed to the landscape. Thus, this chapter reveals how the built environment becomes an active agent in the formation of ideas about race, identity, class, and belonging.

One of the elements that made the Puerto Rican migration to Metropolitan Orlando distinct from earlier migrant waves is the presence of a large number of homeowners. Chapter 6 examines the homeownership and foreclosure experiences of Hispanics in Metropolitan Orlando, and the impact on individuals, families, and the larger community. I discuss the factors surrounding the US mortgage crisis, highlight the individuals and communities that have been most likely to experience foreclosures, and explain how racial and ethnic based inequalities become part of the conversation about predatory lending. Through this analysis I address the wave of strategic defaults in the region, as well as the reactive spatial arrangements that have transformed single-family suburban homes into small businesses operating in an informal economy.

Finally, chapter 7 explores the ways in which Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics formulate, perform, and embody their social class positions, and the ways they perpetuate
these differences through lifestyle choices and by articulating class based distinctions. Through this examination you can see how the everyday lives of individuals are shaped by their class position, and through the distinctions that are made, consciously and unconsciously, thereby fostering a polarized Hispanic population. In this chapter I show how the exclusivity and elitism of the Hispanic upper class contrasts with the poverty, struggles, and criminalization experienced by the low-skilled, service sector labor force.
CHAPTER 1
A PUERTO RICAN LEVITTOWN

Many of Buenaventura Lakes’ long-time residents remember a time when orange groves dominated the landscape and cows outnumbered people. It was not until the mid-90s, with the massive influx of Puerto Ricans, that the landscape began its transformation and a county-sized ethnic enclave began formation. For those pioneers arriving in the early 80’s, the promise of a “Landstar lifestyle” — affordable luxury and country club living—was enough to leave the hustle and bustle of New York or Puerto Rico for an undeveloped, secluded “paradise” in the South. Indeed, by forging alliances with a real estate agency in Puerto Rico and targeting Puerto Ricans on the mainland and on the island in their marketing campaigns Landstar Homes, the developers of Buenaventura Lakes, were instrumental in fostering an awareness of Central Florida’s real estate opportunities and directing the flow of mainland and island Puerto Ricans towards Metropolitan Orlando.

A 2006 Orlando Sentinel article recounts the story of German Colon, a maintenance worker at New York City’s East River public-housing projects who discovered BVL in 1985. He was in a break room with the maintenance crew browsing through the New York Times when he saw an advertisement for beautiful model homes in a new community called Poinciana. The advertisement highlighted the close proximity to Disney World, where Colon was planning a vacation. His co-workers, tired of New York’s fast pace of life, high cost of living, and the unlikelihood of home-ownership, commissioned Colon to check out the property for them; but, he was disappointed to find vacant swampland when he arrived at the site. Then, on his way back to the hotel he discovered a secluded area where new houses were being constructed: Buenaventura
Lakes. Landstar Homes promised “a country lifestyle in a palm-tree paradise,” a sales pitch that persuaded Colon to secure a $52,000 home with a $500 deposit. He later convinced some of his colleagues at the East River housing projects to do the same. The following year he and his wife retired in BVL, and in 2006, at the age of 76, he remained in that same house.

Like Colon, Osvaldo Berberena, a religious man, was on vacation in Orlando when he discovered Landstar Homes. Berberena told an Orlando Sentinel reporter that he prayed for a sign that would help him decide if he and his wife should stay. That sign came, quite literally, as he passed a billboard on Interstate-4, a 132-mile highway between Tampa and Orlando, advertising affordable homes. “We weren’t desperate in Puerto Rico. We had jobs, but we felt we were not going anywhere,” said 50-year-old Berberena. In the mid-1980s Berberena founded the Centro Cristiano Genesis church from his home, which has since grown to a 20,000-square-foot hall with hundreds of members.

Colon and Berberena, like many other Puerto Ricans, were lured to Florida by a real estate advertisement and the chance for a better “quality of life.” In 1984, Sandra Lopez left the South Bronx and moved with her husband and children to BVL. The family felt that New York was no place to raise children. In 1991 she told an Orlando Sentinel reporter, “I lived in the South Bronx . . . I needed to get them out of there. Then you see ads about the sunshine, the attractions, the beach- all the wonderful things you want to hear about when you’re in the inner city.” When I interviewed Sandra 20 years after that Orlando Sentinel article was published she explained that, “Central Florida was the right place, and Disney was here.”
Sandra was working as a teacher in New York City before moving to Orlando, but she felt burned out and realized it was time for a change. Sandra first learned about BVL two years earlier, when her mother decided to purchase a house and relocate to the suburb. When Sandra’s father passed away her mother decided to look for a more tropical environment than New York. The two women traveled to Miami in search of a possible destination and did not like it there. There was too much similarity to urban New York. Then, one day in 1982 her mother saw a Landstar Homes advertisement in the *New York Post* promising to pay potential buyers’ hotel expenses and meals. “Ask any of the old-timers why they picked BVL and they will say it’s because of the *New York Post* advertisement,” Sandra explained. “They advertised in Puerto Rico as well.” When the two women first arrived at BVL in 1982 they only remember one house, one entrance, and a gas station. In 1984, when Sandra relocated from the South Bronx, she was the only Hispanic on her street and there were very few Hispanics elsewhere. In the 1990’s more Hispanics came; still, for the first five years she lived in BVL there was no Hispanic presence. Sandra remained in BVL for 19 years.

In 1985, a year after Sandra and her family had left the Bronx for BVL, Eliza Rodriguez and her family arrived from Puerto Rico. Eliza was 9-years-old at the time, and her parents “were looking for a better life.” Like the Lopez’s, the Rodriguez family began their search in South Florida. Initially, Eliza’s father planned to move to Hollywood, Florida (located in Broward County and part of the South Florida Metropolitan Area) while her aunt was looking in Lakeland, Florida (located approximately midway between Orlando and Tampa in Polk County); nevertheless, both her father and aunt ended up in Kissimmee.
Eliza’s family moved to Royal Palm Drive, in BVL, and she began school nearby; although, she did not know English, and there were no Hispanics in her classroom. During our interview she explained that her first teacher was not accepting of her due to her language difficulties so she was switched to another class. This is the only instance of discrimination that Eliza was able to recall. Yet, by the time she was in 8th grade at Parkway Middle School there were lots of Hispanics. According to Eliza, everything started to change: “Puerto Ricans came all of a sudden! They took over.” Eliza spent many years in BVL before moving to Orlando and later to the nearby City of St. Cloud. In 2003 she purchased a villa in BVL, which she rents out, located behind the bus stop where she caught her school bus as a child. “If you ever find out the reason so many Puerto Ricans came,” she asked, “please explain it to me.” What follows Eliza is your explanation . . .

The Mexican Millionaires

In present day BVL, the Hispanic presence demands attention. A number of small, Hispanic-owned businesses have opened to cater to the Hispanic residents of BVL, and national corporations and non-Hispanic owned small businesses have followed their lead by offering Hispanic products and employing bilingual workers who greet and communicate with customers in Spanish. Upon first glance, it is not always obvious that the residential spaces of BVL house such a large concentration of Hispanics of Puerto Rican descent. When I drove through the streets of BVL each day, passing Mexicali Way, Oaxaca Lane, Toluca Drive, Guadalajara Drive, Merida Drive, Campeche Lane, Vera Cruz Avenue, and Acapulco Drive I always asked myself how BVL, a Puerto Rican concentrated community, ended up with street names derived from places in Mexico?
And, why did so many Puerto Ricans choose this particular destination, this particular suburban development anyways?

I later learned about the Mexican millionaires responsible for the BVL project during an interview with John Smith, a former executive of Landstar Homes Corporation. By 1974 an international consortium of real estate interests headed by the leading development firms from Mexico began work on the new community. The principal investors were Gaspar Rivera Torres, Mexico’s largest land developer, Bernardo Eckstein and Manolo Stern, partners in the second largest land development firm in Mexico, and Juan Aja Gomez. Stanley S. Lane, the president of the marketing and management firm Diversified Property Services Inc., represented the developers. Lane was a resident of Miami and a retired New York manufacturer who had invested with the Mexican enterprises for over 20 years. According to Lane, Gaspar Rivera Torres was one of the wealthiest men in Mexico with a net worth exceeding $100 million, back in 1974. Together, the principal investors sold more than 5,000 homes and 5,000 home sites annually. The name of the suburb, like many of the street names, is derived from a place in Mexico. Buenaventura, one of 67 municipalities in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, was selected by chance, while the developers were throwing darts at a map in the office one day. During an interview with a former Landstar executive, John Smith, he explained that the dart landed on San Buenaventura, a City in the Buenaventura Municipality, and since the term Buenaventura means “good adventure,” “good luck” or “fortune” they thought the name fitting for their newest project.

In March of 1973 the BVL project received planned unit development (PUD) zoning. PUD is both a building type and a regulatory process, and in the case of BVL it
meant that the developers could use the land they purchased for a variety of uses including housing, recreation, and commercial centers, thereby creating a diversified subdivision. The community was planned on 2,350 acres of land with a design that included 65 acres of lakes and streams, 100 acres of commercial development, 6,000 single family residences, 6,000 multi-family dwellings, park sites, church and school sites, a club house, swimming pool, tennis courts, an executive golf course, and a championship golf course.

Landstar Homes employed John Smith, Vice President and project manager, from the time they purchased the land. He worked on everything from sewer and water management to sales and marketing. He was in Miami when he met Stanley Lane, who was with a group from Mexico. According to Smith, the Mexican land developers were trying to move their investments to the United States, fearing that Mexico would nationalize. John and Stanley looked at a large track of land near the present day city of Poinciana and decided it was too large at 40,000 acres, so they purchased the 2,500-acre site located 3 miles from the City of Kissimmee.

Landstar’s initial plan was to develop and sell lots, not homes, through the Real Estate Corporation of Florida. However, land sale operations were affected by the “swampland scandals” whereby buyers purchased land without visiting the site only to find the land swarming with alligators, underwater, and therefore impossible to build on. The San Juan Star, a newspaper from Puerto Rico, published an article on April 22, 1990 entitled, “Out-of-state property scams nothing new in P.R.” In the article journalist Maria Pico claimed, “Florida property scams are not new to Puerto Rico. . . And during the 1970s, Puerto Rico residents were major buyers of worthless Florida Land.” As a result
of these property scandals, Law 145 was enacted in 1980 to regulate the sale of out-of-state property in Puerto Rico. Of course, buyers continued to be skeptical about purchasing undeveloped land in Florida.

As a result of the swampland scandals, Florida land sales dried up for 3-5 years. So, the developers of BVL needed to develop a new sales strategy. Smith went to a successful seller of retirement homes for advice, and the developers decided to transition from land sales under the Real Estate Corporation of Florida to home sales with the newly created Landstar Homes Corporation. In 1978 Landstar’s first home was built in BVL, sales outlets were created, and in June of 1978 the community opened. The original models were constructed across from the Walk-N-Sticks Executive Golf Course, and an architect was hired to design the homes with a Spanish influence.

The Marketing of BVL

By May of 1978 Landstar Homes at Buenaventura Lakes Country Club, as it was called back then, had opened its first New York area sales outlet. The corporation’s advertisements touted “Affordable Luxury” and “Country Club Living.” The sales office that opened at 1184 Hempstead Turnpike in Uniondale, Long Island displayed photos, floor plans, and other information about the homes, which initially started below $27,000 for two bedrooms and one bathroom. The introductory prices included a one-year membership to the Buenaventura Lakes Country Club, which included a golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts, game room, and restaurant, and membership was limited to residents of BVL.

Through these advertisements the developers of BVL were presenting an opportunity for upward social mobility and a new way of life, and this visceral appeal
attracted buyers. The advertisements claimed that BVL was “more than a place to live,” but actually encompassed a lifestyle, the “Landstar Lifestyle,” as they called it. This lifestyle was presumably different than what could be found in the South Bronx or in the East River Housing projects of New York. With their affordable prices and high-end amenities Landstar Homes could make dreams, desires, and class aspirations a reality by providing the American Dream: the house with a garage and front lawn, and a life filled with beauty and luxury in a landscape surrounded by golf courses, country clubs, lakes, and “much more!” as the advertisement reads. The country club and golf courses, however, were a marketing ploy and the former Landstar executive admitted that the corporation knew these amenities were not sustainable. By the time I moved to Buenaventura Lakes the two golf courses were shut down and the country club was demolished. Still, the concept of “country club living” was necessary to attract national and international buyers.

Initially, “there were a lot of local people moving in;” though, in December of 1978 Landstar began a major marketing push in Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Boston, Chicago, and New York. According to Lee Kingerly, who handled publicity for Landstar and worked for a Chicago based marketing firm, there were two groups of people considering southern living: retirees living on a fixed income and individuals trying to escape the “arctic wasteland of northern cities.” And while the BVL development already had the country club facilities established, sewer and water plants, and paved roads, Northern sales continued to be affected by the old Florida land schemes. To circumvent buyer’s fears Landstar maintained permanent reservations at the Howard Johnson Motel, and offered potential buyers a free stay so they could visit the site. These
offers – travel, accommodations, and sometimes Disney tickets – motivated potential
buyers like Sandra and her mother to travel the distance from the Northeast to view the
new development.

Although the investors of Landstar Homes were of Mexican national origin and
many of the sales representatives spoke both Spanish and English, Hispanics were not the
target market initially. In fact, John Smith recalled a meeting where he and other Landstar
associates, including Juan Gonzalez, an individual of Puerto Rican descent, discussed
marketing to the Hispanic community; but, thought it best to wait before advertising to
Hispanics. Smith explained that if they began selling homes to the Hispanic community
too early they risked losing their other markets. This is the hard reality of the real estate
market. When people of color enter a community in vast numbers, the community
becomes less desirable and property values go down. Property values in a community
with a changing demographic, in this case transitioning from non-Hispanic whites to
predominately Hispanics, are actually more erratic than in a community that maintains a
consistent population of Hispanics.

For instance, David Macpherson and G. Stacy Sirmans (2001) examined the
change of house prices in Orlando, Florida relative to the racial and ethnic composition of
the location. The researchers conducted this study by measuring the proportion of
Hispanics in a census tract and testing the correlation of house appreciation to levels of
ethnic and racial integration. They found that the change in percent in race and ethnicity
has a negative effect on appreciation: “Across the census tracts, as the percent of
Hispanic population increased, the average sale price decreased after 10 percent
Hispanic.” Furthermore, the results of this study “suggest that house-price appreciation
is affected more by the change in racial/ethnic makeup of the area than the level of composition itself. Hence, the developers of BVL were cautious about drastically changing the composition of BVL by marketing to Hispanics and alienating their non-Hispanic white buyers.

Marketing to Hispanics would have impacted not only property values in the BVL suburb, but also the perceptions and reputation of the community. For instance, many of the conversations in chapter 5 about the desirability of different Central Florida suburbs will show that a community with a majority of Hispanics is perceived as an ethnic enclave and therefore lacking diversity; whereas, suburbs where non-Hispanic whites make up the vast majority, but people of color are present in small proportions are in fact considered diverse. Hence, there is a “tipping point;” when Hispanics are present in a large enough proportion not only are property values impacted, but the perceptions, reputation, and desirability of the community are impacted as well. This is further complicated by the social class distinctions that exist within the Hispanic population. For example, Edgardo Arvelo, a sales agent with Regent International Inc., does about 90 percent of his business with Hispanics. In a 2002 Orlando Sentinel article he claimed that Puerto Ricans tend to favor housing markets in South Orange County and Kissimmee; whereas, Venezuelans tend to go for higher-priced homes in West Orange County. In the state of Florida, in South Florida in particular, wealthy Hispanics have proven to be and are treated as valuable consumers in the real estate market. These wealthy Hispanics are not living in ethnic enclaves isolated from non-Hispanic whites, and Florida developers do not ignore the buying power of these upwardly mobile Hispanics. Like
South Florida developers, Landstar Homes realized the consumer value of the Puerto Rican population and targeted this segment of the population.

When did the Hispanic market get introduced to Landstar Homes? According to Maria Garcia, who began working with Landstar’s water and sewer systems back in 1979 before transitioning to sales, the corporation did not begin selling homes to Puerto Ricans on the island until 1985; although, a 1976 newsletter written in Spanish at a time when the first house had not yet been built hints at potential advertising to a Latin American market. More than one of my informants, long-time residents of BVL, recall purchasing their homes from Latin American nationals who used the home only for vacationing. Thus, there was also a class transition as the community shifted from individuals owning BVL properties solely for the purposes of vacationing to the homes serving as a primary residence.

How did Puerto Ricans get introduced to BVL in the 80s? Gloria Berman, president and co-founder of the Trans Indies Realty and Investment Corporation (TIRI), one of Puerto Rico’s largest and most prestigious real estate firms, had a meeting with a representative of Landstar Homes and Carlos Romero-Barceló Jr. Romero-Barceló was a Miami-based real estate lawyer, a friend of Berman’s, and the son of Puerto Rico’s former pro-statehood governor, Carlos Romero-Barceló. At the time, Romero’s father was the island’s resident commissioner and congressional delegate.

What fostered Landstar’s interest in Puerto Rico’s real estate market, which led to that initial meeting? Maria Garcia briefly mentioned an additional social connection, but chose not to go into detail. According to Garcia, Eduardo (who had a familial connection to the Landstar Homes developers) met Romero-Barceló Jr. in college, they became
friends, and he encouraged Eduardo and his family to sell homes in Puerto Rico. Before agreeing to market the Central Florida homes to Puerto Rican buyers, Gloria Berman of TIRI visited the project site. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s real estate companies were tapping into the Puerto Rican market in an effort to sell homes throughout the state of Florida; nevertheless, Florida real estate was a hard sell in Puerto Rico since some Puerto Ricans had bad experiences with the swampland scandals.  

Unlike other developers, however, Landstar Homes made good on their promises. “‘I really loved Orlando, [Berman] said. ‘I felt it was the perfect place for families from Puerto Rico to buy . . . the way of life was the way of life we had had in Puerto Rico 25 years ago and had lost because of crime.’”  

Soon after, Berman’s company began marketing Landstar Homes to Puerto Ricans. TIRI assumed complete responsibility for the sale of BVL’s property, which included finding financing for prospective buyers and developing advertising campaigns. TIRI held seminars, showed videos of the property and surrounding area, and sponsored trips to Central Florida for prospective buyers. According to Maria Garcia, TIRI recruited in Puerto Rico by offering $500 towards a plane ticket and a 3-night hotel stay. A bus or van would pick up the prospective buyers at the airport and shuttle them to the site. For their efforts TIRI was entitled to a 3.5 percent commission, which was later decreased to 2.5 percent. According to Berman, it was TIRI that created an awareness of the Central Florida real estate market amongst Puerto Ricans, “‘and Puerto Rico being a small island and a family oriented community, once you begin to get the word out, it ripples through the community.’”  

The initial response was nothing short of “enthusiastic” and reached a critical mass in 1988 when TIRI was able to sell more than 200 homes. At the same time,
Landstar was successfully marketing homes in New York and Chicago’s Puerto Rican concentrated communities. Landstar’s Orlando-area home sales grew from $2 million in 1986 to more than $11 million by 1988.

Real estate transactions published by the *Orlando Sentinel* in November of 1988 reveal a number of purchases made by individuals with a Spanish surname (See Figure VIII.). Four homes were sold to individuals with a Spanish surname (Espada, Pulido, Padilla, Ortero de Torres, Araujo) and four homes were sold to individuals that are less likely to be Hispanic (Dizon, Smoot, Harpootian, and Gesualdi); although, it is uncertain whether the individuals with a Spanish surname are indeed Puerto Rican. This chart reveals the presence of Hispanic homeowners in the late 1980’s, although they certainly were not the exclusive buyers of BVL residences. Figure IX., representing published real estate transactions months later, indicates that Landstar was still attracting a non-Hispanic market in February of 1989.

### Figure VIII. Real Estate Transactions, November 11, 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buyer/Seller</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arthur F. and Carmen M. Dizon to Steven G. Dizon</td>
<td>BVL</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landstar Homes, Inc. to Bob and Loida Smoot</td>
<td>BVL</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelly Zumz Tein to Nereida and Paul Espada</td>
<td>BVL</td>
<td>$57,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George R. and Alma J. Oswald to Bernardino and Eva Pulido</td>
<td>BVL</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landstar Homes, Inc. to Juan Torres Padilla and Lillian E. Ortero de Torres</td>
<td>BVL</td>
<td>$75,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By 1988 Landstar was not only entering Puerto Rico’s real estate market, but also
the global real estate market. In 1988 sales to Puerto Ricans accounted for about 7
percent of the company’s total sales according to Eduardo Stern, vice president of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buyer</th>
<th>Seller</th>
<th>Property Type</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landstar Homes, Inc. to Eduardo L. and Maria T. Araujo</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 10</td>
<td>$88,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Wilson to Rosalie Harpootian</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 2</td>
<td>$68,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landstar Homes, Inc. to Joseph and Leigh Gesualdi</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 10</td>
<td>$63,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Orlando Sentinel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure IX: Real Estate Transactions, February 9, 1989**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buyer</th>
<th>Seller</th>
<th>Property Type</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfred and Marie Josee Regilus to Michael and Helen M. Fertall</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 2</td>
<td>$63,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landstar Homes, Inc., to Hector F. and Felicita Mercado</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 10</td>
<td>$75,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landstar Homes, Inc., to Dennis William Ryan and Graham James Parks</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 9</td>
<td>$106,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landstar Homes, Inc., to George Ambersley and Millicent A. Smith</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 10</td>
<td>$92,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maronda Homes, Inc., of Florida to Anthony and Amelia Uliano</td>
<td>BVL, Unit 9</td>
<td>$94,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Orlando Sentinel
Landstar began heavy marketing efforts in Western Europe, establishing brokerage offices in London and West Germany. British buyers were expected to account for 12 percent of total sales in 1988 and German buyers were investing in the commercial real estate; but, it is unclear whether the new marketing efforts in Germany were connected to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Garcia informed me that similar marketing efforts were underway in Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, France, and Kuwait. And, this diversity was reflected in the suburb’s residential population. Until the 90s, John Smith lived on Bit Court, a street in BVL that contains large, luxurious homes on lots with a minimum of 1 acre. Between 1978 and 1986 he recalls having a neighbor to his left from Holland, a neighbor to the right from Venezuela, while a Cuban and a British family occupied the other houses on the cul de sac. In 1989 Landstar’s sales director said about 35 percent of the sales in BVL and the sister development Meadow Woods (MW) were to people from the Northeast; meanwhile, extensive sales promotions were underway in the Midwest and overseas. In the early 90s Landstar continued to appeal to a global market, though that eventually changed. Buyers ranged from retirees to investors to people relocating for new jobs since the communities of BVL and MW offered such a broad range of prices: from the low $50,000s to more than $100,000. In May of 1991, the Orlando Sentinel described a street in BVL that housed New Yoricans, Italians, Cubans, Filipinos, Indians, Jamaicans, Colombians, Brits, Anglos, and Puerto Ricans. However, sales eventually slowed down in the international market, and by 1994 Landstar’s only full sales office outside the state of Florida was in San Juan, Puerto Rico. According to Estrella Schoene, Landstar’s regional sales and marketing director, the San Juan office sold 200 single-
family homes in 1993, which accounted for one-third of the company’s Orlando-area business.98

Then, in September of 1993 Landstar decided to open its own offices on the island and eliminated TIRI as its exclusive broker. This resulted in a 3 million dollar lawsuit whereby lawyers for TIRI claimed that Landstar had violated a 1964 law protecting Puerto Rican dealers from exploitation by off-island businesses. Still, Landstar continued to dominate Central Florida real estate sales in Puerto Rico. By 1993 Landstar had almost sold out of BVL properties, and was focusing marketing efforts on their newest Central Florida development, Meadow Woods.

**Landstar's Legacy**

Although real estate companies were tapping into the Puerto Rican market prior to Landstar’s arrival, it is Landstar’s successful marketing efforts that prompted Central Florida developers to target prospective buyers in Puerto Rico. Between 1985 and 1993, more than 200 brokers had obtained licenses in Puerto Rico to sell Florida property. Still, the focus of real estate marketing in Puerto Rico had shifted from Tampa and Miami to Central Florida. It became common for the Sunday edition of *El Nuevo Dia* (San Juan’s Spanish language newspaper), for example, to contain a dozen ads for Central Florida properties, and only two or three ads mentioning Miami or Tampa. Landstar’s success with BVL and the sister development Meadow Woods certainly prompted other companies to focus their efforts in Orlando as opposed to Miami or Tampa. In the fall of 2003 one developer, Pulte Homes, sponsored a free seminar in San Juan to sell homes in an area stretching from Hunter’s Creek and Metro West to Casselberry, Tusawilla, and Lake Mary, a distance of about 30 miles. Then there was Lilian Castaneda, a Puerto
Rican broker operating out of Isla Verde, east of San Juan, who sold 90 refurbished condominium villas priced between $55,000 and $70,000 in Las Palmas at Sand Lake, about 12 miles from BVL. According to Castaneda, most of the Puerto Ricans that purchased the properties were not yet ready to move, and instead wanted to purchase vacation homes that could be rented to other Puerto Ricans. Smaller developers held similar seminars for a variety of properties including town houses and reconditioned apartments for as low as $22,000. The shifting concentration of Puerto Ricans, from Miami to Orlando, continues in the present. In 1990, 44 percent of Florida-based Puerto Ricans resided in the Miami Metropolitan Statistical Area; however, by 2008 the percentage of Puerto Ricans fell to 27 percent.

Throughout the years Puerto Ricans have been drawn to BVL, hoping to find a better quality of life for an affordable price. According to Schoene, Puerto Rican homebuyers find the Orlando market attractive because of the price: “You don’t get anything for your money in Puerto Rico- that’s the problem.” Furthermore, while home prices throughout the Orlando metropolitan region increased dramatically during the housing bubble of the millennium —the median home price in BVL increased 67 percent between 2004 and 2006— home prices in BVL remained far lower than most parts of Orange, Seminole, and Lake County. Daniel Ortiz, a 53-year-old auto technician from Puerto Rico started looking for a new home in Osceola County that would accommodate his wheelchair-bound daughter and teenage son; but, the houses on the market were too expensive or too far from his Orlando workplace. “Prices have gone crazy here,” Ortiz told a reporter; although, he was able to purchase a four-bedroom, lakeside home with vaulted ceiling for less than $250,000 in BVL. In a 2006 Orlando Sentinel article, Ortiz
told a journalist that his home came with an added benefit: it was close to his mother, aunt, and two cousins who also lived in BVL.

BVL remained attractive to potential homebuyers because of its affordability, proximity to shopping, tourism, and hospitality industry employers. Real estate agents like Jorge Moreno, the sales associate for Coldwell Bank who helped Ortiz find his home, reminds potential buyers that, “You can get to Disney in less than 20 minutes.”

According to Norman Quintero, a realtor who markets homes to Puerto Ricans, BVL is a “Puerto Rican Levittown” and “one of the first places to which Puerto Ricans come before exploring the rest of Orlando.” At the time of the 2006-2008 American Community Survey, 6,287 of the 8,643 occupied housing units in BVL were owner-occupied; and, while Puerto Rican’s have concentrated in BVL initially, the region’s Latinization has been a result of the spatial spread of Hispanics throughout the region. This was evident as early as 1991 when 8,500 of Osceola County’s 13,000 Hispanics were living outside of BVL, in communities that remained predominantly white.

Landstar Homes was instrumental in fostering an awareness of Central Florida’s real estate opportunities on the island of Puerto Rico and in the Puerto Rican concentrated communities of New York and Chicago, and directing the flow of migration to the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area. In the years that followed the development of the BVL suburb, a Puerto Rican enclave formed, and contributed to the Latinization of the region.
CHAPTER 2
NEW DESTINATIONS, GREAT EXPECTATIONS

“The best form of welfare is a high paying job.”
–Union Advertisement, 6/27/07

On August 3, 2011 I attended a seminar entitled, “Hispanics A Market Revolution,” which was advertised on the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Central Florida’s website. The seminar was intended for Orlando’s business community; consequently, during the one hour-session a variety of speakers from the business community addressed the audience, emphasizing the consumer power of Hispanics and the importance of adjusting advertising and marketing campaigns to target this particular population. I was immediately struck by a presentation given by Geoscapes International Inc., a business intelligence firm that provides data, technology, and analytic services to keep businesses competitive as an “emerging American mainstream consumer” is created by the increasing presence and economic power of immigrants.\(^{104}\) The representative began by flashing a power point slide of a map, which showed the concentration of Hispanics in the United States during the 1980s, followed by projections for 2017 (See Figure X and Figure XI). The caption on the first slide highlighted the gateway states bordering Mexico that were the primary destinations of Hispanic migration, and the second pointed out that, “major metro areas outside border states are now gateway cities too.” The power point slides made it clear that Hispanics are coming to a city near you, and possibly to your suburb as well; but more importantly, the speaker was trying to let the audience know that in Orlando, Florida Hispanics have already arrived, and they are a force to be reckoned with. These visuals were a powerful reminder to the audience of the
United States’ changing demographics, Hispanics’ position as a majority-minority, and the overall “browning of America.”

Figure X. Hispanic Population Concentration in 1990

Source: Geoscapes International Inc.
What caused the Puerto Rican population to start settling in Orlando, Florida instead of the traditional destinations in the Northeast and Midwest? This region experienced migratory flows from both the island and other mainland states, simultaneously. In 2008, 43 percent of Florida’s Puerto Rican population was born on the
island. Nationally, 32 percent of Puerto Ricans were island born, and in the New York metropolitan area only 28 percent were island born.¹⁰⁶ Thus, in Metropolitan Orlando a larger number of Puerto Ricans migrating directly from the island are meeting and coming into contact with those moving from other states. The Puerto Rican exodus and settlement in the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area was fueled by a number of push-pull factors, which I examine in this chapter. In addition to the real estate opportunities that I discussed in the previous chapter, these push-pull factors include Puerto Rico’s economic crises, economic restructuring in New York, a fear of crime, employment opportunities and labor recruitment practices, social networks, and the opportunity for a “better quality of life.”

**Puerto Rican Migration to the United States**

Between the early 16th century and late 19th century Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony. The island was annexed to the United States in 1898 following the Spanish-American War. As a result of the Jones Act of 1917, individuals born on the island of Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens, and can move freely between the island and mainland states. In 1952 Puerto Rico became the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a “free state associated with the United States.”¹⁰⁷ The island is neither a state nor an independent country, has an elected governor and legislature, but no voting representatives in Congress. Additionally, residents of Puerto Rico may not vote in national elections, and are exempt from federal taxes.

The US occupation of Puerto Rico has led to both political and economic dependency, and the out-migration of Puerto Ricans since the early 20th Century. Prior to the American takeover, the Puerto Rican economy was a diversified, subsistence-based
economy with four primary crops, tobacco, cattle, coffee, and sugar, produced for export. However, American investments transformed the economy and increased the dependency on sugar. The decline of the sugar industry in the 1920s resulted in high unemployment and poverty, and prompted the first waves of migration to the United States. The early migrants or pioneers settled primarily in New York City, in Brooklyn, East Harlem, the South Bronx, and the Lower East Side.

The second migratory phase, which is referred to as “the Great Migration,” took place between 1946 and 1964, and led to the growth of the already established New York communities. Additionally, new Puerto Rican settlements appeared in parts of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Illinois and other parts of the country like Lorain, Ohio and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This phase of migration coincided with the implementation of Operation Bootstrap, a development strategy lasting from 1947 to the early 1960s. Operation Bootstrap was a set of government policies and incentives intended to industrialize the island by attracting foreign companies, primarily American, through tax exemptions, industrial services, the provision of factory buildings, loans, lower labor costs, waiving import duties, and offering special assistance.

As a result of Operation Bootstrap, Puerto Rico’s economic system transformed from a one-cash-crop agrarian system into an industrial society. In search of factory work, thousands and thousands of Puerto Ricans left the rural areas of Puerto Rico for the cities. Many of these workers later migrated to the United States when the development programs failed to reduce unemployment. “During the industrialization of the island, almost one third of the population left for the urban slums of New York.” To alleviate
some of the surplus laborers, government agencies helped employers recruit Puerto Ricans to fill the low-paid jobs in New York City.

The last period of migration, “the revolving-door migration,” from 1965 to the present is marked by dispersion to other parts of the United States, and greater fluctuations of net migration since Puerto Ricans migrated to the mainland, but returned to the island as well. For instance, during the 1970s the US economic recession sharply reduced job opportunities, and more Puerto Ricans returned to the island than migrated to the United States. During the 1980s and 1990s, internal migration trends on the mainland also reveal increased Puerto Rican dispersion to other states. “While states such as New York, New Jersey, and Illinois were among those with the largest number of Puerto Ricans, this period saw declines in the rate of growth of these states’ Puerto Rican populations (Rivera-Batiz and Santiago 1994). In New York—the center of Puerto Rican mainland society—the 1990s for the first time saw a decrease in the number of Puerto Ricans resident there (Duany 2004).”

In 2008, the Puerto Rican population was concentrated in two areas: the state of Florida and the New York Metropolitan area. “There were 4.0 million people living in Puerto Rico, 1.2 million Puerto Ricans in the New York metropolitan area and 744 thousand in Florida.” The remaining 2.3 million Puerto Ricans were scattered throughout the United States, but only five states had a population of 100,000 Puerto Ricans or more: California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Texas. In 2008, the largest Puerto Rican concentrations in Florida could be found in Metropolitan Orlando, where 222,000 Puerto Ricans resided. The Miami metropolitan
area had a Puerto Rican population of 201,000 and the Tampa-St. Petersburg metropolitan area’s Puerto Rican population numbered 123,000.

A number of push-pull factors have been cited to explain the waves of Puerto Ricans from the island to the states during the different temporal phases of migration: overpopulation due to improved medical care; displaced and surplus labor resulting from the island’s economic transformations; relative wages and unemployment rates in Puerto Rico and the US; greater participation in the armed forces; and, the recruitment practices of American companies. The Migration Division Office of New York’s facilitation of migration, and the Puerto Rican government’s communications with the Federal Aviation Administration, which led to the approval of low rates for air transportation increased the migrant flow. Many of these same push-pull factors are connected to Orlando’s more recent Puerto Rican migration.

**The Puerto Rican “Underclass”**

For the past eight decades, the most marginal Puerto Rican migrants have fascinated social scientists, policy makers, and journalists. Despite the good intentions of many researchers, the publications portray a dysfunctional sub culture that evolved amongst the “slum dwellers,” and their presumed deviance from mainstream norms, values, and practices made the poor and, at times, working class Puerto Ricans the constant object of inquiry, and their settlements a laboratory for observations and theorizations about the poor. Urban Puerto Rican settlements—including Spanish Harlem, the South Bronx, the Brooklyn Navy Yards, Loisaida, and Sunset Park, among others—served as a laboratory to study slum conditions, extreme poverty, criminality and drug abuse, the social pathologies of the poor, the inability to adjust and assimilate to
dominant cultural practices and the urban environment, anomie, the culture of poverty thesis, the urban underclass, and social disorganization theory linking social behaviors, poverty, and economic deprivation with the absence or breakdown of institutions.\textsuperscript{118} These early depictions contribute to the racialization and “underclass” classification of Puerto Ricans that once dominated the press, and therefore the public imagination. Archival research, ethnographic accounts, social scientific inquires, and memoirs reveal the existence of a Puerto Rican elite, in both New York and Florida, as early as the 1930s; but, like the black middle class in the United States, the social life and residential spaces inhabited by the Puerto Rican middle and upper class remained invisible due to the negative attention focused on the poor urban ghettos.\textsuperscript{119}

In 2006, historian Felix Matos-Rodriguez and anthropologist Jorge Duany predicted that Puerto Ricans in Central Florida could follow a different path from previous waves of Puerto Rican migrants to the United States. The first wave of Puerto Rican migration to the United States was characterized by a massive out-migration of working class Puerto Rican men and women. These individuals settled in the industrial North, where they found low-wage employment in blue-collar trades and the manufacturing industries. The second migratory wave was marked by greater dispersal; however, the majority of the migrants were relegated to low-pay, low-status occupations. The third-wave coincided with deindustrialization and depressed economies in both the U.S. and Puerto Rico, which resulted in wage declines amongst the Puerto Rican population, a rise in unemployment, and an increase in the number of female-headed households.\textsuperscript{120} This wave, however, also included more professionals who were able to find better paying jobs in the New York Metropolitan area and other places.
The focus of this ethnography is on one of the “other places” where professional Puerto Ricans have settled. In comparison to past migratory experiences, the recent Puerto Rican migration to Orlando is distinctive in several ways. First, as anthropologist Jorge Duany (2010) notes, there is a presence of “a large number of well-educated professionals and managers, most of whom define themselves as white in the census.”

Second, “Puerto Ricans in Orlando are more likely to own their houses and to live in suburban neighborhoods than in New York.” Finally, Puerto Ricans in Central Florida are not as isolated from non-Hispanic whites as in other Puerto Rican settlements. Thus, the Orlando case study is an opportunity to explore the suburbanization of the Puerto Rican population, and a segment of the Puerto Rican population that are identified as “middle or upper class,” as chapter 7 will reveal.

**New Destinations of Puerto Rican Migration**

While the massive migration of Puerto Ricans to Central Florida did not occur until the 1980s and 1990s, the presence of Puerto Rican laborers, soldiers, and entrepreneurs are documented in Tampa, Miami, and Orlando well before that time period. Until 1930, Tampa Bay was the center of the Puerto Rican population in Florida. According to the census data on racial breakdown of Puerto Ricans in Florida, the majority of these individuals identified as White. These migrants were drawn to the Tampa Bay area’s cigar-making industry. Pedro and Catalina Casellas, for instance, operated tobacco-manufacturing ventures in Ybor City, and Antonio Malpica owned a cigar-making workshop in Tampa. Census data then indicates a shift from the Tampa Bay area, particularly Hillsborough County, to the Miami area between the 1940s and 1960s. In 1957 the Puerto Rican Department of Labor began to report the number of
air passengers between the island of Puerto Rico and the United States.\textsuperscript{129} Between 1957 and 1960, about 12,000 to 15,500 Puerto Rican residents left to Florida each year, and between 12,000 and 14,000 indicated Miami as their destination.

Much like Orlando’s current Puerto Rican migrants, Miami’s early migratory wave was polarized and included working class laborers and entrepreneurs. The articles that appeared in \textit{El Mundo}, a Spanish language newspaper, are dominated by stories about prominent investors from the island of Puerto Rico who came to Miami in the 1940s to set up sugar and banking interests.\textsuperscript{130} The movement of a small number of agricultural business owners was part of this early Florida migration. According to anthropologist Patricia Silver (2012), these wealthy entrepreneurs subtly emphasized their own class relations, and “advertised that they would bring engineers and skilled workers from Puerto Rico, but not day laborers.”\textsuperscript{131} “This and other data from the 1940s suggest an effort, in Miami at least, to carve out an elite space distinct from working-class communities of the Northeast.”\textsuperscript{132} However, the presence of Puerto Rican laborers working in Miami’s clothing industry during the 1950s has also been documented. The Caribe Employment Agency, owned and operated by William Campell, a US citizen, had a main office in Florida, and “used newspaper and radio advertisements, run in small island towns and rural communities, to recruit Puerto Ricans to work in a range of Florida agricultural and clothing industry jobs.”\textsuperscript{133} The garment industry, the third-largest employer in Miami, attracted Puerto Ricans from both the island and from the Northeast. As Duany and Silver (2010) note, “despite efforts by some investors and entrepreneurs to maintain Puerto Rican Florida as a space apart from the worker-dominated Puerto Rican communities in the North, Puerto Rican Florida increasingly emerged as a cross-class
population.” By the mid-1950s wealth landowners, middle-class professionals, garment factory workers, migrant farm workers, and hotel workers made up South Florida’s Puerto Rican population.

Puerto Ricans obtained agricultural and industrial jobs in Florida through the efforts and recruitment of private industry; the Puerto Rican government did not facilitate these labor contracts. Patricia Silver (2012) points out that while some agricultural workers did come to Florida, these contracts were arranged through private employment agencies, and “discouraged by the Puerto Rican Migration Division because of Jim Crow segregation in the U.S. South.”

A report by Joseph Monserrat, former Director of Puerto Rico’s Migration Division, reveals the government’s hesitation to send contract workers to the South:

Puerto Rico could not and would not accept or fill job orders from areas where racial segregation was legal [in the U.S. South] . . . . Despite constant pressure to do so, particularly from Georgia peach growers and sugar can growers in Florida, Puerto Rico maintained these policies until well after segregation laws in the U.S. were repealed. While Puerto Rican agriculture workers cut cane in Florida and picked peaches in Georgia, these workers were not ‘contract workers’ recruited by the Puerto Rico Department of Labor. These workers went ‘on their own’ without the benefit of the contract which they, as free American citizens, were at liberty to do (Monserrat 1991:12).

There is evidence that Puerto Ricans disrupted a black/white racial binary when they settled into Miami. “A 1953 article in El Mundo notes that in South Florida, Puerto Ricans were considered a ‘third race.’” Puerto Ricans did not want to attend schools for blacks, and whites did not want Puerto Ricans in their schools. In other instances the race of Puerto Rican children, either black or white, was determined based on their place of residence. Duany and Silver (2010) explain that, “because no Cubans lived in black areas, their children were considered white;” however, “Mexican and Puerto Rican
children were deemed white or black depending on the places in which they lived.\textsuperscript{139} This foreshadows the ambiguities and complexities surrounding the racial classification practices that Orlando’s Puerto Rican migrants would later confront, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Puerto Ricans enlisted in the US armed forces began arriving in the Orlando area, particularly to the former McCoy Air Base. In the 1950s and 1960s, land developers also targeted military populations, which brought Puerto Rican veterans to the Central Florida region. The Puerto Rican migration to Orlando continued to develop in the late 1960s, with the acquisition of hundreds of properties in Deltona (Volusia County) by Puerto Rican migrants from the island.\textsuperscript{140} The opening of the first Walt Disney theme park spurred real estate speculation in the region, and it was real estate opportunities that introduced a subset of Puerto Rican homeowners to the Central Florida region; although, the surge of Puerto Rican migration from the island and mainland did not start until the mid-1980s. In 1960 there were 19,535 Puerto Ricans living in Florida (2.2\% of the total Puerto Rican population in the United States, not including Puerto Rico). That number increased to 28,166 (2\% of the total Puerto Rican population in the United States) in 1970, 94,775 (4.7\%) in 1980, 247,010 (9.1\%) in 1990, 482,017 (14.2\%) in 2000, to 847,550 (20.1\%) in 2010.\textsuperscript{141} While the Puerto Rican population in Florida increased, New York’s concentration of Puerto Ricans decreased—from 72 percent of the total Puerto Rican population in the United States in 1960 to 25.8 percent in 2008—as the population continually dispersed throughout the United States.\textsuperscript{142} At the time of the 2010 US Census Puerto Ricans numbered 1,070,558 in New York and 4,623,716 nationwide.
Since the 1930s, Florida has attracted both working class migrants and an upper class of investors, property owners, and entrepreneurs. The development of Orlando’s tourism industry increased the migration of low-paid, low-skilled laborers as well. On the other hand, once the massive Puerto Rican migration to Orlando began in the 80s and 90s it was depicted as a middle class, professional migration, and was distinguished from the waves of working class migrants that settled in the Northeast. These discrepancies and social class distinctions will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7. First, we need to examine the push-pull factors that caused the migration; but, it is important to keep in mind the class diversity of Orlando’s Puerto Rican migrants.

Why does anyone pack up everything they own and choose to leave their home and family to head to a Central Florida suburb? In other words, what pushed Puerto Ricans from the island of Puerto Rico and the Midwestern or Northern states, and what pulled them to Orlando, Florida? Growth outside of inner cities is often associated with “white flight,” suburbanization, and upward mobility. However, the Puerto Rican migration to Orlando, Florida contains elements of both upward mobility and a spatial spread of poor and low-wage workers. Upwardly mobile Puerto Ricans are dispersed throughout Metropolitan Orlando, while the community of Buenaventura Lakes (BVL), where I conducted my fieldwork, is experiencing a concentration of economically disadvantaged Puerto Rican migrants in more recent years as the reputation of the community changes from a place of luxurious, country club living to a poor slum. Still, a willingness to migrate requires an impetus (push factor), and in Puerto Rico it was an unstable economic situation and a fear of crime that sent hundreds of thousands packing.
Push Factors: The Puerto Rican Economy

Puerto Rico’s economic woes were, and continue to be the most prevalent push factor. Furthermore, discrepancies in income levels and employment opportunities make living conditions on the island and the opportunities for upward mobility substantially more difficult in comparison to Orlando, Florida. In the early 1970s Puerto Rico was the “shining example” of economic development, showing how political stability, democracy, and open-market economic policies lead to economic growth. Nevertheless, while Puerto Rico was at the forefront of this industrialization movement with Operation Bootstrap, by the 1970s and 1980s other industrializing nations in Asia and Latin America opened their local markets to foreign investments. Corporations then had the opportunity to select other sites where wages were as low or lower than in Puerto Rico, and the “worldwide movement to reduce tariff and nontariff barriers to trade meant that Puerto Rico lost its advantage in this area as well.”

As a result of Puerto Rico’s industrialization programs, the Puerto Rican economy was heavily dependent on direct American investment. In 1970, “close to 80 percent of all manufacturing employment in Puerto Rico was in plants operating under the governmental incentive program; by 1989, this number had risen to 87 percent.” Thus, in 1982, when the U.S. economy was in a sharp recession and American unemployment rates rose to 10 percent, Puerto Rico’s industrial plants began to close. By 1986, 13,000 jobs were lost when approximately 282 plants operating under the incentive program closed. Unemployment in Puerto Rico reached 21.1% in 1985. (US Bureau of Statistics)

While the US economy quickly rebounded and unemployment rates decreased, unemployment rates in Puerto Rico remained high, prompting residents to seek
employment elsewhere. Figure XII. reveals that the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico has consistently surpassed unemployment rates in the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford Metropolitan Statistical Area, New York, and the continental United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Puerto Rico</th>
<th>Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1980</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1985</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1990</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1995</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2000</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2005</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

In 1980 and 1985, around the time when the first Puerto Rican pioneers began purchasing homes in BVL, the island’s unemployment rates reached 17.5% and 21.1%, respectively. Thus, the 1980s were a key decade in the growth of Orlando’s Puerto Rican population. Job opportunities were plentiful, and the construction and real estate industries were expanding due to the population growth and tourism that resulted from the Disney Corporation’s developments and expansions. Moreover, Orlando’s growth coincided with declining living conditions and unemployment in New York City and Puerto Rico.

These trends, the loss of manufacturing jobs and increasing unemployment, continued in the following decades. Since 1996, 45,000 manufacturing jobs have been
eliminated on the island, and while I have focused primarily on Puerto Rico’s economic situation, economic restructuring in New York during the 1990s decreased manufacturing jobs as well. During this time period, “only 14 percent of Puerto Ricans were in manufacturing jobs, their traditional industrial niche, and over 50 percent were either unemployed or out of the labor force (Grasmuck and Grosfoguel 1997, cited in Grosfoguel 2003: 140).” The more recent 2006 government shut down and 2008 teacher strike had only exacerbated the already grim employment situation by affecting professionals in addition to the already impacted sectors of the labor force.

One argument is that Puerto Rico’s economy does not produce enough high-paying jobs to retain the professionals graduating from its universities, thereby pushing the solidly middle class from the island in what is often referred to as a “brain drain.” In the 1990s, for instance, almost 40 percent of all doctors who graduated from medical schools were moving to the mainland. The same is true in other high-tech fields. Approximately one-fourth of all Puerto Ricans who moved their residence between 1985 and 1990 settled in California, Florida, and Texas. According to Francisco Rivera-Batiz and Carlos Santiago (1996):

Of those Puerto Ricans moving to the South, a significant fraction are emigrants from Puerto Rico, many of whom are highly educated workers with college degrees in professional, technical, and managerial occupations. We estimate that approximately 12,000 professionals moved to the United States from Puerto Rico during the 1985-90 period. About a third located in Florida and Texas The migration of professionals from the island of Puerto Rico continues in contemporary times.

In 2004, Daly Morales, for instance, was planning to graduate from the University of Puerto Rico with a degree in electronics. Her plan following graduation was to pack up
her husband and baby, and move to Orlando or New York City. In 2005, she shared her story with an Orlando Sentinel reporter and explained, “I have to go where the money is,” since Puerto Rico does not offer what she can potentially earn in one of the states. Similarly, Teresa Gomez, a third-grade teacher at a public school in Carolina, Puerto Rico decided to leave the underfunded, over-crowded schools of the island behind and relocate to Orlando: “I’ve come to Orlando because I need to survive. Here I can find a better-paying job in a safer environment. I feel that more people will leave Puerto Rico in the coming years because they are also tired of the professional limitations and safety concerns.”

In 2006, a budget crisis led the Puerto Rican government to shut down, causing thousands of government employees to flee the island, many of them teachers like Gomez. The island government had run out of funds. The shutdown lasted two weeks, May 2nd through May 14th, putting almost 100,000 out of work without pay, including teachers, when more than 1,500 public schools were closed. When the government of Puerto Rico closed offices and schools in May of 2006, Ileana Perez, like hundreds of other teachers, submitted an application to the Orange County, Florida public school system. Perez was hoping to find work in the Orlando area after having used up some of her savings to support herself and her children during the budget crisis: “I did not get paid for a week, through no fault of my own, and the children were missing schoolwork . . . I’m ready to jump ship . . . I don’t have anything tying me down here, so I’d take my children, my stuff, and I’d take the plunge.”

Although thousands of government employees were affected by the shutdown, they were not the only individuals that reacted to the crisis and fled. Lily Martinez, who
ran a silversmith business, made her decision to move after sales began to slow down. In an *Orlando Sentinel* story, the forty-year-old explained that she put her belongings in storage, cashed out the savings she had in a certificate of deposit, and flew to Orlando on the eve of the government shutdown: “God forgive me, but Puerto Rico is a lost cause . . . How could one live in a country like that, without security, without jobs, without tourism, without a future?”

Following the move, Lily Martinez and her friend Edith Colon, a 35-year old nurse, were among dozens of Puerto Ricans at a Kissimmee job fair that took place in May of 2006. They moved from booth to booth interacting with representatives from small businesses like CiCi’s Pizza and LS Lawn, and much larger conglomerates like Super Target and Walt Disney World. Martinez was hoping for an interview with Radisson Resort Orlando; whereas, Colon had two other job possibilities with labs that were offering on-the-job training, health benefits, and a salary that was double the $800 to $900 she earned per month at a gynecologist’s office in Puerto Rico. “Sometimes I feel for Puerto Rico, because the island is losing all of us, but I have to think about myself and my family,” said Colon. At the time, Colon was living in Hunter’s Creek, and was planning a return trip to Puerto Rico later than month; however, she was returning to Puerto Rico to try and persuade her parents, brother, and three nephews to come and join her in Florida. According to Elsie Benitez, a 41-year-old businesswoman, “The moment is now . . . I’ve heard of many people who want to leave but are still working on their plans. Others plan to leave next year . . . It’s really an exodus.”

Like the 2006 Budget Crisis, the 2008 teacher strike spurred an exodus of teachers from the island and pumped hundreds of new students into Central Florida’s schools.
Puerto Rico Teachers Federation, the island’s largest union, demanded an 18 percent increase to their $18,000 annual salary. Additionally, they asked for decision-making power on issues related to class size and class schedules. For two years, negotiations with the Department of Education failed. Then, in late 2007 the union, which represented 42,000 teachers approved a vote to strike in February of 2008. Rafael Feliciano, the union’s president, claimed the first day of the strike stopped classes in 90 percent of the island’s 1,500 schools; although, government officials said the strike shut down only 20 schools.  According to Carmen Warren, a member of the island-wide Special Education Parents Committee, “I hear it everyday . . . Parents talk about going to Orlando and other places. I know of parents that already left because of the imminent strike.”

Students and their parents are not the only ones fleeing the island. Javier Melendez, director of recruitment in the Orange County school district, saw a flood of phone calls and applications submitted by teachers. Higher wages, better benefits, and job security not only lured educators to Orlando, but other public sector workers as well. Police officers, whose starting salary is $26,400, also left their positions in Puerto Rico for better pay. In 1999, Orange County Deputy Jocelyn Aviles left her position as a San Juan municipal cop after struggling to make ends meet on her $8 per hour salary. Three of her colleagues went to the Baltimore Police Department in 2006, and two others were scheduled to arrive in Orlando in October of 2007 to look for jobs.

The island’s economic situation has not improved since the teacher strike and the government shut down. A comparison of economic conditions on and off the island of Puerto Rico in 2010 is revealing (See Figure XIII.), especially since the cost of living on the island of Puerto Rico is not much lower than in the continental United States.
Figure XIII. Unemployment, Median Income, and Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Puerto Rico</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>New York City</th>
<th>Orange County</th>
<th>Osceola County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployment</strong></td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median Income</strong></td>
<td>$18,862</td>
<td>$51,914</td>
<td>$47,661</td>
<td>$55,603</td>
<td>$50,138</td>
<td>$46,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty Rate</strong></td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census 2010, US Department of Labor

These differences in the standard of living, in combination with Puerto Rican’s ability to travel freely, has led to continual migration from the island of Puerto Rico to the mainland states. A preference for the US South has been found amongst Puerto Ricans born in the states as well, Northeasterners in particularly, due to the greater ability to advance economically.\(^{161}\) Despite the lower wages and the drop in family median income that some New York Puerto Ricans experience as a result of their move to the South, “Puerto Ricans who undertake this move are more likely to escape extreme poverty as their lower wages go further (Baker 2002:87).”\(^{162}\) Still, the migration of Puerto Ricans to Central Florida is not simply a labor migration like in so many other instances. A variety of factors fueled the exodus including an increased fear of crime, followed by talk of disorder and the deteriorating “quality of life” on the island.

**Push Factors: The Fear of Crime**
Prior to Puerto Rico’s economic troubles in the late 2000s, Puerto Ricans from the island were flocking to Central Florida for another reason: the growing fear of crime. The crash of the labor market in the 1970s resulted in severe social stress, and the rising unemployment rates were accompanied by disturbing social trends: the rise in crime being the most evident in the 1980s and 1990s.\textsuperscript{163} The statistics on murder, rape, robbery, and theft revealed that crime on the island was at crisis levels. In 1992, for instance, there were 8,669 carjackings, the highest rate in the world at the time.\textsuperscript{164} The murder rate gradually increased in the 1960s and early 1970s before skyrocketing in the early 1990s. In 1990 there were 17 murders per 100,000 people, and by 1992 that rate increased to 24.1.

The Puerto Rican government took action to deter potential criminals, still migrants continued to flee the island in search of a safer environment in the states. To circumvent the rising fear and prevent the persisting crime sprees, the taking of a vehicle with a firearm became a federal crime in 1992, with penalties including life in prison. Puerto Rico’s crime epidemic also led Governor Pedro J. Rossello to make an unprecedented decision in 1993. He used the National Guard to raid public housing projects, patrol beaches, and other high crime areas. Fearful residents welcomed this militarization. One resident of the Vista Hermosa housing project, located in San Juan, proclaimed, “‘Now we can finally enjoy some peace . . . . Before the Guard came in, there were gun battles all over the place and you didn’t dare stick your head out the window. But now I can let my kids play outside after dark. God bless them! As far as I am concerned, they can stay here forever’ (Rohter 1993b, A10).”\textsuperscript{165}
News of Puerto Rico’s crime problems reached Orlando via the press. In the mid-1990’s, the Orlando media highlighted Puerto Rico’s criminal activity and lawlessness, claiming, “In dozens of interviews in Puerto Rico, residents most often mentioned drugs and crime as the reasons thousands of middle-class Puerto Rican families have left.” The articles published by the *Orlando Sentinel* contained account after account of crime victims or bystanders fearful for their safety, and therefore motivated to migrate.

One *Orlando Sentinel* article recounts the story of the Velazquez family. In 1995, Alfredo Velazquez (33 years old) and his wife decided to leave Puerto Rico after “the incident” took place in their community, Villa Fontanta, located in Carolina, a suburb of San Juan. In was 9:30 at night when Velazquez heard gunshots two doors down from his home. The shooting continued for 8 to 10 minutes while Velazquez pressed his body against the wall on the porch. Meanwhile, his wife ran from the back laundry room to the carport, dropping to the ground and remaining there until the shooting subsided. After the incident, the children were afraid to sleep in their rooms, and the Velazquez’s started job-hunting in Orlando; the shoot-out was the final straw, and the impetus to migrate. Alfredo Velazquez quit his $48,000 per year sales job, found a better paying job in Orlando, and applied for a loan to purchase a new home in Kissimmee. New York City, where Alfredo lived as a child, was too cold, too far away, and not necessarily any safer than San Juan. Like Alfredo, the sounds of gunshots left a lasting impression on Nelson Vargas. After 32 years Vargas grew tired of all the crime and murders on the island. He had endured too many nights in his apartment while the sounds of guns and sirens echoed outside his door. Crime, he explained to an *Orlando Sentinel* reporter, is what caused him to move to Orlando as well.
While the Velazquez’ had a first hand experience with crime, others were afraid of potential crime, and did not plan to wait around in Puerto Rico for something to happen. Hilda Batista (age 27) told an Orlando Sentinel reporter that she and her husband were not victims of a crime. Still, she worried about a potential carjacking when her husband commuted to their home in Bayamon. Then, in 1994 the couple vacationed in Orlando, and Batista decided to visit a public school in the area during their trip. Batista felt the children in Orlando were growing up differently than in Puerto Rico. At a certain age they start to “coger malicia,” (get bad or take malice) she explained to the reporter. Between 1994 and 1995 the family traveled to Orlando four times searching for a home and a job. They were successful at finding both, although the $57,000 salary Anthony, Hilda’s husband, earned as a manager in his company’s computer department would drop substantially. Nevertheless, when Anthony thinks of the man he saw driving up to an intersection with a gun in hand, or the armed teenagers that were wandering around in his mother-in-law’s neighborhood, he can only think of the better life that awaits in his new South Orlando home.

While previous waves of Puerto Rican migrants left the island in search of job opportunities, some Puerto Ricans were leaving behind good jobs in search of security and a better quality of life. When my interviewees and informants referred to “the better quality of life” available in Florida they were referencing a combination of factors including: a less congested environment, warm weather, job opportunities, less expensive housing, the quality of schools, and lower rates of crime. According to one real estate broker, “I’ve had people come in the day they were mugged or carjacked and buy a home.”169 He argues that Orlando’s reputation for law and order is the biggest draw for
Puerto Ricans, more so than the housing prices, home styles, or close proximity to the Magic Kingdom. According to Pedro Reyes, a 31-year-old cab driver, in Orlando there are no bars on the windows, the doors are open, and there is more respect for the police. This “openness” and sense of safety is a sharp contrast to Puerto Rico’s middle class suburban enclaves, which the Orlando Sentinel describes as “maximum-security compounds, their perimeters sealed by security walls and garnished, in some cases, by concertina wire.” Following this depiction, the Orlando Sentinel went on to compare crime statistics in Puerto Rico and Orlando: San Juan’s homicide rate was 74 slayings per 100,000 in comparison to Orlando’s rate of 10 per 100,000. The article claimed that most homicides are linked to the drug trade, but the involvement of innocent bystanders kept many Puerto Ricans in fear.

Other Puerto Ricans contend that crime is not the only or even the most significant push factor. Sylvia Caceres, who ran the regional office of the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration in Central Florida, acknowledged that crime is driving some Puerto Ricans away from the island, “but it’s not among the primary reasons.” Take for instance Yesenia Cruz, who left Puerto Rico in 2003. She never witnessed a crime, met anyone who was mugged, shot, or killed on the island, and never had a confrontation with a criminal. “It’s not like you can’t walk out of your house, go shopping or eat at a restaurant in Puerto Rico because you’re afraid of being shot,” Cruz said. Cruz went on to explain that violence is a problem and a potential incentive for leaving the island, but crime statistics can be misleading and can lead to inaccurate perceptions: “Crime is crime, and it’s everywhere you go. It’s here in Orlando or at home in Puerto Rico, but it doesn’t mean everyone is a criminal or leaves because of it.”
Pull Factors: “A Better Quality of Life”

While there were push factors, Puerto Rico’s economic situation and the fear of crime, that prompted the mass exodus from the island, why did Puerto Ricans choose to migrate to Central Florida? And, why did the Puerto Ricans already settled in the traditional gateway cities of New York or Chicago pack up their families and head for this new destination? The presence of Disney, and the powerful imagery it fosters, in addition to other prevalent pull factors – a better quality of life, opportunities for upward social mobility, labor recruitment, social networks, and real estate opportunities – help explain the Puerto Rican exodus. Furthermore, Orlando’s bifurcated economy, with a dominating service sector industry that developed in conjunction with Orlando’s tourism empire, explains the simultaneous migrations of low-skilled, low-paid laborers and professionals from both the island of Puerto Rico and the mainland states.

Disney’s presence was certainly a contributing factor to the allure and desirability of Orlando, Florida. First, it is the establishment of Walt Disney World in 1971 that attracted new residents and tourists to the region, transforming Orlando into a global metropolis. “Since World War II an unprecedented increase in middle-class affluence and leisure time has combined with a booming automobile industry and a nationwide freeway system to make possible—even obligatory—for Americans, adults as well as children, at least one pilgrimage to Disney Land or World as a popular culture ‘mecca’ of nearly religious importance.” Many American families visit Orlando at least once during their lives, and Disney’s Magic Kingdom continues to rank #1 in the world for annual attendance figures (118,000,000 visitors in 2008, 119,100,000 in 2009, and 120,600,000 in 2010). Some of the pioneering Puerto Ricans that purchased homes in BVL, discussed
in Chapter 1, first visited the region as tourists, on vacation. Similarly, many of the
Puerto Rican I encountered during my fieldwork were familiar with Metropolitan
Orlando as tourists long before they considered the destination as a permanent residence.
The positive tourist experience, combined with the powerful imagery invoked by Disney
was a contributing pull factor, which added to Orlando’s appeal.

The powerful, family-oriented imagery—of safety, order, and pleasure—in invoked
by Disney contributed to the impressions of the “better quality of life” available in
Orlando. Disney’s dominating presence in childhood entertainment prior to the
development of the actual theme parks made the corporation a household name. Disney’s
products and creations, intended for mass entertainment and consumption, became
symbols and experiences that all Americans held in common. And, these products
appealed to and were consumed by a multitude of ethnic and racial groups in the United
States and globally. Disney’s Magic Kingdom only solidified the corporation’s
significance as a key symbol in American life and popular culture. Anthropologist
Alexander Moore (1980), writing during the early phases of the Puerto Rican migration,
describes Walt Disney World as “the most technologically developed and rationally
managed amusement park the world has ever known,” and points out that the park “has
had tremendous financial and popular success not only among North Americans but
among Latin Americans as well.”

Walt Disney World is described as “an idealized town” that draws on nostalgia
and popular rather than academic concepts of history. The parks are a source of
“organized, routinized play,” entertainment, pleasure, and fantasy, and a site where some
of the values that “have been lost in the megalopolis” can be reinstated. As Margaret
King (1981) points out, Disney World contains all time modalities except the present; emphasis is on the past and future. Therefore, nostalgia is an important emotion invoked by Disney’s creations. These nostalgic feelings are not necessarily a desire for another place, but the longing for another time. It is no coincidence that Puerto Ricans, who longed for the way of life they had lost in Puerto Rico—“I really loved Orlando . . . I felt it was the perfect place for families from Puerto Rico to buy . . . the way of life was the way of life we had had in Puerto Rico 25 years ago and had lost because of crime”—fled to a space where images of protection, security, and nostalgia for the past prevailed. According to David Johnson (1981), “It has been said that the Disney theme parks are the cities America wishes it had; immune to death and taxes, clean, orderly, crime-free family style environments of optimism and nostalgia, politically independent, with the advantages but few of the vices of real cities.”

In addition to the lure of Disney, Florida has a climate similar to that in Puerto Rico, a place where New Yorkers can avoid shoveling snow and escape the cold winters, and islanders can continue to enjoy a tropical climate with mild winters. Ideas about nature and the tropics reveal the significance of the natural environment to judgments about Orlando’s quality of life, which contrast with historic notions of tropicality. The tropics are not simply a physical space—the horizontal band of the earth’s surface between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn—but a conceptual space as well. Through photographs and travel narratives, colonial representations of the tropics depicted the Caribbean as a place for tourist consumption, and these images have remained firmly imbedded in the Western imagination. The tropics were defined as something culturally, politically, and environmentally distinctive, exotic, or as an imagined zone of
otherness. Tropicality has a close relationship with the history of European expansion since the idea of the tropics developed as a result of European voyages of discovery; additionally, the tropics were not only spaces for tourist consumption for Europeans, but places of disease. Ideas about Florida’s tropical environment are a sharp contrast to colonial ideas of tropicality. The Florida climate was something familiar to Puerto Ricans from the island, not exotic, foreign, or dangerous. This “palm-tree paradise,” as Landstar Homes, the builders of BVL called it, had mass appeal to Puerto Ricans from the island and the states. Of course this tropical Florida climate appealed to non-Hispanics as well since this space of tourist consumption and tropical living, with a climate that mirrored the Caribbean, was marketed as an American place. After all, Orlando is home to one of the nation’s most symbolic popular culture icons, a place associated with pleasurable, tourist experiences and where families and retirees could also avoid harsh living in the “arctic wasteland of northern cities.” I discuss the design elements, which created a cultural landscape that reinforces Orlando’s tropical identity with greater detail in Chapter 3.

In addition to the benefits associated with Orlando’s climate were the benefits associated with less urban landscape. The overcrowding and traffic that could be found in major cities was perceived as escapable since Florida had a reputation for having peaceful, suburban living. Hilda Batista and her husband Anthony Alicea, for example, were amazed by how little noise they heard on the Central Florida streets. In Puerto Rico’s cities they grew accustomed to the density of people, loudness of the streets, limited parking spaces, and congested roads. The sounds of honking horns echoed throughout the streets, and it was not uncommon to be woken from a deep sleep by the
sound of a car alarm. In contrast, Orlando’s landscape and soundscape was described as “urban, but calm,” the couple explained to an Orlando Sentinel journalist. “It was, as so many leaving the island repeat like a mantra, ‘peaceful and quiet.’” Landstar Homes, according to employee Alonso, gave sales pitches to family members emphasizing the better education and better health care available in Central Florida. For many, Orlando was a promised land, and a good place to raise kids and find some peace and quiet.

According to Tom Martinez, former president of the Asociacion Borinquena de Florida Central, Orlando has a lot of appeal to Puerto Ricans who hoped to leave behind a crowded island with high levels of unemployment to enjoy the undeveloped landscape: “It’s like a promised land here . . . We’ve got all this wide-open space.”

In June of 2007, I visited the home of Myra Santiago, a Puerto Rican transplant from Bronx, New York. She had lived in her exquisite home in Okoee, FL for 15 years, and she emphasized its close proximity to Windermere, a town within Orange County known for its wealthy residents, amongst them basketball player Shaquille O’Neal and golf player Tiger Woods. I asked Myra why she decided to leave the Bronx for suburban Central Florida, and she replied, “In the Bronx there was lots of noise and crime. I wanted to go somewhere undeveloped to get away from all that. When I came here it was just dirt roads and orange groves. There was nothing here, and that’s how I wanted it.”

Susan Baker (2002) points out that Puerto Ricans from the Northeast were attracted to Orlando’s economic opportunities, but in making their decisions they were not as concerned about finding already existing Hispanic enclaves in their new settlement destinations. She explains that the Puerto Ricans leaving New York, “are not as dependent on established communities to maintain strong ethnic ties because they are
generally more ‘Americanized’ than their island-born counterparts.”

During several of my encounters with Puerto Ricans that migrated from New York City, they revealed that they intentionally selected suburban residences that were not concentrated with Puerto Ricans. They were avoiding Hispanic concentrated residential enclaves. Like Myra, these migrants were attracted to Orlando because it provided an escape from the overpopulation, congestion, development, and for some, the hyper-presence of other Puerto Ricans. Of course the residential composition in many of these suburbs would later change as more and more Puerto Ricans followed the initial pioneers. Myra, however, remained the only Puerto Rican resident in her Okoee suburb at the time of our 2007 interview.

According to anthropologist Jorge Duany (2010), “compared to earlier movements from Puerto Rico to New York or Chicago, the recent movement to Orlando is more strongly associated with efforts to maintain or achieve middle-class status.”

Amongst his first-generation informants from Puerto Rico, economic considerations—finding a job or earning a higher salary in Orlando—did not figure prominently among the motivations for migration to Orlando. Instead, informants mentioned educational opportunities, professional advancement, “quality of life,” climate, and health concerns more frequently. This is true among middle and upper class Puerto Rican migrants. And, according to Jorge Duany, this is a major difference between middle class and lower class migrant flows, which are primarily motivated by the search for employment abroad.

Luis Martinez-Fernandez (2004) explains that Puerto Ricans are attracted to Orlando because of the region’s frontier nature, and describes Florida as a social and political frontier. In Wild West shows, dime novels, and Western movies, the frontier of
the American West is depicted as a place of violence, where Native populations and American settlers clashed during the 1800s, and political institutions and social life lacked order. In contrast, the Orlando “frontier” was imagined as a peaceful, sanitized, family space, due partly to the powerful presence of Disney. In addition to frontier imagery being evoked to signal the lower population density and the wide-open spaces of the sprawling suburban or rural landscape, Orlando was perceived as a frontier that offered a fresh, new start and a greater degree of social mobility. In this way Orlando mirrored the American frontier of the West. Martinez-Fernandez explains that years and years of poverty and marginalization has stigmatized Puerto Ricans in New York, but Orlando is a place where Puerto Ricans could re-invent themselves and be something besides a “bunch of spics.” A non-career politician could aspire to a high elected position because Orlando “is a frontier free from old party bosses and ancestral party affiliation,” and an individual with a modest income could become a homeowner, for instance. On the island of Puerto Rico “the anachronistic social hierarchy” persists, firmly guarding the doors to the upper class.

For Felix Sandoval Orozco, an accountant who moved to Orlando in 2001 from a suburb in Rio Piedras, Orlando was a place filled with promise. To escape unemployment in Puerto Rico he, like so many others, made the move: “I really like[d] the environment and the orderly way of life here. I used to read many stories in the Puerto Rican newspaper about real-estate opportunities and jobs here, so I came.” For many Puerto Rican migrants, Orlando was an unexplored open space, filled with new opportunities. The frontier imagery that circulated about Orlando, Florida emphasizing the lower population density, safety, and wide-open, undeveloped spaces contributed to the “rural,”
nostalgic appeal of the region. Of course the reality is much different, especially for the flocks that came after the initial pioneers only to find the market saturated and the landscape beginning to resemble the places they left behind.

**Pull Factors: Social Networks**

Another significant pull factor that brought Puerto Ricans from the island and mainland states to Central Florida were the social networks established in Central Florida, and the perception of Orlando as a welcoming new home for Spanish-speakers. Orlando’s close proximity to Puerto Rico meant that family members could quickly and cost efficiently travel between Orlando and the island. As the early pioneers began establishing a Hispanic presence in communities like Buenaventura Lakes and Meadow Woods, it only drew more Puerto Ricans. Greg Grafal, his wife Isabel, and their two children followed cousins to Osceola County in 1985. The adjustment, they said, was not difficult since their children had learned some English from watching cable television in Puerto Rico, and Osceola County offered many of the things they could get back home. As word spread of all that Central Florida had to offer, Puerto Ricans from the island and mainland increasingly migrated in numbers far exceeding the “Great Migration” of the 1950s and 1960s.

Jim Carlson Otero’s experiences also reveal the significance of social networks and chain migration to Orlando’s Puerto Rican exodus. Ortero’s parents came to Orlando in 1984 to get away from the island’s crime wave. They did not want to move to Miami, and Orlando’s weather was as cold as they were willing to tolerate. Since their 1984 move, 40 relatives have followed. According to Jim Otero, a community outreach coordinator for the city of Orlando, “Family is a No. 1 reason that people move here.”
Like the Ortero’s, Jose and Evelyn Julbe, residents of Hubert Avenue in Pine Crest, Tampa, were responsible for the migration of multiple families. The couple visited Tampa in 1975 for their honeymoon, and two years later the couple decided to leave Brooklyn with their two children and head south. Over the next three decades the Julbe’s helped over two dozen neighbors, including their sisters and brothers, move to Hubert Avenue as well. Yet, in 2003 only 5 families remained on Hubert; the remainder had moved to Orlando or Kissimmee. These individuals began their migration when they left Puerto Rico for Brooklyn, only to go to Tampa before selecting Orlando as their newest destination. “I think it’s really a Latino phenomenon”, said Tony Morejon, Hillsborough County’s Hispanic liaison. “We want our family close to us, and if that means moving to be closer to them, we do.”

Many Puerto Ricans were prompted to settle in Central Florida after becoming aware of the employment opportunities available, spurred by tourism and population growth, at times through contact with employment recruiters or from information that flowed through social networks. In Orlando it was possible to get a better job, and if the job did not pay well, there was the comfort of greater job security. For islanders a better salary meant a nicer house, or in the case of New Yorkers, the opportunity to become a homeowner for the first time and get a slice of the American Dream. At a time when manufacturing jobs in New York were on the decline, and the Puerto Rican government’s bankruptcy and instability left many without job security, Orlando, with its bifurcated economy, was welcoming to both professionals and low wage-workers.

The United States and the island of Puerto Rico have a long history of labor relations dating back to Operation Bootstrap, discussed earlier in the chapter, and Mayor
Robert Wagner’s recruitment campaign for New York City factories. Labor recruitment strategies led to Puerto Rican settlements throughout the United States. For example, Puerto Ricans came to Hawai’i in the 1900s to work on sugar cane plantations after being recruited by the Hawai’ian Sugar Plantation Association (HSPA). Likewise, in the 1940s Operation Bootstrap facilitated the importation of Puerto Rican laborers to Lorain, Ohio to work with the National Tube Company, a division of United States Steel.

Like Wagner, HSPA, and the National Tube Company, Florida employers have looked to the island of Puerto Rico for laborers, and the Disney Corporation’s employment recruitment strategies provided incentives for Puerto Ricans migrating to Central Florida. In the 1990s, Puerto Ricans willing to migrate from the island were offered $900 to relocate to Orlando. If they did not last three months they had to repay a pro rata portion of this allowance, and cast members, the title of Disney’s service sector employees, who notified the company of potential workers in Puerto Rico received a bonus.200

On December 5, 1998, for instance, the Disney Corporation ran a full-page advertisement in *El Nuevo Día*, a newspaper distributed daily in Puerto Rico. The advertisement pictured a Hispanic male with broom and dustpan in hand, and a shadow of Mickey Mouse behind him. The advertisement read, “Disney is hiring now! Which means you have the opportunity to celebrate the New Year with a new career and new opportunities to live and work in Central Florida, one of the fastest growing areas in the United States.” Immediate openings were advertised for lifeguards, custodial workers, housekeeping, and merchandise, with salaries starting at $5.95 per hour. The advertisement ended, “We will be in San Juan, Puerto Rico December 3- December 5,
1998, so you must call immediately to begin the interview process . . . to be considered for this magical opportunity.” Recruitment by the tourism industry continues to contribute to Orlando’s low-wage sector of the economy.

Disney’s labor recruitment took place not only on the island of Puerto Rico, but along the Texas-Mexico border area as well. While Puerto Ricans were being recruited for service sector jobs in Disney’s conglomerate, Mexican laborers were sought out for construction jobs in Disney’s Celebration. In 1991, the plan for Disney’s new town, Celebration, U.S.A., was announced. Two award-winning companies were selected to construct the Celebration homes, Town and Country from Chicago and David Weekley from Houston. Although both companies had award-winning reputations, construction is local. The unionized labor force available in Chicago or Houston was not present in Florida, and the companies had difficulty locating skilled workers since there was little unemployment in the construction industry.

Instead of attracting skilled laborers with increased salaries, the companies preferred to recruit laborers south of the border. “As a result, many of those who began to build Celebration were undocumented Mexican agricultural workers, unskilled in construction and underpaid for the semi-skilled work for which they were hastily recruited. Workers proficient in planting crops were learning how to do stucco jobs overnight.”\textsuperscript{201} According to Jorge Comesanas, a Celebration resident in Andrew Ross’ ethnography \textit{The Celebration Chronicles} (2000), “If the INS came in here and rounded up the illegals, Celebration wouldn’t exist.”\textsuperscript{202}

In February of 1998, US Border Patrol agents raided one of the town’s construction sites and sixteen undocumented workers were caught framing homes.
According to Rick Greenier, the Border Patrol agent in charge of the Orlando Office, “we got an anonymous call from a construction worker at the end of January who said he couldn’t get a job there . . . He told us that out of 100 workers at one site, about 90 of them were undocumented.” According to Jaime Garcia, a Celebration subcontractor, Hispanic construction workers are the objects of unfair harassment: “Some of them don’t like us because we can frame eight houses before they finish one . . . Last year this happened after a guy who was fired for screwing up called immigration.” The construction company and the Disney Corporation escaped all charges.

Of course the Disney Corporation was not the only employer that looked to Puerto Rico for laborers. Florida hospitals, schools, the police force, and other private sector employers have actively recruited nurses, doctors, engineers, and teachers from the island by offering competitive wages and better benefits, and, at times, even a relocation bonus. In 2006, during the Puerto Rican government’s shut down the Orange County school system sent officials on a two-day recruitment drive to interview hundreds of teachers. District officials even planned to offer monetary incentives for those teachers who signed up for areas where the county was experiencing teacher shortages. According to Javier Melendez, senior director of recruitment for Orange County schools, the district planned to fill about 2,400 vacancies by mid-June of 2006. However, news got out on the island and the district received more than 6,000 documents via fax, including resumes and professional certificates in just two days. Residents from the island of Puerto Rico were convinced that Florida could offer them “a better quality of life,” higher pay, and greater job security, and that message circulated among social networks, pulling Puerto Ricans from the island and from the mainland states to this new
destination of migration. Figure XIV reveals the difference in average weekly wages in 2011 between New York, Puerto Rico, and various parts of Florida. Osceola County, which was commonly referred to as “the service sector county” has far lower salaries than other parts of the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure XIV. Average Weekly Wages in 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami-Dade County</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In more recent years, the tourism industry has suffered from the United State’s economic crisis and individuals have realized it is increasingly difficult to make ends meet in Metropolitan Orlando, particularly for service sector workers who are earning slightly above the minimum wage, the minimum wage, or below. In the State, approximately 3.8 million workers or 53.7 percent of all wage and salary workers were paid an hourly rate. Figure XV shows the median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers in the state of Florida. The majority of individuals I encountered during my fieldwork working in the service industry earned far less. One of the problems for many of the hourly wage-workers I encountered was the fluctuation in the number of hours they were allowed to work per week. Many of the female housekeepers received under thirty hours of work per week, but were unable to subsidize their low income with a second job due to their inconsistent work schedules. According to the U.S. Bureau of
Labor Statistics, there were 253,000 hourly-paid workers in Florida earning at or below the prevailing Federal minimum wage of $7.25 in 2010. Thus, 6.7 percent of Florida’s hourly-paid workers are being paid at or below the federal minimum wage. “Women workers with hourly pay at or below the Federal minimum increased by 40,000 over the year bringing their share to 68.4 percent of the total, while the total for men decreased slightly.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Below Federal Minimum Wage</th>
<th>At Federal Minimum Wage</th>
<th>Below Federal Minimum Wage</th>
<th>At Federal Minimum Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Florida’s minimum wage rate is the same as the Federal rate, whereas Puerto Rico’s rate is lower.

“Fooled by the Pixie Dust”

Despite the rampant job growth that resulted from the developing tourism industry and the lure of the Disney Corporation, low-wages characterize the sunshine sector of the economy. In the Central Florida case, rapid growth did not mean higher earnings. Earnings per worker remain low because of the weakness of unions in the South, the lower skill level of the workforce, and individual’s willingness to work for less due to the favorable climate and improved quality of life. One commentator remarked,
Those who believe in the idea of a ‘free market’ say that when a commodity is in scarce supply (in this case labor), the price (wages) should go up. But the free market is only a theory and doesn’t really exist, especially in a company town like Orlando. Consequently, Disney and the other corporations that followed turned to Puerto Rico where the minimum wage was lower for potential employees. In 1993, the starting salary for a Disney employee was $5.85 per hour, and after 1998 rose only to $6.25 per hour. After five years, workers were earning $10.43 per hour. Still, Disney’s wages were relatively competitive by Florida standards. Universal Studios started employee’s at $6.15 an hour and Sea World $6.05. In comparison, Puerto Rico’s minimum wage was $4.10 per hour, in 2012.

During an interview with Maritza, a migrant from Puerto Rico, I asked about her experiences as a Disney employee. She spent six years working for room service in the Disney Vacation Club’s timeshare, and the work, she claimed, was easy. If a guest needed something she would just bring it. But, “It was bad working for them,” she explained, “you get good benefits, but the pay isn’t good.” At Disney Maritza started at $5.95 an hour, and at the end of six years she was earning $8.49 per hour. Once she left Disney she found employment at a Lowe’s store, where she is currently employed, and after three years she was earning $13.00 per hour.

During another interview with Maritza’s family member, Rodrigo, he described his girlfriend’s experience as a Disney employee for two years: “Disney has a work opportunity, it sounds like an internship program. They interview you, ask you your talents, and position you over there [Florida]. My ex-girlfriend did it for two years.” Her experience, like so many others, was not a positive one. “The people eventually leave,” Rodrigo explained, “they are usually overworked and underpaid. But, people react like,
‘oh my god I’m gonna be with Disney.’ They sell them a dream, and they come back overstressed.” “So, why do people leave the island to work at Disney?” I asked. Rodrigo replied, “people move because $7.15 an hour here in Florida is still better than $5.15 an hour in Puerto Rico.”

One of my interviewees explained that many people are “fooled by Disney’s pixie dust,” a reference to the magical dust that the fairy Tinker Bell sprinkles over the central characters to help them fly in the Disney film Peter Pan. Individuals move to Orlando with great expectations that are wrapped up in the positive imagery and early tourist experiences of Disney World. They forget that these pleasurable experiences and the utopian environment were carefully crafted by the Disney Corporation, and are a sharp contrast to the realities of life as a service sector employee in the tourism industry. There are four hierarchically stratified categories of workers in the Magic Kingdom: “the menial workers, who do the transporting, cooking, cleaning and other services, mostly underground and out of sight of visitors;” the guides who are very visible, with routinized roles; the technicians who create and maintain the machinery; and management. Disney produces, constructs, and manufactures experiences by carefully controlling and manipulating the environments in their theme parks, and a large part of the Disney imagery is keeping work segregated from the spaces of leisure. The parks are designed “to promote frontstage views and to suppress backstage information from public awareness,” thus the casual visitor is wholly unaware of the levels and tunnel systems beneath the park service:

In this underground level is the wiring for all the power, sewage and other waste pipes, and the distribution points for food and other supplies. Above all, this level contains the staging areas where thousands of employees prepare for their work
aboveground; here they can go to the appropriate ‘lands,’ get into and out costumes, even eat in their own cafeterias (Friedlander 1971).”

So, the daily reality for many of these workers was a frugal salary and minimal benefits, and a workday where they “performed low-skill, repetitive jobs while wearing expensive handcrafted costumes and operating quite expensive electronic and mechanical equipment.” This is a sharp contrast to the pleasurable imagery invoked by the Disney’s tourist experience.

During an interview with Luis Martinez, a commercial banker in the City of Orlando, he explained that the migration to Central Florida has slowed down substantially because people are realizing that Florida is not what they expected. “You have to work very hard to make the dream happen,” Martinez claimed, and “working hard” in Central Florida at times means having two jobs or finding other entrepreneurial ways of earning extra money. During an interview with a job counselor in the Osceola County school district she paused for a moment and pondered how it is that her students can do it, how they can live off of $7.25 per hour. In the meantime, she has the task of helping adults who are completing a GED find work in the service sector industry. One of the challenges to incoming migrants is their language skills, as one employee in the Osceola County school district explained: “You have people who are professionals in their country that are applying for entry level positions. At times it is because of their language skills. They are scared, so they apply lower.” She offered me the example of a woman she knows with teaching experience in Puerto Rico, who decided to seek employment in the food service industry. Then there is Sarah, a county employee that helps residents secure housing and employment, who claimed that many of the people she encounters are actually underemployed and over qualified, before jokingly asking, “What
are they supposed to do, lie and say they only have high school?” Unfortunately, this is not a joke and during interviews I have encountered residents who do in fact lie about their educational qualifications to obtain a service sector job in Orlando’s tourist based economy. So, while Orlando has provided some individuals and families with the opportunity to have a better quality of life, others have experienced downward class mobility as a result of their move to this new destination of migration.

The factors that caused individuals and families to migrate to Orlando, Florida from either the island of Puerto Rico or from the mainland states differs from case to case. Individuals from the island of Puerto Rico most often cited a fear of crime and the declining economy of Puerto Rico as push factors. Similarly, Puerto Ricans from the mainland states highlighted the increased safety and minimal criminal activity as one quality of life improvement offered in this new destination. Amongst Puerto Ricans from the island, Florida was attractive because it was perceived as less congested, quiet, and peaceful; had a lower cost of living; more affordable housing options; better quality schools; job opportunities; warm weather, similar to the island’s climate; and a developing Hispanic community that would make the settlement process easier. Puerto Ricans migrating directly from the mainland states expressed many of these same pull factors. Florida was perceived as a safer, more peaceful living environment; housing costs were substantially lower and the opportunity to become a suburban homeowner presented a new possibility; the climate was more favorable than in many of the Northeastern Puerto Rican settlements; and, although the salary was not always comparable to wages up North, jobs were plentiful in the South at a time when the manufacturing industries were declining in the North. Finally, the cost of living was
substantially lower than in Northern metropolitan areas. The Puerto Rican migration, prompted by a variety of push and pull factors had far reaching impacts and was substantial enough to transform Metropolitan Orlando’s landscape and soundscape, the subjects of the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 3
THE LATINIZATION OF METROPOLITAN ORLANDO

On June 28, 2007 I sat in the audience of the Hispanic Summit while the mayor of Orlando, Buddy Dyer, addressed the audience at the Orlando International Airport’s Hyatt hotel. The mayor used the term “melting pot” to describe the region, and while he was not sure about the actual number of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida—“400,000, 500,000 or 600,000”—the mayor said that he was quite certain that the number was larger than in San Juan, Puerto Rico. When Henry Cisneros, former mayor of San Antonio, Texas and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development during the Clinton administration, took the stage he reminded the audience that, “it is easy to overlook the Hispanic community with the tourism in the region, but the Hispanicization of the country cannot be overlooked!” Of all the things we see as different, he remarked, naming globalization, biotechnology, and other megatrends, he argued that one of the influences would be the Latino population and the resulting Latinization.

Indeed, the influence of the Hispanic population can be traced historically as immigrants and migrants arrived in American cities—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Miami—and transformed the spaces within these cities. As Hispanics increasingly settle in non-traditional destinations, Central Florida in this case, and become the majority-minority in cities and counties throughout the United States, the Latinization of the United States intensifies. Cisneros highlighted two reasons for the increasing Hispanic population: “our families are larger and our families are younger.” He then left the many corporate sponsors and business owners in the audience with an important message: “It is no longer corporate good will to reach out to the Latino
community, it is now core business strategy due to Hispanic’s spending power and their substantial part in the economy.”

This chapter explores the Latinization of Metropolitan Orlando by discussing a number of changes to the region, which resulted from the migration of Hispanics. First, I discuss the region’s demographic changes and Hispanic’s increasing presence in the school system. I also document the impact to the physical landscape and built environment, which reflects and signals the presence of a Caribbean and/or Latin American population. The growing political power of the Hispanic community, and the presence of elected officials that brought resources and awareness to the needs of Hispanic residents is another dimension of Metropolitan Orlando’s Latinization. Similarly, the increasing economic power of the Hispanic population, which results from the consumer strength of the population and the increasing number of Hispanic-owned businesses, has altered the commercial landscape and business community. All of these elements point to the increasing economic, political, and cultural influence of the Hispanic community, and the Latinization that has resulted from this massive migration.

Latinization, quite different from ethnic enclave formation, is “a power process of social differentiation and cultural production” based on the notions of a shared Latino/a or Hispanic identity and latinidad. Latinidad is “an analytical concept that signifies a category of identification, familiarity, and affinity . . . [and] identifies a subject position (the state of being Latino/a in a given discursive space).” Thus, Latinization refers to specific social practices and particular sites where discourses of latinidad are produced and performed over time and in space. It is important to recognize that the process of Latinization is produced not only by Hispanics, but also by institutions and businesses
owned by non-Hispanic. For example, the Applebee’s located in BVL offers Latin Karaoke Thursdays and a Latin DJ Fridays and Saturdays, while the Orlando Magic basketball franchise adorned El Magic Jerseys on “Latin Night” in recognition of their Hispanic fan base. These gestures, attempts to appeal to an important segment of the consumer market, contributes to the visibility of the Hispanic population and creates a shared sense of culture, in this case through displays of the Spanish language and Spanish music, which contributes to the Latinization of the region.

Latinization is also produced by Hispanic people and Hispanic-based institutions. Hence, Latinization becomes evident and operationalized by tracking the transformations to institutions and societal sources that are visible in the landscape and the soundscape. Visible displays of Hispanic cultural practices and Latinidad in specific institutional sites and societal sources—for instance museums, churches, schools, social service agencies, restaurants, nightclubs, social and cultural movements, government, the market, and media—are indicative of processes of Latinization, while auditory changes whereby Spanish music and the Spanish language become dominant reaffirm the transformations. I therefore track the increasing Latinization of Osceola County and the Central Florida region by focusing on the demographic changes, increasing presence of Hispanic people, Hispanic cultural practices, and the display of Latinidad, and I discuss the transformations experienced by a small sample of societal sources: schools, landscapes, government, and economic markets in the following pages.

I have refrained from using the term “ethnic enclave” to describe the transformations to the Central Florida region and instead prefer the term “Latinization.” This is because the transformations to the region are not only evident in the spaces where
Hispanics are residentially concentrated. Additionally, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics have dispersed throughout the Orlando-Kissimmee area, creating residential concentrations in a number of communities. However, residential concentration does not necessarily denote an economic ethnic enclave, the conceptualization originally introduced by Alejandro Portes (1980) that viewed ethnic enterprise as a vehicle for first-generation upward mobility.\(^{216}\) Ethnic enclaves are “assemblages of enterprises owned and operated by members of the same cultural/linguistic groups that concentrate in an identifiable geographic area, maintain intense relations with one another, and hire significant numbers of their co-ethnics.”\(^{217}\) Most immigrant groups, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Indian, and Chinese, for instance, have displayed a pattern whereby co-ethnics settle in concentrated communities to provide social support networks and generate small businesses to fulfill consumption needs.\(^{218}\) Arguably, enclaves do not simply emerge from residential concentration, but from “the exceptional rise of a number of integrated ethnic firms . . . that provide employment for a sizable proportion of workers from the same minority.”\(^{219}\) While Hispanic-owned businesses, both small and large, are providing job opportunities and self-employment to some Hispanics in Central Florida, it is the tourism and hospitality industries that provide a large bulk of low-skilled jobs, and national corporations that provide employment to professionals. Therefore, it is questionable whether a community like BVL, with its combination of franchises, Hispanic-owned businesses, and non-Hispanic owned establishments is in fact an economic ethnic enclave, particularly since many of these businesses are small, family owned enterprises that cannot employ a sizeable portion of the residential population.
Demographic Transformations

Since the mid 1980s the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area has seen an influx of Hispanics, primarily Puerto Rican. In Osceola County, for instance, the number of Hispanic residents rose from 1,089 in 1980 (2% of the total population), 12,866 in 1990 (12% of the total population), 50,727 in 2000 (29% of the total population), 115,762 in 2009 (42% of the total population), to 122,252 (45.5% of the total population) in 2010. In comparison, Non-Hispanic whites were 40.3% of the total population in 2010. These demographic transformations are making many non-Hispanic whites a minority for the first time in their lives. As the Orlando Sentinel pointed out: “In the New Orlando of 2020, nearly one in every three residents will be Hispanic—with a new generation on the rise. In BVL and the surrounding neighborhoods, a slice of that New Orlando already exists.”

The Hispanic wave that is shaping the region is most evident in places like BVL, Meadow Woods, Poinciana, Azalea Park, Kissimmee, Oak Ridge, Southchase, Union Park, Pine Castle, Deltona, and increasingly Hunters Creek. As a result of the demographic shifts, these places have become identified as “Puerto Rican places” in public discourse, with names like “Little Puerto Rico,” “the 79th District of Puerto Rico,” and Boricuas Viven Libre (Puerto Ricans live free) for BVL specifically. In 1998, for example, Edgar Pagan left the Bronx with his two sons to relocate to Orlando. By 2005 the 47 year-old was working as a salad chef at the Citrus Club (a ritzy private club frequented by Orlando’s top executives and entrepreneurs), and living in the Azalea Park neighborhood, which was 59% Hispanic according to the 2010 US Census. Pagan refers to his community as “Spanish Harlem” because “it’s got Hispanics, lots of Hispanics.”
Mexicans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans.” There are only a “couple of whites, black Americans. I ran into a Russian family,” Pagan told an Orlando Sentinel reporter.223

As early as 1986 the Orlando Sentinel was reporting on the Latinization of the region; however, it was labeled as more of a “trickle than a downpour.”224 Carlos Licea is quoted in the article, and describes the surge in the Puerto Rican population as “the big change.”225 Licea is a native of Cuba and the managing editor of the Spanish weekly newspaper La Prensa, The Orlando Sentinel article went on to explain how poor economic conditions in Puerto Rico during the 1980s changed the ratio in Orlando from two to one, Puerto Ricans over Cubans. By 1989, the Orlando Sentinel was using the term “Latinization” to describe the ways that businesses and schools were adapting to the “quiet” migration of Hispanics:

Evidence of the increased Latinization is staggering. Five years ago, there were no interstate moving companies serving only Hispanics. Today there are five Hispanic-owned companies that bring several thousand Latins every year from Puerto Rico, New York and Chicago. Hispanics can do business in Spanish at 24-hour, bilingual teller machines. School-age children can attend classes taught in Spanish. Last year a Puerto Rican opened the area’s first store to sell only Spanish-language books.226

By 1989 there was also a reported 180 Hispanic doctors operating in the region, 40 lawyers, and 56 Spanish-language churches. There was talk of a Hispanic bank being opened, and a group of Hispanic businessmen started a low-power television station in August of 1989 to begin airing programs in Spanish. In August of 1989 the Orlando Sentinel, in an article entitled “They Are Citizens,” warned the general population about the onslaught of Hispanics, the possible changes that could affect “all” Orlando residents due to the community’s changing ethnic and social makeup, and predicted that the flow of migration would only increase in the coming years:
They are popping up everywhere, and we can expect thousands more to migrate to Central Florida in the next year. In one way or another, all of us will be affected by the sudden change in our community’s ethnic and social makeup. Our public schools already are experiencing the onslaught of so many new non-English speaking students. Surprisingly, most teachers (including university professors), journalists, civil servants, the clergy, politicians and other taxpayers know little about them.\textsuperscript{227}

By 1991 Osceola County had experienced one of the nation’s largest Hispanic population surges since 1980, with the Hispanic population increasing by an astounding 1,199 percent. Jorge Del Pinal, ethnic and Hispanic statistics chief for the U.S. Census Bureau in Washington D.C. commented, “‘I can’t think of any place where I’ve seen that . . . That’s an amazing figure.’”\textsuperscript{228} Places like BVL were no longer monopolized by dominant North American norms, social practices, and styles. Instead, competition increased for cultural and linguistic space. In 1991, for instance, Lizette Pagan “traded the Caribbean breezes of Ponce, a city on Puerto Rico’s southern coast, for the wider opportunities of what was then the mostly rural, wooded area of Osceola County called Buenaventura Lakes.”\textsuperscript{229} She had no idea how many other Latinos would soon follow stating, “It has changed drastically . . . I didn’t know so many other Puerto Ricans would come. This is like back in the years after [World War II] when everyone went to New York.”\textsuperscript{230} In 1991 Greg Grafal told the Orlando Sentinel that the adjustment from Puerto Rico was not difficult when he, his wife Isabel, and two children followed family members to Osceola County in 1985 since Osceola County offered many of the same benefits as home. “‘You can buy Spanish products here. . . We can go to the stores and buy seasonings we need,’” Grafal remarked. Indeed, by the 1990s commercial establishments were beginning in Osceola County, BVL in particular, were beginning to offer products and services for the Hispanic population. The Blockbuster Video store in
BVL, for instance, was the only of 27 Central Florida stores to offer American-made movies dubbed or subtitled in Spanish so that residents could see the movies *Rain Man* or *Problem Child* in Spanish. “Almost everything we get in English, we get in Spanish. . . We felt it was something we needed,” said Blockbuster store manager Scott Koob. By 2006, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported that “signs of the Puerto Rican community’s vibrancy are everywhere,” naming real estate offices, car repair shops, banks, supermarkets, dance clubs, churches, and funeral homes that catered to Hispanics.

Long time residents of the area recall how things were before the influx of Hispanics. During an interview at the home of Chris Williams, a 75-year-old retiree that has lived in BVL for 24 years, he pointed out all of the neighboring houses that were once occupied by “White, English-speaking people.” “I used to interact with the people, but there has been a gradual change. They are all gone now, for various reasons: relocated, died, normal transitions.” When Hilda Berrios first moved to Kissimmee, “it was really a nice small town. But it grew too fast.” She decided to move to Lake County to escape the congestion; however, she often returns to Kissimmee to shop and visit family. According to Berrios, a native of Puerto Rico, “there’s so many Puerto Ricans, it’s a Spanish country over there [in Kissimmee].”

**A Presence in the School System**

One of the first institutions to feel the effects of the changing demographics were the public schools, suddenly faced with an influx of Spanish-speaking youth. Hispanics made up the fastest growing segment of students in Orange County’s public schools, thereby increasing the demand for special language classes. In 1988, for instance, 8,043 Hispanics accounted for 9% of Orange County’s total school population; whereas, in
1980 they accounted for 3.7%. The schools located in the areas where many of the Hispanic families were settling experienced even larger increases in enrollment: Colonial High School 18%, Jackson Middle 32%, and Englewood Elementary 36% of the total student body.\textsuperscript{236}

Osceola County experienced similar growth in Hispanic enrollment. By 1991 the \textit{Orlando Sentinel} reported that, “the growth [in the Hispanic population] is most striking in Osceola [County]”.\textsuperscript{237} The growth could be traced through annual student enrollments which showed a 3,400 percent jump in Hispanic students since 1975, and report cards at some Osceola schools were being sent home in Spanish and English. Then, in 1994 \textit{Orlando Sentinel} journalist Michael McLeod visited Gateway High School, located 5 miles from BVL in Osceola County, and reported on his findings. When the high school first opened in 1986, non-Hispanic Whites made up the vast majority of enrollment; but, as school enrollment grew the percentages shifted and by 1993 the numbers flip-flopped making Hispanics the new majority. Of 2,000 students, 43.5% were Hispanic, 43.3% were non-Hispanic whites, 9.4% were Black, and 3.7% were other minorities, mostly Asian. McLeod claimed, “the Latin influence at the school is obvious from homeroom to homecoming” before going on to describe a typical day at Gateway High School:

When the morning papers carried news of a South American drug czar death, a Nicaraguan student gave her class an impromptu lecture about cartels. When Miss Vasquez’ English literature class decided to perform scenes from Shakespeare this year, Lady Macbeth had a Spanish accent. When the students in a Spanish literature class had a discussion about the macho image in Hispanic cultures, the macho image made a personal appearance: Some of the more tradition-bound Hispanic boys loudly disagreed with some of the more progressive, independent-thinking Hispanic girls in the class.\textsuperscript{238}

By 1995, educators’ desire to learn about the Puerto Rican people had increased due to the growing number of Puerto Rican students. According to Gladys Casteleiro,
who served as the executive director of the Office of the Government of Puerto Rico in Orlando during 1995, “seventy percent of the Hispanic students (in Central Florida) are Puerto Rican. And sometimes we do have little differences in cultural issues.” In an effort to ameliorate potential problems that could be caused by “cultural differences,” Osceola County schools sent a group of educators to Puerto Rico two years in a row: Valencia Community College officials organized a visit to Puerto Rican universities, and Puerto Rico’s secretary of education planned a visit to Orlando to meet with teachers and school superintendents.

The sudden interest in Puerto Rico and the formation of alliances and partnerships between educational institutions in Orlando and Puerto Rico resulted from the demographic changes in the school population. During the 2005-2006 school year 49% of Osceola County’s Public School population was Hispanic, 33% were Caucasian, 10% Black, 5% Multiracial, and 3% Asian. By the 2009-2010 academic year Hispanics reached 50% of Osceola County’s Public school population, and Caucasian students were down to 29%. These percentages remained the same during the 2010-2011 academic year and a December 2012 report revealed an increase to 55%. Additionally, when I arrived in BVL two Puerto Ricans had achieved positions of power in the Osceola County educational system. Sandra Lopez was in the appointed position of Assistant Superintendent, and Julius Mendez, who announced his run for one of the two newly created congressional districts in early 2012, was a member of the School Board (an elected position) representing District 2.

The population of Hispanic students also increased in local universities. In the late 90s Valencia College was projecting Hispanics to account for 17% of its student body by
the year 2000, up from 6% in 1984 and 13% in 1994.\textsuperscript{241} As of January 2008, the student body was 42.7% Caucasian, 25.7% Hispanic, 15.4% African American, 10.4% other, and 5.4% Asian/Pacific Islander. During the fall of 2010 Hispanic students increased to 29% of the population, while Caucasian students dropped down to 38% of the total population.\textsuperscript{242} At this point Valencia College was considered a Hispanic Serving Institution. As Hispanic students became the fastest-growing population in different educational institutions, the needs of the Spanish-speaking students were addressed and the demographic transitions were confronted.

The influx of Hispanic students was not met without resistance to the changes. In January of 2011 I spoke with Johnny, a 40-year old male that relocated to St. Cloud from Connecticut, and listened to him as he complained about his daughter being “the only white spec in her school.” During an interview with an administrator from the Osceola Public School system, I asked if any racial tensions existed in the schools. The employee explained to me that it was not that the Hispanic children looked different, it was not their hair or their skin color that differentiated them; instead, it was language that made the difference.

The students that were bilingual were not a problem, the administrator explained. however, the transition of people from Puerto Rico, whose first and only language was Spanish, was viewed as a problem and caused friction between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. According to the employee there was the presence of the, “This is America, you have to speak English!” commentary, and teachers from the public schools would ask why they had to accommodate the Spanish-speaking students. “When you go east to St. Cloud you still see this type of opposition,” the administrator explained. When
the META-decent decree was introduced, which requires ESOL and other student services for Spanish speakers, the teachers in St. Cloud were most resistant, while others realized the need and importance of training classes. The St. Cloud teachers would say, “we don’t need to take these classes,” but as the population of Hispanics began settling further and further east, moving from Kissimmee to St. Cloud, everyone had to take the classes and this caused issues. The increase in the Hispanic student body led to the recruitment and hiring of bilingual teachers, some were recruited directly from Puerto Rico. During our interview, the administrator recalled the response to the presence of Hispanics in the school system. Parents complained about teachers with an accent. They would claim that their child could not understand what the teacher was saying because of their Spanish accent, and demand that their be child moved to another class. “Spanish-speaking children would be made fun of, and the teachers would think the Spanish-speaking kids are not smart, or have a type of disability. But, these monolingual children are in fact smart in their own language, they just don’t know English.” And, the stigma about the intelligence of Spanish speaking students continues, while teachers and parents continue to adjust to the changing demographics in the public education system. The influx of Hispanic migrants has not only impacted educational institutions, other spaces and places are undergoing transformations.

A Changing Landscape

When I arrived in Buenaventura Lakes in May of 2010 I found myself in a self-sustaining community, a place where everything I needed was conveniently located in the residential or commercial spaces of the suburb. Within the residential community was a nursery, school, library, fire station, community center, park, soccer field, baseball fields,
and a track. Surrounding the residential development on both the north and south entrances, less than 1 mile from my house on Floral Drive, were shopping centers and strip malls with supermarkets, fast food chains, restaurants, retail stores, hair and nail salons, barber shops, a liquor store, gas stations, doctors offices, banks, gyms, pharmacies, tax services, pawn shops, and convenience stores. Upon first glance, it was never obvious to me that the residential and commercial spaces of BVL house such a large concentration of Puerto Ricans. The layout felt like any other suburban community, after all the design had come from Landstar, a national homebuilder that mass-produces homes with a standardized, uniform landscape and architectural elements. Landstar Home’s Capri model, for example, was taken from a standard planning book, In contrast, custom homebuilders construct one-of-a-kind homes designed for a specific buyer using plans created by an architect or professional home designer. One and two story-residential properties, complete with front lawns, driveways, garages, and the occasional picket fence make up the majority of the housing in BVL, and are a reflection of the “middle class” aspirations and American dream imagery that associates upward social class mobility with homeownership and suburban living. Small clusters of apartment complexes, villas, and town homes can be found in BVL as well. Business establishments were usually located in the strip-mall style shopping centers so common in the sprawling suburbs of the United States. Finally, a car was a necessity, and the primary means of transportation for the majority of people I encountered. Those without a vehicle found themselves isolated and frustrated with a public transportation system where bus routes were limited and infrequent.
This Puerto Rican suburbanization in Greater Orlando has to be contextualized within the history of suburbanization in the U.S. Growth outside inner cities is often associated with “white flight,” suburbanization, upward mobility, and an escape from the dangers of the city.\textsuperscript{244} Kenneth Jackson (1985) distinguishes suburbs from other residential communities stating, “affluent and middle class Americans live in suburban areas that are far from their work places, in homes that they own, and in the center of yards that by urban standards elsewhere are enormous.”\textsuperscript{245} Suburbanization presupposes a white, middle class composition, and Puerto Ricans rarely fit into those assumptions.

Kenneth Jackson attempts a definition of the term suburb, which he admits to be vague. He suggests, “suburbia is both a planning type and a state of mind based on imagery and symbolism.”\textsuperscript{246} What is a suburban state of mind? The dominant physical features of suburbs are the lawn or yard, driveway, and garage. The imagery and symbolism of these elements correspond to popular ideas of progress and modernity. In addition, status and income are very much correlated with the suburbs.

Yet, a closer look at the landscape reveals that BVL is unlike other suburbs in the United States. This suburb is the product of a national movement whereby Hispanics are leaving the urban core—cities like Miami, New York, and Chicago—and forming new communities in the suburbs of the United States.\textsuperscript{247} Upon settlement, these migrants are transforming their residences, commercial spaces, and consequently the entire suburban landscape into something familiar, something that resembles the homes they left behind, thereby Latinizing the region. These transformations are achieved through changes to the built environment and through social practices that are being interpreted by non-Hispanic
whites as unusual and characteristic of Hispanics. I discuss Hispanic suburbanization in greater detail in chapter five.

There are two types of feature elements in the built environment that form the cultural landscape of an area: fixed-feature elements and semi-fixed feature elements.\textsuperscript{248} Semi-fixed feature elements can include lawn ornaments, house color, display of a national-origin flag or symbol, furnishings, or store front/advertising signs. Semi-fixed feature elements cost less to alter and are therefore accessible to individuals of all socioeconomic levels. Fixed-feature elements change rarely and slowly, and may include the architectural style of a building, and building interiors or exteriors including walls, floors, and ceilings. In the case of the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area, fixed-feature elements and semi-fixed feature elements are essential since they contribute to the Latinization of the physical landscape and are particularly important for interpreting the meaning of the built environment.

In Metropolitan Orlando these feature elements include murals; casitas; the building of Asociación Borinquéña de la Florida Central, a Puerto Rican cultural center; Spanish language signage; house color; and flags. When a number of individuals of the same ethnic background in a particular geographical area collectively use a shared set of semi-fixed feature elements, a distinctive “cultural landscape” is created.\textsuperscript{249} In the case of Orlando-Kissimmee’s Puerto Rican concentrated communities, design elements create a cultural landscape that emphasizes the tropical origins of its residents and the southern positionality of Florida; but, at the same time serve as a source of tension between non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics. As early as 1989 a new style, emulating Caribbean architecture, was introduced to Central Florida: “In short, Central Florida’s architectural
roots are planted somewhere about the Mason-Dixon line. But recently, signs of a hot, new style—at least for Central Florida—has blown up from the tropical south. The look is Caribbean: vivid, colorful, playful and, most of all, tropical.

According to an Orlando Sentinel article, the first to implement this Caribbean style, inspired by not only the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, but also the English and French speaking Caribbean, was actually Walt Disney World. The corporation opened the Caribbean Beach Resort, which was painted in bold blues, reds, pinks and teals. Then there were the Caribbean Isle Apartments, a new complex that opened in the summer of 1989 in Kissimmee with a color scheme of coral pink, shell white, and teal. Additionally, Landstar Homes created a new collection of homes entitled “The Islands,” which were painted in bright green, pink and blue pastels. The different model homes were named Martinique, St. Croix, and Grand Cayman. Architect Bob Koch, whose firm designed the Disney resort and the Caribbean Isle Apartment complex, believed this architectural style to be an up and coming trend: “With more and more people coming to Central Florida, the region is starting to establish its own identity. And finally there is a realization coming about that this is not an extension of the north, but it is a tropical place.” Thus, Koch expected to see more architectural structures that represented Orlando’s “native tropical heritage.” Hence, in the 1980s, prior to the massive migration of Hispanics, Central Florida’s landscape was beginning to transform and arguably the feature elements, which were inspired by Caribbean design elements, helped attract Hispanic residents with a landscape that was beginning to resemble the tropics that migrants from the island of Puerto Rico were leaving behind.
In 1988 Orlando council member Mary Johnson, a Hispanic whose district included East Orlando, explained that “most of the subdivision and street names are Spanish,” leading her to believe that this could have helped draw Hispanics to the region and increased the appeal of the different suburban subdivisions. "It’s like little Puerto Rico in the community here," Johnson declared in April of 1988, and “once an initial group established there, Johnson said, word spread to friends and relatives.” Physical changes to the landscape continued and in 1995 Puerto Rican businessman Benito Fernandez and a group of investors bought the Orlando Vacation Resort on U.S. Highway 27, south of Clermont in the Disney area. Fernandez, the husband of New York State Senator Nellie Santiago, operated a resort in Puerto Rico and had experience in the tourism industry. He and his investors paid $3.5 million for a 233-room motel and planned to transform the resort’s Tennessee country themed restaurant into an island motif. Fernandez’s plan was to spruce up the Lake County motel and target Puerto Rican tourists. The numerous Hispanic-owned businesses, which reached 37.6% of all businesses in 2007 in the case of Osceola County and 20.9% in neighboring Orange County, contributed to the commercial landscape’s transformation with Spanish names, Spanish-language signage, national flags, and tropical colors. Clearly, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics were important consumers to be courted since they made up such a large percentage of the population.

Transforming the built environment is a slow process, a process that began in the early 1980’s and continues into the present. But, it is important to keep in mind the demographic diversity found in BVL and Osceola County. While most people consider this county and the BVL suburb to be a “Hispanic place,” and will quickly cite the
Hispanic population as over 80% of the total population, the reality is much different. Hispanics are 65.67% of the total population in BVL, non-Hispanic whites comprise 19.8%, non-Hispanic Blacks are 9.85%, and Asians are 3.9%; whereas, 45.5% of Osceola County’s total population is Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites are 40.3%. Therefore, the remnants of rural Osceola County remain and struggle to resist the increasing Latinization of the region.

This contrast, for example, was evident to me on March 14, 2011 when I began my day at the annual Kowtown Festival held in downtown Kissimmee. I observed a hot dog eating contest and a meatloaf tasting competition before stopping off at a booth sponsored by the Women Cattle Ranchers Association, all the while acutely aware that I was one of the only people of color present, with the exception of a booth selling baked goods set up by West Indians. I left, only to drive a few miles to a church in BVL for a car show. Car shows are a staple of the community, and can be found regularly at churches, the Old Town theme park, Downtown Kissimmee, and as part of different festivals or fairs. When I arrived at the church Latin music was playing and souped-up cars lined the parking lot displaying license plates from the different parts of Puerto Rico. The piraguas (shaved ice) and fritters available for purchase were a sharp contrast to the “all-American” cuisine at the Kowtown Festival. Later that evening I went bowling and the jukebox alternated between country music and reggaeton, as the Hispanics and non-Hispanics took turns putting money into the machine and picking their songs of choice. When I visited the Flea Market on Interstate-192 the following day I entered a dirt road and passed the Cracker House Saloon on my left before parking in the flea market’s lot. However, the flea market is frequented by many Hispanics, in opposition to the saloon
out front that appeared busiest on the nights when they offer discounted beers for biker night. Inside the flea market a booth selling flags displayed the confederate flag beside a Mexican flag. Less than 10 miles down the road from the flea market is the Silver Spurs Arena, where the rodeo takes place and the county fair is held; but, you can also attend the King de La Calle Car Show or hear reaggeton and bachata artists Don Omar and Prince Royce in the same arena. Then there is the Chinese restaurant in Old Town with its grill out front where an Asian employee yells out “pinchos, pinchos!” This was a sharp contrast to the signage I passed on Florida State Road 535 advertising the sale of gator jerky, boiled peanuts, and oranges during an afternoon drive.

Indeed, the Latinization was evident in the landscape, but so were the remnants of rural, small-town Florida, particularly in parts of Osceola County where cattle ranching and orange groves still dominate parts of the landscape. In the rural parts of Osceola County, I was told, “real cowboys can still be found, in Kenansville and Yeehaw Junction.” Others mentioned the neighboring city of St. Cloud that was infiltrated by Hispanics, but remains a “redneck” stronghold in the opinion of some. However, Johnny, a resident of St. Cloud, felt that Hispanics were taking over St. Cloud as well: “There was a battle between the rednecks and the Hispanics, and the Hispanics won. But, you don’t want to mess with the cops in St. Cloud,” he warned. “Hispanics can’t drive through St. Cloud without their car getting searched completely.” He went on, “when I come here [the Applebee’s located in BVL], this is like Puerto Rico,” a distinction frequently made between the “Puerto Rican spaces” of BVL and the City of Kissimmee, and the neighboring “non-Hispanic white spaces” of the City of St. Cloud.
As I have said before, upon first glance it was not immediately evident that Puerto Ricans numbered 10,514 in BVL and 72,986 in Osceola County. However, a Puerto Rican flag hanging in a garage, window, or as an insignia on a car served as a reminder (all semi-fixed feature elements), while the weekends brought a plethora of garage sales, yard sales, and poster boards advertising the sale of *alcapurrias* (meat fritters), *empanadas* (stuffed pastry), or *pinchos* (shish kebab) available from a grill set up on the front lawn, a garage, or in a nearby commercial parking lot. The concession stand at the Archie Gordon Memorial Park in BVL sold *empanadas* and *pernil* sandwiches, while the gentleman behind the counter blasted salsa music on a radio. I could even purchase *pasteles* from the Wal Mart parking lot when a daring vendor leaned a wooden sign against his vehicle advertising the sale of food from his van. Then there were the autobody shops with lawn chairs and grills set up out front during the weekend with signs advertising *pinchos* to attract potential customers and make a little extra money.

This form of entrepreneurship, the selling of food in the suburban streets of Osceola County, was most striking to me and ever present. The signage and advertising that accompanies these enterprises were a powerful visual signs of the region’s Latinization. On another occasion I was struck by the signage and food advertisements that contributed to the region’s Latinization:

What I always find interesting are the many signs that contribute to the Latinization of space and the food trucks that help the process! For example, on Semoran Boulevard today I was surprised to see the airport parking garage (off-site) with a flashing sign that alternated between the price of parking and an advertisement for *alcapurrias* and other Spanish food available from a mobile truck in front of the parking lot. I have seen those mobile trucks with benches (picnic table style) in a few locations. (Field Notes 12/19/10)
Additionally, there were a plethora of supermarkets, restaurants, and other small businesses that were either Hispanic-owned or that catered to the Hispanic residents of BVL and Osceola County, allowing them to dominate the commercial landscape. When I went food shopping at the local supermarkets, went to the bank, retail outlets, doctor, or the pharmacy I was most often greeted in Spanish by the employees, a practice that was directed at Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike, and therefore a constant point of contention.

On a few occasions during my fieldwork, non-Hispanic residents of Osceola County and BVL objected to the social practices they believed to be unique to Hispanics. During a conversation with Rick, a resident of BVL, he complained that “the Publix Sabor sells the entire pig, since Hispanics like to cook them in the dirt,” while a long-time resident of Osceola County and political leader, Jonathan Foster, discussed some of Hispanic’s practices, which he interpreted as cultural differences that violate zoning and building codes. According to Jonathan multiple cars were parked on front lawns, single-family homes were being turned into multi-family dwellings, goats and chickens were kept in the backyard. He went on to mention that the county should perhaps look at code and land development differently, due to cultural differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. In 2005 Felix Matos-Rodriguez, a historian, commented, “this surge is an interesting development, because Puerto Ricans are really the first group that comes to Central Florida in numbers that are sizable enough to challenge the homogenous culture.” Indeed, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics were challenging dominant North American norms and practices for acceptable suburban living, while some non-Hispanic
whites took direct action to reclaim and improve the spaces of BVL and Osceola County by calling code-enforcement and lodging complaints when they saw a violation.

**The Memorialization of the Borinqueneers**

In early 2011, transformations to the landscape reaffirmed BVL’s Puerto Rican place-identity and the growing power of Hispanics. Commissioner John Quiñones, the representative of District 2, which includes BVL, introduced a proposal to revamp and re-name 33.6 acres of county property located in BVL, formerly the Walk-N-Stick Executive Golf Course, as the 65th Infantry Veterans Park. The 65th Infantry, which is known as “the Borinqueneers” was an all-volunteer US Army regiment of Puerto Ricans that fought in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. The US congress created the regiment in 1899, and the segregated unit is the only all-Hispanic regiment in the army’s history. Quiñones hoped to honor the infantry who remain heroes in the Puerto Rican imagination, particularly since some of the borinqueneers are alive and residing in BVL or other parts of Central Florida. In addition to re-naming the park and making improvements with a budget of approximately $400,000, the commissioner planned to erect a memorial in honor of the infantry. This legislation intended to name a communal, public park after Puerto Rican people, which led a group of residents to contest the legislation’s exclusivity.

When the commissioners opened up the floor to discus the resolution Michael Smith was the first to approach the podium and address the five county commissioners:

> The Infantry Unit 65 is stationed or head quartered in Puerto Rico. As a Vietnam veteran, and one that spent a year in country, I take that as a personal affront! You’re gonna name a park after a company in the military that’s headquartered out of another country!
Dennis Freytes, a Puerto Rican veteran in the audience interrupted Michael, shouting, “It’s not another country!” The commissioner then called for order so Michael could proceed:

I think if you want to honor the service people there are more appropriate names . . . yes there were a lot of Puerto Ricans that died . . . but after that it was changed to where they basically are non-combat support role troops so I think it’s time that somebody take a different view of this and pull it off and rename the park.

Retired US Army Colonel Dennis Freyes took the podium next and described his military record and community involvement before clarifying Puerto Rico’s territorial status:

My name is Colonel Dennis Frietes, US Army Retired. I’ve commanded infantry, I’ve commanded Special Forces, I’ve commanded airborne units, and I’ve commanded ROTC. . . And our veterans they don’t fight for just one county, they fight for all Americans no matter what county they are. And Osceola County is part of America. Puerto Rico is not a separate country; Puerto Rico is a US territory under the American flag! My father fought in the 65th infantry regiment, my uncle Erasto Freites fought in the 65th, they’ve given a lot of their lives . . . But we want to highlight a special recognition to the US Army 65th regiment because their contributions. They are unsung heroes of part of our segment of our American population. I’m an American patriot and I believe that this segment that hasn’t been duly recognized should be recognized by this honorable commission.

After some clapping from the audience Commissioner Quiñones thanked the Colonel for his service, mentioned that there is still ignorance when it comes to the issue of Puerto Rico, and mentioned the names of two BVL residents who served in the infantry. The commissioner claimed that the meaning the Walk-N-Stick Executive Golf Course held for resident 30 years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years ago, and 5 years ago is not quite what is was. He continued,

And how interesting that now we can bring not only the culture of Americans born in the United States and unfortunately who cannot vote for the president of the US, but who can defend the country of the US and Osceola county and so now they are being commemorated . . . And I will tell you, those of you who continue to be ignorant about their involvement I encourage you to go to the PBS website and look at the documentary called The Borinqueneers and it will tell you more about the history of these brave men.
One of the other commissioners then asked a question, awkwardly trying to find the correct phrasing to connote Puerto Rican’s territorial status: “Is this the first or only national recognition inside, outside of Puerto Rico, I’m trying to think of the proper way to say it. Within the continental territory of the US, is there any other place that nationally recognized the 65th?” Quiñones responded, “Yes, Colorado.” With that, he made a motion to approve the resolution, the public hearing concluded with a unanimous vote, and the commissioner invited everyone to the ribbon cutting ceremony. I spoke to Michael later that day and he explained to me that the commissioner had called him “racist” and “ignorant” during the afternoon commission meeting. This is how he interpreted the commissioner’s comment about the existence of ignorance about Puerto Rico and the Borinqueneers. In the days that followed a memorial was constructed and the park re-named only to be contested two months later by a group of BVL residents.

Thirty residents began weekly meetings in an effort to “recall” or remove John Quiñones from office. The recall group, according to spokesperson Jennifer Robertson, was particularly bothered about the renaming of the park, which took place without consulting the residents or the county’s Parks Advisory Committee. While the recall group was planning its offensive, another group was meeting six miles away from BVL, in the Puerto Rican Cultural Center to plan the first Puerto Rican parade in Osceola County, an event dedicated to the Borinqueneers. In an interview, one member of the opposition, Jenny Robertson, told the press the park name was inappropriate because the 65th were “traitors,” not patriots, and did not deserve to have a park named after them. Robertson’s statement was based on the court-martia ling of 95 members of the unit for disobeying orders to fight during the Korean War. The men were pardoned; however,
Robertson’s remarks challenged the bravery and valor of the infantry. Her remarks outraged Puerto Rican residents and politicians who interpreted the comments as a racist attack against the Puerto Rican community and their military heroes. This ignited a controversy over the history, worthiness, and heroism of the Borinqueneers, which played out in the press, the community and on the Internet. For Puerto Ricans, the historical narrative about the Borinqueneers military service proved heroism, worthiness, and belonging; whereas, the opposition used the group’s history to exclude Puerto Ricans as undeserving traitors. The two groups displayed different usages of the Borinqueneers’ historical narrative for opposing intentions.

Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas (2007) refers to a “politics of worthiness,” whereby Puerto Ricans are asked to prove that they are deserving of US citizenship and legitimately entitled to civil rights and social benefits that other populations assume as inalienable. Puerto Ricans engage in this politics of worthiness as a way of “circumventing their own racialization,” and positioning themselves outside of culture of poverty arguments “by following prescriptive rules of patriotism, social mobility, and national acceptability.”

Military service, which connotes a willingness to die for country, demonstrates belonging, patriotism and arguably one’s worthiness of citizenship. By labeling the entire infantry as traitors and calling into question their deservingness of a memorial on Florida soil, opponents of the park challenged the patriotism, Americaness, and citizenship of Puerto Ricans and their celebrated military heroes.

On April 21, 2011 John Quiñones held a press conference at the park to defend the bravery and valor of the Borinqueneers and his initiative to re-name the park. Accompanied by Hispanic commissioners from the City of Kissimmee, Quiñones argued
that the recall group’s efforts were “100% motivated by bigotry and racism.” He cited a 2007 newspaper article that revealed an email correspondence from one of the group leaders stating, “An Anglo needs to win this [county] seat and not a Hispanic.” To their attack on diversity, the commissioner proclaimed, “¡Basta Ya! (Enough Already!) Over 300,000 Americans of Hispanic descent are here and live in Central Florida and they’re here to stay, they’re not going anywhere. They’re here to pay taxes, to denounce this groups racist motives. ¡Basta Ya!”

For the the next nine days the Internet lit up with commentary about the historical events surrounding the court-martial, the blind defensiveness of the Puerto Rican community, the racism against Osceola County’s Hispanic newcomers, and the worthiness of the 65th Infantry. Anonymous bloggers, vocal community activists and politicians, the Puerto Rican son-in-law of the recall group’s leader, and the producer of The Borinqueneers documentary posted comments on the Hispanosphere blog. The racist motives of the recall group were articulated by bloggers defending the 65th, and refuted by others with commentary that rarely happens in face to face interactions between non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics:

This is beyond any Latino political. The issue is about an act of racism as well calling these military heroes traitors. The racism needs to be confronted head on. This is an insult to every Puerto Rican/Latino who has served in the military. Ms Robertson needs to do a better job researching since the Puerto Rican 65th Infantry Regiment are genuine heroes.257

All I got to say is that my Mother in Law Jennifer Robertson is not a racist. Im her son in law 100% Puertoirican born in Rio Piedras PR. She has a beautiful granddaughter that’s half PUERTO RICAN that she watches for my wife and I everyday. The reason for her speaking was why is Quinones naming a park all by himself, when the park is a public park for all races. To each its own but this was not about racism.258
In these instances, when confronted with allegations of racism, an intimate familial relationship—in this case Robertson’s half Puerto Rican granddaughter and Puerto Rican son-in-law—is presented as evidence that she cannot possibly be opposing the project because of racism, but instead because the non-Hispanics now feel excluded as a minority in what they believe should be a “race-neutral” space. As I will discuss in chapter 4, “Blacks and other racial minorities are thought to bring race into situations that previously were understood, in their all white formation, as nonracial or as racially neural.”

For other bloggers the worthiness of the 65th Infantry was up for question as well as the blind defensiveness of the Puerto Rican community. One post read, “Puerto Rico had more servicemen killed per capita then just about every state in the USA during the Korean War. That’s worth an ‘American’ memorial.” Another respondent claimed to be responsible for the documentary film and weighed in on the controversy, “I am the Producer of the documentary film, THE BORINQUEENS and have read the various comments in this blog. My position is that the 65th Infantry Regiment was a brave, fighting unit extremely American and patriotic.” In defense of the Borinqueneers one blogger asked the public to remember “that the 65th soldiers were not able to vote for President of the United States or for voting representation in the US Congress. Yet, they went to war for America.”

Others attacked the blind defensiveness of Puerto Ricans and challenged them for defending the individuals who were court martialed:

but it is funny to see how people support the Borinqueneers blindly

You and many others, blindly want us to accept a blanket statement of reivindication for the 92 individuals.

The 65th Infantry Regiment served valiantly, but the 92 offenders will forever live
in history as either cowards or deserters or worse, traitors, as Robertson calls them.\textsuperscript{265}

But when you hide the black sheep for vanity, don’t be surprised when people drag your hidden secrets and humiliates you like Robertson did, hateful comments but correct statements because some members did run to momma afraid for their lives.\textsuperscript{266}

Another blogger did not object to the park, but articulated an all too common remark regarding the Latinization and linguistic transformations taking place in Central Florida, the subject of chapter 4. These comments articulate the larger territorial struggles over the Latinization of space, and the transformations to residential, commercial, and public spaces:

\begin{quote}
should have named the park in san juan . . .65\textsuperscript{th} contributed very little to the war effort compared to the real warriors. . . \textsuperscript{267}
\end{quote}

They fought—they were soldiers, let the park be named in their honor. My only gripe is that for the current Puerto Ricans who live in the United States—learn and speak ENGLISH! If I moved to Puerto Rico, I would learn the language. And don’t try to turn Florida into Puerto Rico West. If you miss Puerto Rico so much, stay there. Don’t fly your flag here—fly the American flag.\textsuperscript{268}

Let the ricans keep their park name they own the rest of bvl anyways\textsuperscript{269}

For Puerto Ricans the \textit{Borinqueneers’} military service signaled “worthiness” and belonging in the United States, and therefore merited the memorialization in the park. The Puerto Rican community never interpreted the place-name or memorial as exclusionary of non-Hispanics. Instead, the memorial was a signal that they were equally entitled to recognition. When accusations labeled the \textit{Borinqueneers} as traitors the Puerto Rican community immediately interpreted these articulations as racism. The contestations over place-making, over who has the right to be represented and memorialized and who has the right to name a space, sheds light on race relations and the power of white
privilege. This incident made me question whether allegations of racism always followed when non-Hispanic whites expressed opposition to government-funded projects or initiatives that targeted the Hispanic population. On many occasions during my fieldwork allegations of racism quickly followed when non-Hispanics opposed social programs and funding that targeted the Hispanic community. But, in the case of the naming of the park and the memorialization of the *Borinqueneers* this power struggle, over the right to control space and the naming of a place, the privileges of whiteness are defended. In this case spaces in their all white formation are viewed as race-neutral, while spaces that are marked by Hispanics are viewed as exclusionary. Additionally, the discourses surrounding the controversy reveal the growing fear in the BVL community as non-Hispanics continue to lose power, political representation, and are even silenced by allegations of racism, which are difficult to combat. For now the recall group has gone silent, primarily because a recall petition may not be filed until the commissioner has served one-fourth of his term. But, to many in the Puerto Rican community “the 65th infantry more than proved itself in the ultimate test of worthiness.”

But, the Latinization of Orlando, fueled by the migration of Puerto Ricans, continues to ignite controversy over the demographic, linguistic and spatial transformations in the Central Florida Region.

**Consumer Strength and Economic Power**

One of the greatest of the greatest measures of change has been the increasing presence of small and large Hispanic-owned businesses, and the transformations to existing commercial establishments that first accommodated, and then began catering to the Hispanic market. This is evidence of the populations growing consumer strength.
Ethnic businesses are symbolic markers, visible to Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike, sending a message that the community of Hispanics, in this instance, has reached a critical mass. Take for example food and the presence of supermarkets and restaurants, one of the transformations that frustrated some of non-Hispanic whites that I interviewed. Not only did a plethora of restaurants and supermarkets open to cater to Hispanics by providing familiar products and communicating with customers in the Spanish language, but these markets and restaurants began replacing previously existing establishments that once catered to non-Hispanic whites. One woman complained about the Sedanos supermarket that replaced her former marked, and expressed a hope that they would not succeed financially. During an interview with Sandra Lopez, she recalled having to drive to Orlando, to an area close to Church Street and Orange Avenue, to find Hispanic products in the late 1980s: “It took between forty-five minutes to an hour to get platanos or pernil. As time progressed the food changed.” Food, she said, was a measure of the change and the demographic transitions: “Eventually the supermarket created an “international” food isle and you knew that was your section.” As time progressed entire supermarkets that catered to the Hispanic consumer replaced the single international food isle.

In a 2005 Orlando Sentinel article entitled, “Orlando develops Hispanic Accent,” the opening of the first Publix Sabor supermarket in BVL is mentioned as evidence of the growing Hispanic population and its influence. However, on July 13, 2010 I stood outside of the Robert Guevara Community Center (named after the first Puerto Rican elected to the Osceola County Commission) with a group of BVL residents discussing their frustration with the local supermarkets and retail chains that cater to the Hispanic
population. Not only were the residents frustrated by the dominance of products catering to the Hispanic market in the area supermarkets, they were astounded by the lack of English-speaking store clerks. Rick, one of the BVL residents, mentioned his experience in a supermarket where several store associates had to look around to find an English-speaking worker to assist him as he waited patiently in disbelief. Michael also expressed his frustration with the local Publix Sabor when they stopped carrying his brand of cheese and instead introduced several Latin American brands. He went so far as to make a formal written complaint to the manager, but his complaint went without a response. Thus, he started traveling to supermarkets outside of the vicinity for his shopping.

In 2010 Sedanos, a Miami-based, Cuban-owned supermarket chain that started in 1962 and grew to a chain of 30 South Florida supermarkets, entered the Central Florida market. Sedanos purchased three already existing Albertsons markets, and planned to keep them open while the conversion took place. The Sedanos stores play salsa music, pastelitos are available in a café, and clerks greet customers in Spanish, although signs are in English. When the Orlando Sedanos opened a cart by the supermarket entrance was selling churros and piraguas. The store owners were proud of the wide variety of products they were able to offer their customers. Shoppers were not limited to Goya, which opened a distribution center in Orlando back in 2003, but also had access to brands like Iberia, Conchita, and Norteno amongst others. Sedanos was planning to offer different products than those found in the South Florida markets. Instead of catering to a Cuban market, the company planned to stock more items that could appeal to the Puerto Rican population. According to Augusto Sanabria, president and chief executive officer of the Hispanic Business Initiative Fund, “Anytime that a big Hispanic company comes
into town, it just re-emphasizes the power of the Hispanic community here in Central Florida. . . That’s recognizing that in Central Florida, the Hispanic community is growing and it is powerful. It’s music to my ears.”

On December 28, 2009 an Orlando Sentinel article was published about the new chain, but the internet responses to the article was less than positive. On January 8, 2010 an internet user that goes by the name of tim posted the following two responses:

Hispanics need their own supermarkets . . . wow! . . . the regular supermarkets are not good enough for them??

You people continue to divide the community, next will be Hispanic only churches and in a few years will be segregated again and the cycle will begin for another round. Again, the Cubans who came fleeing Fidel brought to the US a lot of money, which has been used to purchase influence ad power in Florida. This is the beginning of the cubanization of Orlando.

Throughout my fieldwork I found the purchasing of food and the performance of other everyday life activities, like banking, shopping, pumping gas, or eating at a restaurant to be the most contentious for non-Hispanic whites because they are constantly reminded of their diminishing presence and the increasing Latinization of the region.

The presence of Hispanics has led many corporations to realize that Hispanics are in fact needed to grow one’s business, and therefore Spanish-speaking employees are necessary, while advertising that appeals to the Hispanic market is equally important.

According to Angelo Figueroa, former editor of People en Espanol, “I don’t care who you are . . . If you want to grow your brand, you need to start advertising in the Hispanic community.”

Take for instance the efforts of Sun Trust Banks Inc., an American bank holding company with approximately 1,700 branches across the Southern United States. In 2006 Sun Trust decided to launch a Latin banking group in Orlando by bringing together a half dozen bilingual employees from various sectors of the bank.
banks have followed this example, making an effort to reach out to the Hispanic community by employing bilingual Spanish-English speakers, joining the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Orlando to network within the Spanish business community, and sponsoring events for Hispanic entrepreneurs, like the 2011 Business After Hours hosted at Seaside National Bank and Trust.

Indeed, the consumer power of the Hispanic population has not gone unnoticed. In fact, Hispanics are credited with pumping billions of dollars into the Central Florida region and diversifying its economy. In 2006 an Orlando Sentinel article argued that the hundreds of thousands of Hispanic who settled in Central Florida are contributing much more to the area than just raw population growth: they have pumped more than $16 billion into the region. Their economic contributions include supplying labor, creating businesses, and spending money in their communities.\textsuperscript{275} Most Hispanic businesses in the Orlando area were in construction, administrative support, professional services, and health care. In the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area there were 19,639 Hispanic businesses as of 2002. Cubans owned 42\% of the state’s Hispanic businesses, primarily concentrated in Southern Florida, and Puerto Ricans had established more than 24,000 businesses statewide.\textsuperscript{276}

The growth of Hispanic-owned businesses has led to increased hiring of bilingual Spanish-English speakers, and more business being conducted in the Spanish language, but also an increasing presence of the Spanish language and Spanish advertising amongst non-Hispanic owned businesses. This has changed the soundscape in many commercial spaces, where Spanish can be heard as frequently, if not more frequently than English. The contestations and controversy surrounding these auditory changes, resulting from the
increasing Hispanic population and their consumer power, will be discussed in the next chapter. However, the dominance of Hispanics in certain communities and throughout the Central Florida region has not always been viewed as a positive change. The spaces where Latinization is most evident are stigmatized and racialized as non-white, un-American, and therefore unfit for assimilating, upwardly mobile Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike.

**Political Power**

The memorialization of the *Borinqueneers*, discussed earlier in the chapter, was made possible largely because of the presence of a Puerto Rican in the 5-member county commission. A federal voting lawsuit involving residents of BVL, Osceola County, and the US Department of Justice required the county to create the Hispanic concentrated district that Quiñones represents, increasing Hispanics’ political power and representation. Previously, the Board of Commissioners of Osceola County (BCC) was elected through at-large elections to four-year staggered terms. Candidates sought election for numbered seats, which corresponded to the district where they live. Although candidates were required to live in a particular district, all the voters in the county elected them at-large. As the Hispanic population grew, Hispanic leaders began expressing an interest in achieving political representation at a county level. In 1991, the Osceola County Hispanic American Association formally requested that the BCC change the election system and threatened to pursue legal action. The Hispanic leaders felt a single member district system, where voters living in a particular district could vote for that district’s commissioner would be fairer to minority voters. No Hispanic candidate was ever elected to the BCC in an at-large election. In 1996 a single member district
election was held, and a Hispanic candidate, Robert Guevara, got elected. The 1996 election was conducted under a single member district system and was racially polarized. Robert Guevara was elected to the BCC to represent a District encompassing BVL, but his campaign generated racial hostility from non-Hispanics including his opponent who sent a campaign mailer that depicted himself as day, and Guevara with darker skin as night. Other remarks were made such as “we do not want Osceola to turn into another Miami,” and were brought up during court proceedings.277

After the 1996 election Osceola County deliberately returned to an at-large system. The return to an at-large system prompted activists and Osceola County resident Armando Ramirez to file a complaint with the US Department of Justice in 2000. These individuals demanded their rights to representation, political participation, and inclusion in county decisions that would affect the district in which they live. In 2005, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales filed an action pursuant to sections 2 and 12(d) of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 against Osceola County, Donna Bryant (the supervisor of elections), and the Board of Commissioners of Osceola County. These actions, initiated by community members, resulted in a case heard by the court between September 18th and 20th of 2006. On October 18, 2006, the court issued a memorandum opinion stating Osceola County’s voting system caused a dilution of Hispanic votes in violation of the Voting Rights Act. After spending more than $2 million to fight the case and defend an at-large voting system. Osceola County complied with the judge’s orders and created five single-member districts with a Hispanic majority in the newly drawn District 2, which includes BVL, Lakeside, Remington, Kissimmee Bay, and parts of Mill Run and Oak Run. This district has been referred to as “the Hispanic district” in public discourse.
Since the voting rights law suit, several Hispanics have obtained elected or appointed positions in Osceola County and the City of Kissimmee’s governing bodies, with the Voting Rights lawsuit setting a precedent against discriminatory political practices. As early as 1991, predictions were launched about a political shift from old-timers to newer residents as the Hispanic population grew, and consequently their political influence. According to Morton Winsberg, a Florida State University professor studying Hispanic growth, “‘The good old boys will have to make an appeal to the Hispanics or not get voted in.’” 278 While Luis Roman, president of the Hispanic American Association, commented, “It won’t be long before the candidates for office will be relative newcomers instead of the old-line representatives who have dominated Osceola politics.” 279 Figures XVI. and XVII. list some of Osceola County and Orange County’s Hispanic elected officials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Guevara</td>
<td>Osceola County Commissioner</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Otero</td>
<td>City of Kissimmee Vice Mayor</td>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda Rentas</td>
<td>City of Kissimmee Commissioner</td>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Quiñones</td>
<td>Osceola County Commissioner</td>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Melendez</td>
<td>School Board Member</td>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Irizarry</td>
<td>City of Kissimmee Commissioner</td>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
City of Kissimmee Commissioner Carlos Irizarry was especially pleased with Tony Ortiz’s 2008 victory, which increased the number of Puerto Rican elected officials in Central Florida to five at that time. “We’re here to work hard and to make history. We have just now proved it,” remarked Irizarry. Quiñones expressed a similar comment during the 65th Infantry memorial controversy. Both politicians wanted the public to recognize that Puerto Ricans are in fact here to stay, and are not part of the transient labor force so often found in the Orlando-Kissimmee region. The issue of permanency is recurring. Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics want the residents of Metropolitan Orlando to know that this population is going to remain in Orlando, and that the resulting transformations are going to indeed become a part of a new, Latinized Orlando.

The massive influx of migrants led to increased political representation, and the election of Puerto Rican politicians. Politicians have even looked to Puerto Rico in deciding how to campaign during elections. On May 31st, 2011 Nelson Melendez, formerly a volunteer for Robert Guevara’s campaign, recalled the meetings they had in an apartment during Guevara’s race. “We decided we would run it the way they do in Puerto Rico,” he said, “with caravans and people holding signs in front of the supermarkets.” In 2010 I observed the continuation of these practices from my BVL home as a long caravan
playing Spanish music and waving Puerto Rican flags supported the candidacy of Republicans John Quiñones and Wanda Rentas.

After the 2011 redistricting, Osceola County approved a new district map where Hispanics would comprise more than 50% of the population in two of the five districts, and at least 40% in two of the other districts. According to journalist Jeannette Rivera-Iyles, “The map reflects the tremendous growth of Hispanics, who at 122,000 strong account for 45.5% of Osceola’s population, the highest of any Central Florida county.”

However, commentary from bloggers equates the population increase with an increase of youth, who would not be eligible to vote since districts are created based on census population figures, without attention to voting age of the population. Additionally, the blog responses reflect the common perceptions of Puerto Rican apathy and low voter turnout. These discourses were not only present in blog commentary, the disappointment with low voter turnout amongst the Hispanic population was expressed during my one-on-one conversations with interviewees and in public forums like the Osceola County redistricting meetings. One Hispanosphere blog conversation reads:

Hispanic population growth never equals voting power . . . Hispanic’s, especially PRs, do not vote.

Rico, get with the programme, an increase in hispanics doesn’t automatically equate to more voters. Babies in diapers can’t vote! Hahahahaha.

Puerto Rican activists have made a concerted effort to dispel any myth of Puerto Rican apathy and low voter turnout. At a redistricting meeting in May of 2011 a Hispanic in the audience commented to a political hopeful that Puerto Rican voter turnout was in fact low in Central Florida and other parts of the continental US. The aspiring politician, from the island of Puerto Rico, responded with a finger over his mouth saying “ssssssshhhhhhh.”
“We can’t say those things, it’s putting ourselves down” he replied, reflecting the efforts of middle and upper class Puerto Rican’s to reverse the stigma. I had very few in-depth conversations with my interviewees and informants about politics in Puerto Rico or Florida, about conflicts between Democrats and Republicans, or about pro-statehood and pro-commonwealth supporters. At times these individuals would say that they are Republicans or Democrats, and on one occasion an individual felt that only Puerto Ricans living on the island should be responsible for making the decision about Puerto Rico’s political status. But, rarely did discussions about politics arise in our conversations, although these issues were well documented in the media. For many of my informants politics were not a primary concern in their daily lives, and they therefore chose not to be involved, while for others it was a sensitive topic that they preferred not to discuss.

Still, one of the greatest challenges to the acquisition of political power amongst Hispanics is in fact the apathy and low voter turnout that has been noted in the region, branding the Hispanic population. For instance, in 1990 the US Census counted an estimated 159,000 Hispanics in Orange, Seminole, and Osceola counties with 102,000 residing in Orange County. However, only 18,731 or 18% of Hispanics were registered to vote in Orange County. Several explanations have been offered to explain the low rates of voter registration, particularly in comparison to turnout on the island, which often reaches 80%. One explanation is that Florida’s Puerto Rican community is not concentrated in one geographical area like other island migrations to New York or Chicago. Since there is not a large concentration of Puerto Ricans who are politically, socially, and culturally organized, it becomes more difficult to define the community’s political and social agenda. Orlando City Council member Mary Johnson said, “she
thinks that many Hispanics are too laid back to get politically involved. ‘I think a lot of them are sort of reserved, quiet.’”

Another theory is that many Puerto Ricans are not registering to vote because of economics. Retirees from the island decide to keep their permanent residence in Puerto Rico for tax purposes. Even though Puerto Rico’s taxes are higher than in many of the states, residents of Puerto Rico do not pay the federal income tax. Yet, others provide a different explanation for low voter turnout and political apathy:

Annabelle Conroy, a professor who teaches a Latin-American politics class at the University of Central Florida, had students survey Kissimmee citizens about the past presidential race [when George W. Bush was victorious in 2000]. Most Hispanics said they did not vote. Many were newcomers. who said they were too busy to pay attention to the campaigns; some were leading more-transient lives as renters who moved from place to place; and others had not yet adopted the U.S. political parties as their own.

Take for example Nestor Gonzalez, a Central Florida resident who admits he would rather stay home than show up at the poles. He was too busy getting his business off the ground than to take the time to learn about the candidates and figure out “‘the lesser of two evils.’”

“My priority right now is to establish myself here,’ said Gonzales, a resident in the Dr. Phillips area of Orlando.” He continued saying, “‘I am so disappointed with politicians from Puerto Rico that I am coming here with that bad feeling that they are not going to solve anything.’

On one end, it is suggested that Puerto Ricans are disengaged with Florida politics because they have been so turned off by the intensity of island politics, while others argue that Central Florida’s Puerto Rican population remains firmly entrenched in island politics. According to *Orlando Sentinel* journalist Maria Padilla, “the downside to island-style politics is that it infects everything—from your job to your wardrobe. Everything is
filtered through a political lens, every issue is blown up to crisis proportions and people weave conspiracies where none exist.” Padilla even recalls an occasion in the 90s when she was asked if she was a nationalist because she had on a black and white dress, the colors of the old Nationalist movement. Needless to say, she never wore that dress again.

Politics, according to Padilla, “is the national sport of Puerto Rico, where in casual conversation people try to smoke out your political affiliation.” In contrast, other commentators’ opinions, captured in the press, attribute the disengagement with Florida politics to first and second-generation Hispanics’ preference to remain engaged in island politics. Yet, others argue that Puerto Rican politics are infiltrating Florida. For instance, fundraisers for politicians running for office in Puerto Rico are becoming more and more common in Central Florida.

Indeed, Puerto Rico’s political candidates have created linkages to Florida’s Puerto Rican residents. In May of 2008, Orlando Sentinel reporter Jeannette Rivera-Iyles attended a fundraiser for politicians running for office in Puerto Rico:

> On a recent Friday night, a small, elegantly dressed crowd sipped wine and nibbled on bacon-wrapped scallops at the swanky Citrus Club in downtown Orlando. They were there to open their wallets for someone many of them didn’t know personally, but were happy to support: Tomás Rivera-Schatz, a candidate for the Puerto Rico Senate who has been anointed by his pro-statehood party as the next president of that legislative body. Why would Florida’s Hispanic population be concerned with Puerto Rico’s elected officials? According to Tomás Rivera-Schatz, a former candidate for the Puerto Rican Senate, “You have, for instance, many local residents that have businesses, property or family on this island. They want to see things improving because what happens there affects them directly here.”

> Therefore, it is in their best interest to have a stable, reliable, and honest government on the island. Oscar Osorio, an Osceola County resident
and mechanical engineer, wrote a check to Rivera-Schatz out of a sense of civic responsibility: “I was born and raised there, I owe to Puerto Rico much of what I am today. I believe people like Rivera-Schatz can be agents of change, so I support them.”

It is important to note that individual Puerto Ricans who migrated from the island are not the only ones attending fundraisers for island politicians. Puerto Rican companies that have expanded into the Florida market—Banco Popular, The Taco Maker, Casiano Communications—have become increasingly interested in island politics, since island politics have a direct impact on their financial success.

Unfortunately, recent scandals involving local Puerto Rican politicians have raised doubts about the newcomers’ capabilities. In other conversations their authenticity is questioned. For example, in February of 2010 Mildred Fernandez took a trip to Puerto Rico where the island’s pro-statehood governor Luis Fortuno endorsed her mayoral race. On the Hispanosphere blog, Jeannette Rivera-Iyles wrote a commentary about Fernandez’s trip to Puerto Rico and endorsement by Fortuno. In response, Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike attacked Fernandez for assimilating to American culture, turning her back on her Hispanic constituents, and alienating Democrats:

Mrs. Fernandez does not represent the PR or Hispanic Community or their interests. As a fact, she has denied any relation with the Latino community. After eating ‘alcapurrias’ and ‘bacalaitos’, now she prefers ‘hamburgers’ and ‘hotdogs’ but that is how ‘mal agradecidos’ proceed. After we voted for her in the two previous elections now, she has declared to EL NUEVO DIA NEWSPAPER on February 23, that she does not need the Hispanic Votes . . . ok. Because she does not need the hispanics votes, we don’t need her either and on March 9th, 2010 we are going to demonstrate to Mrs. Fernandez that yes we do not her as a Commissioner and less as a Mayor. We are going to protest in front of the Commissioners Building since 9 o’cloch in the morning. Come and joint our cause. We do not need Mrs. Fernandez no more . . . RESIGN NOW . . OUT OF OFFICE NOW. .

We, hispanic democrats, voted for Ms. Fernandez the first time she ran for commissioner, we were happy and ORGULLOSOS that finally we were going to
have more access to the county commission, but later we were disappointed by the wayMs. Fernandez treated puertorican and hispanic democrats, and other people that were not republicans. We believed that she was going to have doors open for all hispanics form the district, but we were wrong . . because all she did was use her office to directly and indirectly attack other democrat hispanics. She was so arrogant that even in her own party, she created enemies. I remember how she use to talk negatively about other puertorican from the republican party that were actually helping democrats and republicans, like Commissioner Quinones and Commissioner Irrizarry. She created gossip at her office to damage other well intended republicans that were not limited mentally by their party and were helping the community as a whole without limitation of party affiliations. We puertorican and hispanic democrats, always jumped fences and voted for people like Mildred, because we believed in them, but now that we know the limited IBM mentality that we are dealing with is time to make corrections. Before we were good guys because we voted for her, now we are traitors because we don’t like the way that she represent our community. Arrogant Mildred will lose because she only has the support of the 30 hispanic republicans that exist in Orange County. 294

The discussion, originally focused on Mildred Fernandez, became an attack not only of the commissioner, but also about the dysfunctionalism of all Puerto Ricans and their resulting second-class citizenship:

I wouldn’t pay two cents for a whole pile of your people or your history. You are undecided, vacillant, uncommitted, devious, you don’t believe in loyalty, dishonest, etc. ect. No wonder you remain a territory, you don’t even come up to the knees of real americans but pretend to be like us. You should all get on a boat or swim back to your beloved island and bite your heads off there, like you have been doing here, over the political future of one of your own. All of you need some sort of psychological exam because you people have big troubles. 295

In response, the military service of Puerto Ricans was brought up as a testament to their worthiness, and deservingness of citizenship and political participation:

If you can’t pay 2 cents for our people and our history, let me remind you that we were able to make your history be in the books all over the world . . In World War II do you know who really were the 65 Infantry (the people that you would not pay 2 cents.) . . Puerto Ricans have participated in every major American military conflict, from the American Revolution, when volunteers from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Mexico fought the British in 1779 under the command of General Bernardo de Galvez (1746-1786), to the present-day conflict in Iraq. . . By the way do you know who is commanding the forces form Central Florida in Afghanistan, Commander Marrero from Puerto Rico and his crew is also more than 50% puertorican and hispanics from Central Florida 296
The political participation of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida continues to be contentious, particularly after more recent scandals and controversy surrounding three Hispanic politicians: US Senator Mel Martinez, Orange County Commissioner Mildred Fernandez, and Kissimmee City Commissioner Carlos Irizarry. In 2009 Martinez gave up his seat with more than a year to go, disappointing the constituents that voted for the Senator. Then, Mildred Fernandez was arrested on a number of charges related to illegal campaign contributions when she was caught asking an undercover agent posed as a developer for political donations. Finally, Irizarry was arrested for “allegedly brandishing a gun at his wife outside a school,” and faced felony charges for aggravated assault with a firearm. Irizarry was the first Hispanic and Puerto Rican on the City of Kissimmee Commission, and Mildred Fernandez was the first Hispanic and Puerto Rican to sit on the Orange County Commission. While politicians nationwide have been hindered by scandal, the number of Hispanic elected officials in Metropolitan Orlando is small, making their wrongdoings all the more noticeable.

In nearby Orange County, controversy over the ethnic makeup of the 2011 redistricting committee has garnered a great deal of attention locally and nationally. For instance, on April 7, 2011 The New York Times reported on the 15-member panel appointed by county commissioners and the mayor to redraw the boundaries of the political districts. Puerto Ricans in Orange County were outraged, and challenged the appointment of only three Hispanics, none of them Puerto Rican, despite the counties exploding Puerto Rican population. Court proceedings in Orange County are currently underway over the redistricting map as a result of a lawsuit filed by Puerto Rican community members. The population increase of Hispanics, particularly Puerto Ricans,
continue to draw attention from Hispanic and non-Hispanic political hopefuls alike. Hispanics are demanding their rights to political representation, being vocal, and are willing to fight through formal legal channels to gain greater political power in the region, as is evident by the Federal Voting Rights Suit in Osceola County and the controversy surrounding Orange Counties redistricting committee.

In fact, Central Florida’s Hispanics are increasingly influential not only in local politics, but also national electoral politics. The I-4 corridor, one of the biggest swing areas of the biggest swing state has an estimated 900,000 Hispanics, one of the biggest swing demographics for the corridor. Florida’s population increase earned the state two more seats in Congress during the 2011 redistricting, the redrawing of electoral district boundaries that takes place after the decennial census, and Hispanics in Central Florida are key to that growth. A great deal of importance has been placed on the I-4 corridor since about half of the state’s more than 600,000 registered Latino Democrats live in the region. Journalist Victor Manuel Ramos articulated the significance of this region in a 2008 article, “It’s important because, realistically, the I-4 corridor decides elections in Florida and 18 percent of that vote is Hispanic.” For years the Democratic Party gave Hispanic voters in Florida little attention since the Hispanic vote was predominantly Cubans, who were loyal to the Republican Party historically. However, the large number of Puerto Ricans in the region has garnered attention from both the Democratic and Republican parties, and the distinctions between Puerto Ricans moving from the island and those from the North have also been highlighted.

Hispanics in the state of Florida make up 13.5% of the state’s approximately 11.4 million registered voters. Amongst Florida’s 1,551,000 Hispanic voters, 463,000 are
registered as Republicans (11.2% of all registered Republican voters), and 592,000 are registered as Democrats (12.9% of all registered democratic voters). Initially, more Hispanics were registered as Republicans, but by 2008 the balance tipped to the Democrats (See Figure XVIII).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Florida Department of State Division of Elections

Of Florida’s eligible Hispanic voters 32% are Cuban, 28% are Puerto Rican, 9% are Mexican, and 30% are of other Hispanic origin. Puerto Rican Governor Luis Fortuno claimed, “The Puerto Rican vote in Florida is up for grabs, of course.” He went on to distinguish between Puerto Ricans from the island and Puerto Ricans from the North, “Puerto Ricans in Florida tend to be very conservative socially. If they are second or third generation moving south from New York, that’s different. Those coming straight from Puerto Rico are social conservatives for whom issues such as high taxes are very important.” In yet another article a reporter writes, “Puerto Ricans in Central Florida are divided into two distinct voting groups. Roughly half are ‘Nuyorican’ and other Northeasterners who have migrated south to retire or re-establish themselves. They are
more likely to be longtime Democrats. The other half have come here directly from the island. They’re less predictable politically.”

Because Florida is one of the four electoral megastates, with 29 electoral votes, securing a victory in Florida has been key political strategy for both Democrats and Republicans. On October 19, 2012, during a campaign speech in the Sun City Center, located in South Florida, Vice President Biden told the crowd that the election will be over if they win the state of Florida. During the 2012 election, Florida was reported to be “the only swing state that Romney, or any Republican, must carry to win the presidency. And it's the one state where a win can guarantee Obama, or any competitive Democrat, four years in the White House.” According to Susan MacManus, a political scientist at the University of South Florida that specializes in voter demographics, Florida swings politically because “it’s the one state whose population breakdown most closely mirrors the nation as a whole.”

MacManus claimed that Florida “closely approximates the entire nation” in the categories of race, geography (rural, urban and suburban), and age groups. She explained that Florida is only slightly older than the rest of the country, despite the state’s reputation as a place for retirement; although, that demographic is changing too. Additionally, two-thirds of voters were born outside of Florida, meaning their political preferences have developed in other regions of the country or in other countries. But, Hispanics are increasingly influential to Florida’s politics.

Indeed, Florida’s demographic transformations have changed the political realm. Florida is becoming more Hispanic, like much of the United States, and the 2012 election shows that the growth in the Hispanic population is coming from individuals that lean towards the Democratic Party. Conservative Cubans once dominated politics in Florida’s
Hispanic communities, but Puerto Ricans are now the fastest growing group. And in 2008, for the first time in decades, more Hispanics registered as Democrats (38%) than Republicans (30%). In a November 2012 *Sun Sentinel* article entitled, “Hispanic voters flex muscles—Record numbers shift from GOP” the Hispanic population’s overwhelming support for Obama is chronicled. In 2012, Obama received 60% of Florida’s Hispanic vote and nationally he won an estimated 71% of the Hispanic vote. And, Puerto Ricans have been credited with changing the state’s political profile: “Within the state's Latino community, Obama got overwhelming support from Puerto Ricans, Florida's second-largest Hispanic group. They voted for the president over Republican challenger Mitt Romney by a 83-17 percent margin, according to one exit poll.” Additionally, exit polls showed greater democratic support from the Cuban population than in previous elections, and Obama was the overwhelming favorite amongst other Hispanics as well.
CHAPTER 4
LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND RACIAL FORMATIONS

“What is bilingual? Knowing 2 languages. Trilingual? Three languages. Knowing only one language? = American.”
---Latinfrommanhattan, Hispanosphere, Jan. 6, 2011 12:01pm

On November 4, 2009 Nberry7 posted an entry on City-Data.com, a website that includes statistical data and conversational forums about different US cities, to inquire about the “pro’s and con’s” of relocating to Kissimmee, FL, from Kansas to open a daycare. The user found some “very nice houses on the internet for cheap,” but questioned, “is there a catch of why they are so cheap? Please tell me more?” Nberry7 received the following responses:

I wouldn’t put my kids into Osceola schools. If you don’t speak Spanish you’ll have a hard time opening a day care in Kissimmee. Houses are cheap for a reason. The majority of Kissimmee and Poinciana are NOT a desirable place to live. 309

Forget Kissimmee, I have been living here 25 years and if you don’t speak Spanish, forget it . . . Kissimmee is a “no go” on my list, its going down hill. 310

I agree too, especially about the Spanish speaking part. I’d stay away from Kissimmee. It looks like a big carnival lining the streets. 311

Have to agree with the “don’t move to Kissimmee” crowd . . . the area has run its course from good to bad. No area that is largely populated with migrants and illegals will see property values or the quality of schools increase. Areas that were once just average affordable “old Florida” neighborhoods in Kissimmee now have the appearance of “barrios.” 312

These are some of the discourses that are circulating about new destinations of Hispanic migration in Central Florida. As I began reviewing my fieldnotes after five months of research, an unanticipated theme emerged: the dominance of the Spanish language in public spaces, and the tensions this creates between ethnic and racial groups. As the
online conversation reveals, the hyper-presence of the Spanish language has become a primary marker of difference and the basis for judgments about the worth and desirability of both people and places in Central Florida. This chapter explores how language use and language ideologies mediate the relationship between Latinization and racialization processes.

The massive influx of Hispanics, and the resulting Latinization has transformed the physical landscape, politics, social life, and demographics in the region. However, the soundscape has been altered as well. Bilingualism is an asset in the business community, Spanish can be heard as frequently, if not more frequently than English in residential enclaves like BVL, and the Spanish language is increasingly present and accommodated in public and private life. The region’s Latinization has led to the articulation of ideologies about the Spanish language and its usage as non-Hispanics are increasingly exposed to the changing soundscape. These ideas or language ideologies reveal how linguistic practices are racialized along with other practices, physical characteristics, and signifiers of identity. In this chapter I highlight the conversations where language ideologies circulate—becoming naturalized and sometimes going unchallenged—and argue that those ideologies lead to the formation of a white racial consciousness by non-Hispanic whites and the racialization of Hispanics as a non-White racial group, thereby revealing the relationship between Latinization, racialization, and language ideologies. In the social spaces where language ideologies are articulated, racial meanings and ideas about difference and belonging in the United States are generated, shared, and refined. I draw particular attention to the circulation of racial anger, feelings of white exclusion, and the move to confine linguistic differences to the home; additionally, I discuss
Hispanics’ response when bilingualism and the use of Spanish in public spaces are challenged.

**Relevant Theoretical Frameworks: Language Ideologies and Racialization**

Language ideologies are the ideas, perceptions, and beliefs about the nature and usage of languages, and this chapter explores a few dimensions of language ideologies as they relate to perceptions of the nature, identity, and character of Hispanic people; struggles for power; and the constructed separation between Spanish and English. Ideas about language become naturalized, shared, commonsense understandings, and these ideologies connect language to identities, values, and morals. Thus, in Metropolitan Orlando language becomes an index for racial identities, status, character, and personhood. Furthermore, language ideologies are closely connected to the acquisition and maintenance of power and other political, economic, or individualized interests; thus, the expression of language ideologies documented throughout this ethnography point to the power struggles that result from the demographic shifts and increasing economic and political power of Orlando’s Hispanic community.

Another dimension of language ideologies involves the very idea of the existence of distinctly identifiable languages. The boundaries we construct, in this case the boundaries between English and Spanish, erase the contradictions and variations amongst speakers of those languages. The research subjects in this article, for instance, deny the existence of “multiple spanishes” and the interrelationships between languages, the use of “spanglish” being a case in point. The vignettes in this chapter show the articulation of language ideologies that position Spanish and English as distinct entities with different
values, and reveals the intricate ways in which the Spanish language becomes “emblematic of self and community.” In this case language ideologies lead to assumptions about the character of a Hispanic suburb and the people that reside there. Irvine and Gal (1995) have suggested that “iconicity” is widespread in linguistic ideologizations. Iconicity refers to “the interpretation of linguistic form not just as a dependable index of a social group but as a transparent depiction of the distinctive qualities of the group.”

In Orlando, linguistic ideologies become the basis for judgments about the nature and character of Hispanic people and Hispanic concentrated spaces, but also effected racial formations. Language usage and linguistic ideologies impacted racial meanings, understandings, and categorizations.

As mentioned before, Hispanics are not as isolated, residentially, from non-Hispanic white residents. Instead, I observed greater residential segregation and social distancing from African Americans, as a result this chapter does not document interactions between Hispanics and African Americans. My informants, in free flowing conversations, reveal some of their racist and stereotypical perceptions of the black population due to already conceived notions about blackness. However, the invisibility of black bodies and black people throughout Osceola County made it less necessary to engage in distancing strategies to create separation from African Americans. This, however, is different than many rural Southern spaces, where Hispanics are not segregated from well-established African American communities, which greatly impacts race relations and in turn racial understandings. 

Tensions between African Americans and Hispanics in new, southern destinations of migration reveal that non-racial discrimination, xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments, and economic competition has
stifled possible solidarity between African Americans and Hispanics.319 Helen Marrow (2009) claims the collective social distance from blackness “is at least partially based on the way race is organized in Latin America, where distancing from blackness is frequently encouraged.”320 While the one-drop rule “blackened” individuals with a combination of black and white ancestry, “legacies of white superiority encourage many Latin Americans to identify as ‘whiter.’”321

My emphasis on Puerto Ricans is particularly significant for studying the changing black-white binary since populations from the Hispanic Caribbean have had the experience of being perceived as black, which is less common amongst Mexicans and most South Americans. The slave trade was especially developed in the Hispanic Caribbean islands, and racial mixing between European colonizers, African slaves, and the Indigenous population resulted in a population that “spans a continuum from White to Indigenous to Black.”322 Although there are indeed Afro-Latinos in South and Central America, the less advanced slave trade resulted in a population whose appearance is more likely to range from White to Indigenous.323 Intrigued about the ways that race surfaces in everyday life encounters, I often waited until talk about race came up naturally during interactions, or was initiated in a conversation with my informants. On more than one occasion my Colombian or Puerto Rican informants have pointed to their skin to make statements such as, “look, I’m white, no one is going to discriminate against me.” The opposition to the Spanish language, and Hispanics’ racial ambiguity expands historical discourses about Mexican and Puerto Rican incorporation into the US political structure, which focus on the enduring nature of racial formations, and the centrality of race in the
determination of political participation, incorporation, belonging, and the ideological formulation of U.S. citizenship.\textsuperscript{324}

Racial and ethnic tensions often present themselves in the voicing of language ideologies, whereby non-Hispanic whites defend English as the only legitimate language of “real” Americans, the constitutionally sanctioned language of Florida, and therefore the only acceptable language for the public sphere. These ideologies about the English language show how language gets mapped onto race and ethnicity.\textsuperscript{325} In this case study, language difference leads to feelings of racial exclusion, the circulation of racial anger, and the development and strategic deployment of a white racial consciousness by non-Hispanic whites who rally around and defend their “whiteness,” “white privilege,” and the sanctity of “white public spaces.”\textsuperscript{326} At the same time, these individuals display a nativist response to the Hispanic migration, in addition to a white racial consciousness and a defending of white privilege; thus, whiteness and nativism work together and these discourses overlap during the expression of language ideologies and during the process of racialization. The accommodation of Spanish and privileging of bilingualism also leads to allegations of reverse-discrimination since bilingualism provides a labor market advantage and at times leads to the exclusion of non-Hispanic whites who are increasingly finding themselves to be the “minority” in Hispanic concentrated spaces.

I am using the terms whiteness, white privilege, and white public space as an analytic to delineate power relationships between non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics, and to explain how social forces, in this case language usage, ideologies, and migration, shape racial identity in the United States. Whiteness is quite different than a white racial identity, and can be defined as, “a compilation of institutional privilege and ideological
characteristics bestowed upon members of the dominant group in societies organized by
the idea and practice [historically and contemporarily] of pan-European supremacy.”

Whiteness, therefore, is a structural position of social privilege and power. Whiteness is
about cultural, material, and political power, and the capital that results from the
privileged position that increases the opportunity and chance for success.

It is important to recognize that whiteness is not static, but fluid and changing. The factors that categorize an individual as part of the “white race,” such as nationality, phenotype, ancestry, or class mobility, have changed, and who is classified as white has also changed. The fluidity of the white racial category helps explain how the Irish, Italians, and Jewish “became” white over time due to shifting economic circumstances, ideologies, and perceptions. However, Hispanics in Metropolitan Orlando are racialized as non-white, regardless of their self-identification as part of the white race. Additionally, the “immigrant analogy” suggesting that Hispanics will “become” white as future generations become upwardly mobile and assimilate, like the European immigrants that preceded them, has been refuted. At the same time, even amongst individuals that are perceived as having a white racial identity, there are hierarchical subgroups; so, not everyone with white skin enjoys the same privileges of being white. For instance, Matt Wray (2006) discusses how poor whites, labeled “white trash,” are perceived as “not quite white.”

One of the greatest privileges of a white racial identity, and the power position that whiteness entails is the benefit of being an unmarked, normalized category. Whiteness defines what is normal, natural, mainstream, marginal, and deviant, despite an individual’s intentions, since the privileges of the dominant position are not seen as a
privilege, but the norm. Ergo, non-whites are subject to racialization, while whites are the norm by which difference is measured. Historically, a white racial identity has been about the social distance from blackness. Hence, white is the unmarked category, and is constructed, ideologically, as non-black.\textsuperscript{330} Although a white racial identity was originally constructed as simply black vs. non black, Hispanics have shifted the conversation from a black/non-black binary, making non-Hispanic whites more conscious of their white racial identity, and the threat to their white privilege in the face of a perceived non-white, although not black, population.

Additionally, the privilege of being an unmarked category in a position of power enables a white racial identity to be conflated with Americaness, while relegating others to a second-class citizenship. This privilege is evident linguistically in an example provided by Jane Hill (2008). Of two different statements, “Americans are still prejudiced against blacks,” and “Americans still make less money than do whites,” only the second statement generates a startled reaction from research subjects. In the first sentence “whites” can stand in for “Americans” without seeming odd, although 12.6% of Americans are black; yet, in the second statement “blacks” cannot stand in metonymically for “Americans.” The same is true if we were to apply this example to Hispanics.

Finally, white public space refers to the actual places where white privilege is exercised and reproduced, and where the interests of the dominant encroach on the rights of the dominated. For instance, when my informant, Allen Mitchell, enters a store in BVL and demands, “This is America, speak English!” he is defending his white privilege in what was previously a white public space, and simultaneously encroaching on the rights
of the Spanish-speaker with his nativist remark. Furthermore, many individuals would not even think they were entitled to eavesdrop on a conversation, and then interrupt the speakers to comment on or correct their word choice, language, accent, or grammar. By articulating utterances about white victimization, reverse discrimination, and the minoritization of non-Hispanic whites in the spaces of BVL and Osceola County, my informants are displaying an increasing awareness of themselves as raced in response to demographic changes in Osceola County and BVL. Instead of being unmarked in public spaces, these individuals feel hyper-marked, and their white identity is interpreted as a liability; henceforth, awareness and consciousness comes about in a setting where they are made to feel uncomfortable and out of place due to the region’s Latinization.

**Linguistic Transformations**

The massive influx of Hispanics, and the resulting “Latinization” has not only transformed the physical landscape, political power, social life, and demographics in Metropolitan Orlando; the soundscape has been altered as well. Bilingualism is an asset in the business community, Spanish can be heard as frequently, if not more frequently than English in residential enclaves like BVL, and the Spanish language is increasingly present and accommodated in public and private life. It is important to recognize that Florida’s linguistic transformations, until more recent times, were unique and exceptional and only present in certain parts of the United States, like Miami, Chicago, and East Los Angeles. But, Spanish/English bilingualism in the public sphere is increasingly present as the Hispanic population continues to grow throughout the United States, particularly in non-traditional destinations of migration. Individuals defend these changes by highlighting the inevitable results of globalization, with moving and interconnecting
bodies, capital, and language, or the United State’s “multicultural” demographic, while others object to the hyper presence of Spanish in public spaces.

The accommodation of the Spanish language, in opposition to other languages, is viewed as the “privileging” of Spanish people and the Spanish language. As a result, there is a backlash against Hispanics and evidence of tensions and polarization between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, Spanish speakers and non-Spanish speakers that are based on linguistic differences instead of perceived physical differences. Thus, language practices are racialized. This linguistic polarization leads to allegations of reverse discrimination, the expression of color blind or race-neutral ideologies, and the development of a white racial consciousness amongst non-Hispanic whites. At the same time, second and third generation Hispanics’ reliance and increasing preference for the English language complicates the English/Spanish divide, whereby Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics disagree about the importance and use of the Spanish language in everyday life. Throughout this chapter, research subjects define Hispanics in relations to Spanish, whether or not they are actually speaking the Spanish language, and non-Hispanics in relation to English. This reveals the rigid distinctions between English and Spanish, and the ways in which language ideologies shape racial meanings, which in turn leads to a constructed divide or barrier between Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

As early as the 1990’s, when the influx of Hispanics drastically increased in the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area, Spanish/English bilingualism in education, politics, business transactions, and during everyday social life became increasingly common. Hispanic migration, and the resulting spatial and linguistic transformations is further accentuated by media coverage. Throughout the years the local
media has highlighted the growing presence and influence of Hispanics with headlines that accentuate the changing soundscape; “Orlando Develops Hispanic Accent,” “Latinos at the Helm of Orlando’s Public Broadcasting,” “Seminole to offer ballots in Spanish,” “A New Home-One of Every Three Puerto Ricans in the State Calls Central Florida Home, Giving the Region A Bilingual Flair,” and “Ever Wonder why ATMs in Central Florida Speak Spanish?”

In a 1987 Orlando Sentinel article entitled Hispanic Boom in Los Estados Unidos, journalist Peter Francese opens up the story by asking his readers, “Habla usted Espanol?” He immediately goes on to warn his readers, “You might want to think about taking some lessons,” since the number of Hispanics in this country is increasing so rapidly.

Less than 10 years later, in 1996, the Orlando Sentinel was reporting that the United States is a global society, we are living in a global age, and that English-speaking Americans, not Spanish speakers, will just have to adjust. In 1996 Mr. Pequeno spoke with an Orlando Sentinel journalist. Mr. Pequeno was the organizer of the Viva Osceola festival, a cultural event with entertainment, ethnic foods, and commercial vendors trying to market to the Hispanic community. In an article entitled, Hispanic Influx Helps Make Central Florida International, Mr. Puqueno claimed, “Accepting the newcomers will take time . . . Politicians will have to adjust to their new audience, and some locals will resent the rise in Spanish- language speakers . . . But everyone will adjust. ‘They have no choice.’” And, monolingual English speakers are continuing to adjust, and are increasingly displaying a survival Spanish by incorporating a few Spanish words into their vocabulary to be inclusive and appeal to Spanish speakers in political, economic, and social forums. This is remarkably different from “mock Spanish,” a usage of Spanish
common amongst monolingual Anglos that incorporates Spanish terms, such as “Hasta la vista, baby,” “No problema,” or “Buenos nachos,” in a humorous way, at times ignoring grammatical rules, which can be interpreted as a form of racialization and covert racism. One year prior to Pequeno’s proclamation about politicians adjusting to Hispanics, Orlando Mayor Glenda Hood greeted the audience with, “Buenos dias y bienvenidos a todos,” at the opening of the government of Puerto Rico’s first office in Orlando one Friday in 1995. According to the Orlando Sentinel, “The City Beautiful became the city bilingual” that Friday morning, and as time progressed command of the Spanish language became an asset and a necessity in the workforce, thereby transforming the soundscape from English to Spanish in some spaces and places in the region.

Months later I sat at the Applebee’s restaurant in BVL listening to two non-Hispanic white males complain about a Muslim business owner in Osceola County that was pretending to be Hispanic. One male complained that he did not trust the owner. “He has his family working in the store, and the owner speaks Spanish and everything,” he said. “But, why does he have to lie about being Hispanic,” the two repeated over and over. They did not object to the use of Spanish, after all being greeted and serviced in Spanish is not uncommon in Osceola County. What disturbed the men more was that a non-Hispanic was trying to pass as Hispanic to avoid the backlash against Muslims in the United States Post-911. Interestingly, that Muslim man found a Hispanic identity and the Spanish language to be the most appropriate cover.

The presence and accommodation of the Spanish language can certainly be juxtaposed with the state of Florida’s support of English-only legislation. In the state of Florida English has been the official language since 1988, although the United States has
no official language. English-only legislation has its roots in Florida due to a 1980 anti-bilingual ordinance enacted by voters in Dade County, a nativist response to the hyper-presence of Cuban immigrants. According to the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, the English-only movement “promotes the enactment of legislation that restricts or prohibits the use of languages other than English by government agencies and, in some cases, by private businesses.” Thus, language ideologies not only shape ideas about Hispanic people, but get applied to policies that have led to the public regulation of languages. This has been the case not only in the United States, but other countries like Britain and France as well. The English-only policy of Workforce Central Florida, a local agency that helps the unemployed find work, provides an example of language prohibition in the Central Florida region.

In an April 2009 memo, Spanish-speaking employees at Workforce Central Florida were reminded by management that using a language other than English is not allowed, even during breaks or during lunch hour, unless a customer is unable to speak English. The text read:

Hey Team!

We have had some recent complaints about staff speaking in Spanish out (in) the offices in lieu of speaking in English.

All staff are being advised that while in WCF offices, all staff must speak English. This includes break time, lunch time and/or if you are on the phone at the WCF office. Spanish speaking will only be allowed in the office if a customer is unable to speak English.

Please adhere to this policy as this is important that we do not offend and/or exclude non-Spanish speaking customers and/or staff no exception to this policy.

Thanks.

When questioned by local reporters, Workforce Central Florida claimed the English-only policy was in place for two to six weeks, and that no employee was ever reprimanded
while the policy was in effect; yet, former employees told reporter Jim Stratton that some workers did in fact receive warnings that were placed in their personnel file. Why did the agency place these restrictions on their employees? According to an agency spokeswoman, the policy was put into place after Workforce Central Florida received several complaints from job seekers and non-bilingual employees who felt uncomfortable with staff members speaking Spanish to one another.

The discomfort experienced by monolingual English speakers comes about because at times individuals believe that Spanish speakers are talking about them. Additionally, this discomfort results from a fear of change, and the language ideology that links belonging in the United States with English. Although Workforce Central Florida’s policy was later amended without written notice to allow bilingual staff to speak their language of choice during breaks, bilingual employees were encouraged to be sensitive to those around them, and to avoid excluding their monolingual peers by speaking Spanish.

While Workforce Central Florida introduced the English-only requirement through official company policies, other employers subject bilingual employees to the same mandates verbally and unofficially, at times contradicting their involvement with the Hispanic community and their increased interest in hiring bilingual staff to service Spanish-speaking clientele. The ideologies about the spaces where Spanish usage is acceptable reveals how discrimination, on linguistic grounds, is publically acceptable and often goes unchallenged while the corresponding racial or ethnic discrimination brings must more stringent consequences. The dominance of the black-white paradigm leads to the invisibility of other form of non-racial exclusion and discrimination based for
instance on language use, national origins, or other “cultural” factors. According to Elizabeth Aranda (2004), “Race in 20th-century America is not limited to phenotype; the social construction of race involves ethnic and global dimensions such as national origin, culture, language, religion, the historical relationship between colonial powers and their political subjects, and race.” 337 She terms the racialization of ethnicity “ethnoracism.” Thus, the social construction of race “consists of the interlocking effects of these ethnoracial, cultural, historical, and geopolitical factors.” 338 As a result, Aranda argues that, “the definition of racism must be expanded to include how ethnicity, culture, national origin, and the historical relationship between minorities’ country of origin and the country of settlement (Bonilla-Silva, 2000; Grosfoguel & Georas, 2000) have been racialized.” 339 By focusing on both the blatant and covert ways that racism manifests in response to the Latinization of Orlando, I explore the ways that racial and non-racial discrimination (anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobia) become entangled.

In June of 2011 I interviewed Miranda Otero in the office of the Seminole County bank where she worked. During our conversation she explained the increasing need for a Hispanic presence amongst the staff. “Before, they [the bank] were catering only to the Anglo population, and Hispanics would be looking for a Hispanic presence or a Hispanic bank.” When Hispanic clients approached her they would comment, “oh finally, a Hispanic.” “Why did they want another Hispanic?” I asked. “Because they like to do business in their language,” she replied. Other branches of her bank would call and need her to interpret for a client, or would ask her to be present at their branch for an appointment with a Spanish-speaking client. Miranda approached her regional manager
and explained that they need to hire bilingual speakers since Hispanics are an “untapped market.”

Miranda has since witnessed increased involvement with the Hispanic community, and the hiring of bilingual staff in the different branches. Her branch joined the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and began sponsoring events for the Hispanic community. “They know the strength of the Hispanic community,” said Miranda, “and the Hispanic community is close, tight-knit. If you do something right we will give you referrals, but if you do something wrong we will tell everyone not to go there.” However, despite the increased interest in the Hispanic community, and the hiring of bilingual speakers, management controlled the use of Spanish in the branch. According to Miranda, her employers want English to be spoken, unless when servicing a Spanish-speaking client. She went on to explain the unofficial policy of the bank, which her co-workers were aware of: “If you have a Spanish speaking co-worker you can speak in Spanish at lunch or if there are no clients. But if there is someone in the lobby there should be no Spanish because it can offend someone. There is a lot of resentment from the true Floridians.” And, while these unofficial rules infringe on individual, constitutional liberties, these “unofficial” company rules that police the use of Spanish go uncontested and unchallenged in Miranda’s bank.

In a state that has resisted the changing soundscape through English-only policies and practices, first in South Florida and now in Central Florida, the integration of the Spanish language into political, economic, and social life did not happen without a fight, and at times that fight was waged with legal threats and law suits. Concerned citizens, activists, politicians, and organizations like New York City-based Latino Justice
PRLDEF have demanded the rights of Hispanic US citizens, which at times requires the presence of the Spanish language in institutional settings. For example, in the early 1990’s it took the threat of a lawsuit by the League of United Latin American Citizens against the state of Florida to move the Department of Education to change the way English was taught to foreign students. By 1992 the state was requiring public schools to employ bilingual teachers if a school had 15 or more students who speak the same language. It therefore became necessary to employ bilingual Spanish/English teachers, and the recruitment drives discussed in chapter two only facilitated the migration of teachers from the island of Puerto Rico to the Central Florida public school system.

While the integration of the Spanish language began in the early 1990’s, the struggle continues into contemporary times. In the political realm, the provisions of the 1965 federal Voting Rights Act is a weapon that is enacted case after case to move Spanish from the private spheres of the home, to the public sphere of politics. The voting rights act requires local governments to provide notices, assistance, and ballots in a foreign language when the census count shows that more than 10,000 residents or more than 5 percent of voting-age citizens speak a language other than English. By 2009 Orange and Osceola County were in compliance with the federal mandate; however, neighboring Central Florida counties like Seminole have formed committee’s to explore the best ways to transition to bilingual ballots or translated ballots for Spanish speakers. The presence of the Spanish language in local politics ensures monolingual Spanish speaker’s ability to participate in electoral politics; although, the Voting Rights Act is not only used for bilingualism. In chapter 3 the legislation was enacted to oppose the dilution
of Hispanic voters during congressional redistricting, and to contest single member districts.

**Language Ideologies and Linguistic Polarization**

When I arrived in BVL in 2010 the process of integrating Spanish into public life was long underway, and it was not long until I became accustomed to being greeted and serviced in Spanish. Everyday life encounters, in supermarkets, classrooms, banks, and restaurants, between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, and the resulting talk about race, ethnicity, and Spanish shows how language and language ideologies has polarized the residents of BVL. During an interview with BVL resident Chris Williams he claimed, “there are basically two separate communities, the English speaking and Spanish speaking. This results in mistrust, it’s difficult with the language barrier.” Again, the boundaries between Spanish and English, Hispanics and non-Hispanics are rigidly constructed and bounded with little attention given to the erasure of bilingual speakers, particularly the second and third generation Hispanics I encountered during fieldwork that exhibited a preference for English.

In July of 2010 I spoke with a group of residents about the changes to BVL as a result of the influx of Hispanics. Additionally, they were astounded by the lack of English-speaking employees. The overwhelming number of Spanish-speaking employees and the constant presence of the Spanish language in the public spaces they frequented bothered a few individuals. Brett Rogers began to describe his experiences at the Bank of America and Publix Sabor to the group. He recalled a time in the Public Sabor where several store associates had to search for an English-speaking worker to assist him as he waited patiently in disbelief. Publix Sabor is one of four supermarkets in Florida,
introduced by the Publix Supermarket, Inc. chain, which caters to the Hispanic population. Publix Sabor makes all product information and signs bilingual, and offers a wider variety of Caribbean and Latin American products than their other Publix stores. The group went on to talk about their frustrating experiences at the local Bank of America, emphasizing that it is the Bank of A-M-E-R-I-C-A, and it is therefore unacceptable to be greeted and spoken to in Spanish. “Can’t they tell we are not Hispanic?” Brett joked, pointing out his blond hair and blue eyes. This is how everyday life situations intertwine race and language, with language ideologies leading to the racialization of people, although on the surface the conversation appears to be solely about language.

Of course some Hispanics have blond hair and blue eyes as well, making it difficult to assess someone’s ethnic or racial background by physical appearance alone. The ambiguities of Hispanics’ racial identity is reflected in a section of Jackie Wirshing’s letter to the editor of the Orlando Sentinel: “I, [ ] , am considered a ‘minority’ because I am Puerto Rican. But I am white. My grandparents came from Germany and from Spain. We are all blond, blue-eyed, white Puerto Ricans. Why keep labeling us minorities as non-whites?” Indeed, it is the use of the Spanish language that marks Hispanics as non-white or as “the other,” and residents are most comfortable attacking language use.

Hispanic’s claim to a white racial identity is captured in US Census data and was expressed by many of my Hispanic informants during fieldwork. In BVL 49.9% of Hispanics identified themselves as White alone, while 2% identified as black or African American, and in the larger county 30.6% identified as white, and 2% as black. However, in the conversations non-Hispanic whites are identifying themselves as the authentic
whites, while racializing Hispanics as some other race that is neither white nor black, despite Hispanics’ claims to a white racial identity. The boundary between who is white and non-white is both policed and contested; as a result, individuals have resorted to different strategies to be perceived and accepted as white: passing, assimilation, legal confrontations, and upward social mobility.\textsuperscript{340}

The frustration and anger over the accommodation and privileging of Spanish has left Hispanics with few allies. Instead of Spanish/English bilingualism being supported by other bilingual speakers, there is growing resentment over the Spanish preference by businesses, government, and the media. For example, on September 9, 2010 \textit{Hispanosphere} posted a news story entitled, “Hispanic Children need quality programs on Spanish-language TV.” A poster who goes by the name of Vitto responded, “This article is wonderful but I’m offended because my parents are from Italy and there is absolutely no Italian programming available to me other than what I get on my satellite dish. It is completely unfair to provide programming to Spanish, Brazilian, Venezuelan and other countries, but nothing in Italian to keep my culture alive.” The respondent is not clearly opposed to Spanish language programming or Spanish/English bilingualism, but is disturbed that other languages, like Italian, are not present.

A second poster, Martha, opposes the Spanish language more directly, criticizing the labor market advantage enjoyed by Spanish/English bilingual speakers and attacking monolingual Spanish speakers for not learning the English language like other non-Spanish speaking immigrants:

I don’t mind that Spanish-speaking families wish for their children to continue to speak Spanish. I do however have a problem with the fact that for many jobs it is a requirement to be bilingual. I work in the Administrative field and was unable to get a job at the Social Security Administration because I do not speak Spanish.
I was born in the Netherlands and speak both English and Dutch. So why is it ok for those who speak Spanish to continue speaking Spanish and forcing the United States to conform to those people, yet anyone else who doesn’t speak English and moves here must learn English to get by? In my opinion if you want to live in the US you must have enough knowledge of the English language to be able to communicate with the community.

Both Vitto and Martha object to the Spanish language’s privileged position. They want television programming in Italian, in addition to Spanish, or for Dutch/English bilingualism to be equally valuable in the labor market. Furthermore, they do not see the size of the Hispanic population in the United States as justification for linguistic accommodations. Martha objects to monolingual Spanish speakers being accommodated, instead of having to “conform” to the English language like other immigrants. Similar to Martha’s critique, the next commentary attacks Spanish monolingualism.

Ariel Gaussart, a French immigrant who was vice-President of Seminole County’s Republican Party asked an Orlando Sentinel reporter, “Why don’t other immigrants learn English, like [I] did? Out of respect for this great nation, I find it inappropriate to demand the American family cater to particular groups.” This theme is repeated time and time again on Internet forums. There is growing frustration and anger over the accommodation of and catering to the Spanish language. In these critiques, the hyper-presence of the Spanish language is associated with monolingual Spanish speakers who are refusing to assimilate and learn English. Furthermore, the Spanish language resources—for instance, television programming, Spanish language ballots, or Spanish language books at public libraries—that aid this monolingual population are contested because it is believed that these resources allow the maintenance of the Spanish language, encourage Spanish-monolingualism instead of English language learning, hinder assimilation, and create a labor market advantage for bilingual Spanish/English speakers.
The language ideology embedded in Ariel, Martha and Vitto’s critique, that links belonging in the United States with English, is also expressed during informal, everyday life conversations between BVL residents. Language ideologies, which intersect with certain moral, religious, social, or political values, allow people to rationalize and justify their beliefs about the appropriate ways or places for using language; thus, language can be good or bad, correct or incorrect, and therefore linked with people who are similarly good or bad, correct or incorrect, moral or immoral. For instance, proponents of the English-only movement advocate for language homogeneity due to the belief that monolingualism strengthens and unifies the nation. Subsequently, this language ideology results in Spanish speakers being accused of displaying allegiance to another country or territory, a lack of patriotism for the continental United States, and they are therefore constructed as unworthy of citizenship.

In the Orlando case Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speakers are constructed as unworthy subjects since they are not self-censoring their language usage in a way that privileges English. But, the attack on the Spanish language and Hispanic presence is ironic since the written history of Florida begins in 1513 with Juan Ponce de León, a Spanish explorer from Spain. During the 16th century Florida was a Spanish colony, and was under colonial rule by both Spain and Great Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. It’s not until 1822 that Florida became a US territory and in 1845 they became the 27th US state. Thus, there has been a Spanish presence since the discovery of Florida. Florida, however, is constructed as a space that has always been American and English-speaking. The Spanish history is written out of history and forgotten in the popular imagination. The same has been noted of Phoenix Arizona’s Mexican ancestry. Although Phoenix’s
ancestral heritage was bicultural, this has not been the popular narrative of the city’s history.\textsuperscript{342} The “whitewashing” of the history has been attributed to the era of Anglo demographic dominance, selective memory, and the intentional skewing of history.

During lunch with Allan Mitchell, a retired resident of BVL, the language ideology linking English with being American is expressed when Mitchell reprimands Spanish speakers. Allan admitted that he finds it “so incredibly disrespectful when Spanish is spoken in front of him.” He claimed, “about 95% of them [Hispanics] understand English, but choose to speak in Spanish;” although, the 2006-2008 American Community Survey revealed that 28.5\% of BVL’s Spanish speakers claim to speak English less than “very well.” Allan went on to describe how he responds to people who speak to him or in front of him in Spanish, “This is America, speak English!” Part of his goal is to generate a reaction, to force a startled Spanish-speaker to utter a response in English, but he admits he also responds this way because he feels he is being talked about. Furthermore, he associates the use of the Spanish-language with resistance to assimilation and drew a distinction between Puerto Ricans, who do not assimilate, and South and Central Americans in the area who, in his opinion, assimilate faster. However, he chose not to elaborate on the particular experiences that led him to distinguish Puerto Ricans from South and Central Americans.

Instead, Allan told me a story from his childhood about an Italian friend he had. When visiting his friend’s house for dinner, he explained, the mother would instruct everyone to only speak in English, so Allan could understand what was being said. On one occasion the father forgot and started speaking in Italian. The mother reprimanded him, and insisted that he speak in English. In Allen’s experience, the disciplining and
self-monitoring of language usage was a conscious attempt to assimilate to American
culture, and he commended that mother for aiding the process by making her family
speak English around a non-Italian speaker.

On another occasion Allan and I were chatting about the local churches in the
BVL area and I asked him if he attended any of the services. He communicated his
experience at an event that was held in a church located behind his home. At one point,
the Pastor told the audience, “lets make English the second language here.” Allan
described this incident as “unwelcoming,” and expressed his resentment since he
interpreted the pastor’s message as one intended to divide Hispanics and non-Hispanics,
and replace the language of the nations majority. The language ideology that connects
being American with speaking English is expressed time and time again when residents
challenge the use of Spanish in public spaces or in their presence.

On November 18, 2010 I participated in a voluntary teach-in sponsored by the
Osceola County school district. I visited two classrooms in a local high school to discuss
Hispanic migration in the region, and the racial/ethnic tensions that I observed during my
fieldwork. Did these tensions exist amongst the younger generation as well? In the first
class Sean, who claimed to have some Cuban ancestry, although the teacher later
described him as a self-identifying “redneck,” was in constant debate with the Hispanic
students sitting on the other side of the room. The Hispanics made up a clear majority,
and as the teacher pointed out, the African American and Haitian students were once
again the smallest minority.

Once the conversation began the language ideologies expressed by my adult
informants were verbalized unapologetically. Sean insisted that there are appropriate
places for English, and went on to declare, “you are in America, speak English!” He argued that if he went to the Bravo, a Dominican-owned supermarket chain, he expected to hear Spanish, but he did not want to hear it in the Wal-Mart. Thus, the language ideology expressed by Sean is constructing some places as legitimate sites for the usage of Spanish, and others places as “white public spaces.” However, the public/private divide is complicated in this particular instance as Sean reveals that there are in fact public spaces where Spanish usage is acceptable, thereby revealing the existence of multiple public spaces as opposed to a singular, “white public space.” In response to Sean, Jose raised his hand and mentioned “freedom of speech,” “Martin Luther King,” and the “I Have A Dream Speech,” while Christina angrily declared, “They just don’t like us!” Still, one thing was certain, the Spanish-Speaking students did not apologize for speaking Spanish in public spaces. In fact, Miguel asked, “why don’t they just learn Spanish, after all it’s the second most spoken language?” Juan agreed, pointing out that in the Dominican Republic they have to learn Creole, Spanish, and English; after all, the United States is one of the only monolingual countries in the world. Sean’s classmates, however, frowned at the idea of an additional language requirement.

Although I detected tensions in the classroom, most likely resulting from my discussion of racial, ethnic, and linguistic tensions in the region, the teacher witnessed many other divides in her classroom. She claimed the biggest fight is actually between the Puerto Rican and Dominicans in her classroom because her students from the Dominican Republic are considered the “dumb Dominicans.” The other factions are the “rednecks” and the “suburban white kids,” that “are not really preppy, but verging on it,” according to the teacher. The African Americans are once again the minority, but the
dividing line is not really race, she explained. Instead, it has to do with how serious they are about their education. There are the serious kids trying to get their credits, and the clashes are between the serious kids and the students she labeled the “yahoos.” The majority of her students are Hispanic, but there is the in-crowd and the out-crowd that are divided. However, when I was present the commentary was quite revealing, and the shocked teacher expressed surprise at some of her student’s expressed feelings.

**White Racial Consciousness**

How do non-Hispanic whites justify their strong reactions to the use of Spanish? And, how do non-Hispanic whites come to understand their own feelings about Hispanic people? As discussed above, the use of Spanish is perceived as resistance to assimilation and a disruption to the social norms, since an English dominated soundscape is no longer guaranteed. They view Hispanics as the newcomers, transforming a place to which they feel entitled, due to their longevity in the region, which they nostalgically describe. Additionally, at the level of everyday life the use of Spanish is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and inconvenient to some non-Spanish speakers. The disruption of unavoidable, everyday tasks creates the most hostile reactions, particularly when the burden of communication and adaptation is placed on the non-Hispanic white, who feels like the victim or the minority in a space to which they feel entitled. For example, on August 11, 2010 I observed an exchange between two English-speaking men and a Spanish-speaking woman in a *bodega* (grocery store) owned by a couple from the Dominican Republic that was quite revealing of the everyday encounters between Spanish and monolingual English speakers.
I was sitting at a table in the back of the store when two workers walked up to the lunch counter; their shirts read “Smith’s Septic Service.” One of the men attempted to ask the woman behind the counter serving the food if a particular stew was oxtail. She responded to him in Spanish, but he did not understand and once again asked if the stew was oxtail. There were several customers sitting at the tables surrounding me, and we all turned our attention to the interaction. The customers and employee went back and forth in their respective languages for a few short minutes while the other patrons observed or eavesdropped until a man sitting at one of the neighboring tables finally spoke up to translate. These moments of translation are becoming increasingly common. Then, both men placed their orders with the assistance of a third party. The female worker then asked if the food was para aquí o para llevar (for here or to go). The male worker got agitated and replied “no hablo espanol! (I don’t speak Spanish!).” The woman behind the counter repeated the question in Spanish and the male worker responded in frustration, “she just keeps talking away!”

In this instance it was the two men who were encroaching on a Spanish-dominated space, and so the employee made no effort to speak English or communicate with them in any way (verbal or non verbal) except through the Spanish-language. Perhaps the employee could not communicate in English and repeated herself hoping the two men would be able to decipher what she was saying. Another possibility is that the employee could in fact utter a few words in English, but chose not to accommodate the English speakers since she was in a Hispanic-owned store, where the majority of clientele can communicate in the Spanish language, if necessary.
Do some Spanish speakers alienate monolingual speakers intentionally? On several occasions bilingual informants have admitted that they sometimes speak Spanish in front of monolingual English speakers intentionally, just to give them a hard time. Still, other Hispanic informants do the exact opposite by instructing their children, and reminding their Spanish-speaking peers to be sensitive and not speak Spanish in a setting where non-Spanish speakers are present. While there are practical challenges for non-Spanish speakers trying to carry out their daily life activities, the discourses surrounding language usage represent much larger concerns and ideologies surrounding language, Hispanic migration, and belonging in the United States. Hence, as Bonnie Urciuoli (1996) argues, “what seems at first glance a simple classification of language turns out to be fundamentally a classification of people,” a remark consistent with the notion of iconicity.\textsuperscript{343} In the Orlando case study, Spanish speakers are classified as non-white and un-American due to linguistic differences and anti-Hispanic nativism, while non-Hispanic whites defend the privileges they once experienced as the majority. It is quite possible that over time the privileges of “whiteness” will diminish in these exceptional spaces, and the power will shift or at least be shared with the Hispanic majority. Already the Hispanic community of BVL and the larger county are showing signs of increasing economic and political power, in addition to becoming a demographic majority. Of course population size does not guarantee power, which is evident in the South African case.

How do non-Hispanic residents respond when their privileges require defending? The conversations I document in the next pages show that some non-Hispanic whites responded by circulating racializing discourses that reaffirm their white racial identity,
and the non-white racial identity of Hispanics. According to Bonnie Urciuoli,

“racializing discourses equate language difference with disorder, with images of illiterate
guardians flooding the United States and refusing to speak English or hordes of the
underclass speaking an accented English with ‘broken’ grammar and ‘mixed’
vocabulary.”  

Henceforth, the deployment of whiteness is achieved through a discursive
process whereby the racialization of Hispanics as non-white is related to the racialization
of kinds of speech, and the racialization of space.  

Because of their dominant position, non-Hispanic whites have had the luxury of racializing others without necessarily
developing or invoking a strong racial consciousness.  

However, the reaffirmation and
strategic deployment of a white racial identity has resulted from the transition from the
majority to a minority in places like Osceola County, Florida.

As Hispanics become the majority in particular Central Florida communities,
interactions are no longer monopolized by dominant North American norms and
practices. Instead, competition has increased for cultural and linguistic space on the
Internet, the airwaves, and in public and private places. As follows, by using Spanish in
domains that were previously marked as “white public spaces,” Hispanics undermine the
“whiteness” of non-Hispanic white residents.

Lets go back to the online city-data.com

forum I began with, where nberry 7 asks for advice before purchasing a house in

Kissimmee. The conversation thread continues to circulate on the Internet in January of

2010 when Hxrguitar responds:

Well First thing is first there are TONS of Spanish, Mexican’s, Latin Americans
Puerto Ricans u name it barely any white people not being racist but that’s all you
will see or Hillbilly’s/Rednecks but that is more saint cloud area that’s one thing u
might not be to happy about and all of them speak Spanish mostly. They “Can”
speak English but per-fer Spanish . . . Like I said before there are a lot of Spanish
and people that kind of race that live there so ur kids will feel kinda awkward
being the small amount of white kids that live and go to school here. Not being racist I have many Mexican and Spanish friends I’m just basing it on what I see EVERYDAY. I’m just basing this on if ur kids are white.348

The next respondent, Duttygal86, continues:

Kissimmee is a city in transition . . . Wikipedia says the Latino pop in Kissimmee is only 40%, I beg to differ. I work in the ER and I am always startled when I see a White person or a Black person, because its almost a rarity . . . Spanish is spoken as frequently, if not more frequently, than English . . . I love that Kissimmee is diverse, but its loosing that now too, as it becomes completely Caribbean Hispanic. Its mainly people form the Northeast and PR.349

In the example respondents are racializing the Spanish language, the City of Kissimmee, and therefore Hispanic people as non-white. In the process these residents are constructing Kissimmee and Osceola County as non-White spaces, uncomfortable, foreign, and therefore unsuitable for a white person. But whom are these posters referring to when they talk about “white people?” The majority of Hispanics in BVL and Osceola County consider themselves white as well, consistent with existing research that documents the Latino “flight toward Whiteness.”350 So, the respondents are identifying themselves as the authentic whites, while racializing Hispanics as some other race that is neither white nor black.

The development and deployment of a white racial consciousness is a direct response to the demographic shifts, and perceptions of a Hispanic threat. In BVL, for example, the presence of Hispanic businesses and Spanish-speaking employees leads many to believe that Spanish-English bilingualism is favored in the labor market, thereby giving Spanish speaking Hispanics an ethnic-based linguistic advantage. These businesses enable language maintenance and interethnic competition. I frequently observed job advertisements in the newspaper or posted on billboards along the commercial streets requiring or articulating a preference for bilingual speakers.
Furthermore, with Hispanic-owned firms comprising 37.6% of all businesses in Osceola County in 2007, up from 22.4% in 2002, and a population of Hispanic consumers that reached 122,252 (45.5% of the total population) in 2010, Spanish-speaking employees are a necessity. The need for bilingual speakers is not only present in low-paid service sector industries, but also in the professional settings of insurance companies, real estate offices, and banks, which increases competition throughout the Central Florida labor market. However, while bilingualism can be an asset in Orlando’s labor market, this is often contingent on perceptions of “good” English usage and a degree of self-censorship when using bilingual linguistic skills, as in the case of Workforce Central Florida. Additionally, the size of the Hispanic population in this particular region makes bilingualism an asset, although this is not the case in many other parts of the United States where other bilingual Hispanics reside.

During an interview, a commercial investment banker from Puerto Rico commented, “if there is a business owner, they need someone who speaks Spanish, I’ve been explaining that to my bank.” He claimed that bilingualism is an advantage, and that businesses do in fact look for, and hire Hispanics. “In Anglo business,” he said, “50% of their clients are Hispanic,” before going on to mention three insurance companies that joined the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce to connect with the Hispanic market. In addition to affecting the labor market, the massive influx of Hispanics throughout Metro Orlando has led to numerous political, cultural, and economically structured initiatives by businesses, politicians, non-profits, churches, educational institutions, and social service providers who hope to represent and provide for the needs of the Hispanic population. The outreach to Hispanics, and their incorporation into the social fabric indicates that
Orlando-Kissimmee is a global metropolis in transition. Of course there is resistance to change.

For some non-Hispanic Whites the accommodation of Spanish, and preference for bilingual speakers is interpreted as reverse discrimination and white victimization. Take for example a forum on hate crimes and cultural sensitivity sponsored by the U.S. Justice Department, which took place in the Robert Guevara Community Center in BVL. The local county newspaper, *The Osceola News-Gazette*, recapped the event in the Saturday, July 24, 2010 issue of the paper, mentioning how forum panelists shared stories about how biases have been directed toward them. Then, on Saturday, July 31, 2010 a resident of Osceola County provided a response in the opinion section of the paper: “I have a gripe . . . the editor failed to mention all the Hispanic businesses and restaurants that only employ other Hispanics to work there. If that is not job discrimination, then I don’t know what is. People should clean up their own back yards.” This opinion is consistent with the online forums where non-Hispanic whites focus on the “discriminatory practices” of Hispanics.

Jane Hill (2008) articulates a folk theory of racism, shared by many white middle class Americans. I will be discussing two of the premises within the folk theory, which holds that (1) racism is entirely a matter of individual beliefs, intentions, and actions, and (2) prejudice is natural to the human condition, so that all people are thought to make distinctions and to prefer to be with their own kind. As such, anyone can be a racist meaning behavior by whites and blacks, for instance, can be judged on the exact same moral plane. Thus, blacks choosing to sit together at a lunch table permits whites to speak of “black racism” as if it were exactly like white racism. This is the basis for allegations
of reverse discrimination, which is closely linked to ideologies of race neutrality. However, as Hill points out, these discourses of white victimization ignore the privileges that whites experience, historically and currently, due to de facto segregation and persisting inequalities. Furthermore, the ramifications for racism against blacks are more serious than for whites because of the disparities evident in housing, the labor market, health, and wealth, amongst other things.

Concurrently, the presence of Spanish in places that are believed to be “race-neutral” generates a great deal of anger, hostility, and a defending of whiteness, which is inextricably linked with Americaness. Proponents of race-neutrality advocate for “color-blind” social policy, a belief that racial inclusion and racial equality requires that the law treat people equally or similarly instead of creating ethnic or race conscious solutions. Meanwhile, Hispanics are at times criticized in Osceola County for their participation in identity-politics, in which they defend their citizenship rights, advocate for the Hispanic population, or bring forth allegations of discrimination. As follows, when Hispanics claim rights or demand resources based on their ethnic identity, a history of discrimination, and as a minority population whose rights need protection, non-Hispanic whites interpret these actions as “playing the race-card.”

The commentary resulting from funding for Hispanic-focused projects is revealing of these color-blind ideologies and the hostility that results from identity politics. On December 21, 2009 Hispanosphere posted a story about Orlando congressman Alan Grayson, who obtained $700,000 in funding out of $13 million for two Orlando-area Hispanic projects: Spanish language materials for the public library and
expanded programming for the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The following responses were posted:

Why does any one race require their own projects paid for by American Tax payers.\textsuperscript{351}

This is ridiculous. If they want to live the “American Dream”, they need to be American. Americans speak English. If we keep catering to these people they will have no reason to learn English. If they don’t want to learn English they need to go back to Puerto Rico or the Spanish speaking country of their choice.\textsuperscript{352}

Why are they spending American money on books in Spanish?\textsuperscript{353}

Where is the funding for Caucasian projects? Grayson is a racist nut job!\textsuperscript{354}

In this example respondents are displaying the color-blind ideology that correlates an ethnic conscious solution with reverse discrimination, and the language ideology that connects being American with speaking English. At the same time this commentary reveals the nativist critique that rejects Hispanic migrants’ right to resources, deems this ethnic group inassimilable, and therefore a non-white racial group. This positions Hispanic citizens as non-American, and henceforth a subclass of citizens that are not as entitled as the “real” Americans.

When a November 23, 2009 publication announced that an Orlando radio station, 1190AM, was switching to Spanish-language sports, posters responded with the same anger, anti-Spanish hostility, and nativism that links belonging in America with English.\textsuperscript{355} In both cases the presence of the Spanish language, either verbally or in written form, was perceived as an encroachment on spaces that should be “race neutral.” “Blacks and other racial minorities are thought to bring race into situations that previously were understood, in their all white formation, as nonracial or as racially neutral.”\textsuperscript{356} So, these respondents interpret the designation of resources for a particular
ethnic group as an exclusive, race-based decision; although, policies that favor non-Hispanic whites are believed to be race neutral. The public library, the radio airwaves, supermarkets, and as the next excerpts will show even Hispanic blogs are believed to be spaces that should be treated as race neutral, “American,” English-dominated, and the domain of white hegemony. So, when is it permissible to speak Spanish? According to Urciuoli, “Languages other than English become safe and acceptable when used in carefully scripted contexts . . . where language is part of a commodity that is familiar and comfortable to most Americans,” like print and electronic media, emblematic language in festivals and parades, or waiters with accents in ethnic restaurants.357 To the contrary, in Osceola County language difference and displays of ethnic group membership are constantly challenged in so-called “safe spaces.”

On September 8, 2009 Hispanicsphere posted an article about a Puerto Rican Roundtable being formed in Orlando. The idea was for several Puerto Rican organizations to come together and form an umbrella group to foster unity amongst the Puerto Ricans in Central Florida and represent a common agenda. One poster responded, “My question; how is racism ever going to disappear when we keep being exposed to examples of it? Instead of a Puerto Rican Roundtable, how about a Central Florida Roundtable?” Again, an example of Jane Hill’s folk theory of racism, whereby a population racialized as non-white faces accusations of reverse-discrimination or racism based on the belief that racism can be judged on the same moral plane. As the conversation thread continues, the discussion transforms into a heated debate about the appropriate places for the use of Spanish after Hector ivan Rodriguez posts a response in
Spanish. A participant that goes by the name of Ed responds to Hector, angrily posting the following comment:

Ok now will someone please translate this into English so we all can understand it. Hector it is the height of arrogance to write in Spanish on an English speaking blog in an English speaking newspaper . . . If you wonder why non-Hispanic people hold Hispanics with contempt it is because of the arrogance displayed by some Hispanics such as Hector. Speak Spanish at home. Speak Spanish with your friends and family. Speak English in public and when dealing with non-Spanish speaking people of all races. That alone will go a long way towards easing the backlash against Hispanics that comes from both white and black non-Hispanics.

Ed went on by highlighting another post that switched from English to Spanish:

Here is another one. Luis R Pastrana began posting in English but mid sentence changed to Spanish. Why? It is obvious that you can speak and write in English yet you choose to be arrogant and post part of your comments in Spanish. Is it an inside joke? Are you laughing at the gringos who don’t speak Spanish and can’t understand what you are saying?

During everyday life conversations and encounters between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, the use of the Spanish language and the deeply imbedded linguistic ideologies are influential in fostering a shared racial consciousness and revealing the color-blind, race-neutral beliefs that lead to allegations of reverse-discrimination and white victimization. This is the response of some, not all non-Hispanic whites, to the Latinization of the region. On the other side of the spectrum are non-Hispanic whites that accommodate the Spanish language, and are at times influential in providing increased support and resources for Hispanics based on economic and political interests, or for moral reasons. This is evident in Alan Grayson’s allocation of funding for Spanish language materials and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, or the corporate accommodation displayed by banks, a response to the spending power of the Hispanic
market. There is also a segment of liberal, non-Hispanic whites that do not object to the linguistic changes, and therefore remain silent. It is equally important to recognize that opposition to Hispanic focused projects does not necessarily connote racism, although opposing voices are quickly dismissed as racist in Osceola County.

**Hispanics Talk Back**

Although the use of the Spanish language is contested by a select group of non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics have not remained quiet when bilingualism or Spanish monolingualism is challenged. A segment of the Hispanic population defends the use of the Spanish language, advocates for the end of white hegemony, and highlight Hispanic’s growing power due to the United States’ demographic shifts, whereby the Hispanic population is increasing and the non-Hispanic white population is decreasing. Most often the use of Spanish is viewed in relationship to the economic capital it enables, since bilingualism can provide job opportunities in the region. During online conversations the labor market advantage is emphasized, while the significance of language for the maintenance of a Puerto Rican ethnic identity is rarely mentioned, although cultural preservation is indeed important to many Hispanics. Thus, Hispanics openly suggest that non-Hispanic whites learn Spanish or be at a disadvantage in Orlando’s increasingly competitive labor market. Furthermore, bilingualism is defended as freedom of speech, and therefore a constitutional right. These are the most defensive responses to the attack on the Spanish language. But, while some Hispanics take a defensive position, other Hispanics agree with the attacks on the use and privileging of bilingualism, advocate for assimilation, and prioritize knowledge of the English language for success in the United States.
For instance, on January 6, 2011 a summary of a *New York Times* article, entitled “Primero hay que aprender espanol,” was posted on the *Hispanosphere* blog. In the *New York Times* article columnist Nicholas Kristof, fluent in Mandarin, argues that Spanish is far more useful for business and pleasure in the United States than any other language. Kristof defends his argument by offering statistics about the United State’s growing Hispanic population and the 2050 projections: Hispanics will grow to 29% of the total population by 2050, up from 19% in 2009, while the population of non-Hispanic whites will continue to decrease. The blog post and commentary by Kristof angered Central Florida residents who argued that Hispanics should learn English, as opposed to monolingual English speakers learning Spanish. Additionally, angered non-Hispanics suggested that Spanish-speakers return to the Spanish speaking location of their birth if they want Spanish to be a part of everyday life. In response, defensive Hispanics warned non-Spanish speakers of their dwindling power. The US, they argued, will become a bilingual Spanish/English nation, and “white hegemony” and the “Anglo mainstream” will soon be replaced.

The warnings to non-Hispanic whites were most often framed as a labor market advantage, and the Spanish language a survival strategy for remaining competitive as the Hispanic population increases. While respondents defensively emphasize the significance of speaking Spanish, and explicitly attack white hegemony and English’s dominance, these individuals are not advocating for Spanish-monolingualism. These individuals do not discount the importance of the English language; nevertheless, they expect Spanish to be equally respected and for bilingualism to be embraced as an asset in the nation state.

Respondent Jimmy Changa posted several comments on January 7th, and follow up posts
on January 8th and 9th, which reflect one segment of commentator’s responses to nativist, anti-Spanish remarks:

Tim, the English only supremacy will end in a few years. You can give it up now or wait, the choice is yours. Hispanics are not leaving and will not stop speaking Spanish, so you need to learn to speak Spanish. We already have a leg up on you, we are fully bilingual . . . Learn and survive! Comprende?358

The choice is yours, learn Spanish or be left behind. I learned English and for a long time have been able to compete in two markets with no problems whatsoever. . . . But as a Hispanic I can tell you from the heart that my people will continue to be fruitful and multiply as good Christians are called to do. Demographic rates for whites are down.359

We get it, you think you own America and have a slanted view of the past, but your days of hegemony are counted. History has a way of catching up with people and you better learn Spanish while you have a chance.360

by 2050 all the experts and top economists are telling you that the white race will no longer be the dominant race.361

The next two respondents echoed Jimmy Changa’s commentary, encouraging monolingual English speakers to enroll in Spanish courses, and to recognize and accept the “flood” of Hispanics that are changing the dominance of the English language:

Hurry up Tim and White American there is a Spanish class course in your local libraries. Advance courses in UCF and local Universities. . . Do not sweat we will be speaking English in America by 2050 it will be a multilingual. No excuses.362

I agree fully with the author, you have to learn Spanish to deal and enjoy the flood of people of Latin heritage who has moved to the United States in the last 40 years. . . Spanish language is all around us in the mainland and Americans need to recognize it.363

In response to a different Hispanosphere blog post about Spanish language programming for children, “Social Security Manger” defends the undeniable presence of Spanish in Florida, and the necessity of learning Spanish to remain competitive

If she doesn’t like to be left out, then she should take some courses at the closest community college. Also that shows some ignorance of the demographics of the
USA . . . she needs to wake up to the fact that she is in Florida and in Florida the two principal languages are English and Spanish.\textsuperscript{364}

To Jenny, bilingualism provides a considerable market advantage that all Americans should embrace, and goes on to threaten monolingual English speakers, much like the above mentioned posts:

I learned English as an adult when I moved to America, and even though my English isn’t perfect, I have a great job in America b/c I know both English and Spanish . . . \textit{My kids will be completely bilingual one day . . . and they will take away the jobs of those who know just one language. I guarantee it!} [emphasis added]\textsuperscript{365}

While the majority of posters cited the labor market advantage provided by Spanish, and the changing demographics of the United States as a reason for learning Spanish, other respondents express their anger at “Anglos,” and articulate a defense based on the constitutional right to free speech. The next respondent makes it clear that Hispanics are in fact part of the United States, and that Anglos do not have “the right to tell me to shut up.” Furthermore, the poster, Maria, emphasizes the importance of language for maintaining one’s ethnic identity and sense of self, a response that rarely came up in blogs, but was articulated by some of my informants:

So many people who are attracted to an adopted culture eventually find themselves part of no culture! Unable to fully throw off our first culture and unable to become a whole in the adopted culture. We then become attuned to neither! This is a form of cultural and psychic rape, and it render people in a limbo, like we are now in Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{366}

On more than one occasion my informants echoed Maria’s response, and were visually disturbed by second and third generation Hispanics’ loss of language, and their preference for things that they interpreted as mainstream American. As a third generation Puerto Rican/Haitian, I too was reprimanded when my Spanish was grammatically
incorrect or I revealed a preference for things, music for instance, that were interpreted as mainstream American

In contrast to the defensive responses of some posters, and the dismay at the second and third generation’s reliance on English are the individuals that prioritize a command of the English language, and restrict their use and their children’s use of the Spanish language in an effort to assimilate to mainstream America, and avoid the backlash against Hispanic migration. During a conversation with a public school teacher of Puerto Rican descent, Alice Rodriguez, she expressed her opposition to bilingual education programs that cater to Hispanics. “It shouldn’t be limited to just two languages, English and Spanish,” she said, “What about Germans? It’s a problem that Puerto Rican kids aren’t learning English in the public schools on the island. It is okay for South Americans, but Puerto Ricans are US citizens. They have to speak the language.” For this teacher, being a US citizen meant speaking the English language, and from her experience the public school’s ESL programs were better prepared to work with Spanish speaking students, which constituted the majority, a privilege she believed to be unfair.

During an interview with Joseph, founder of a for-profit business networking organization, he explained how he taught himself English after relocating to Orlando from Puerto Rico. He can recall speaking Spanish in Wal-Mart, and being reprimanded for his inability to communicate in English. Now, as founder of his organization, he reminds bilingual members of his organization’s board of directors to remember to speak English when monolingual English speakers are present in order to avoid offending anyone or losing potential clients. According to Joseph, “Anglos always think we are talking about them when we speak Spanish in front of them, and he juxtaposes the
backlash against Spanish speakers with “the Chinese,” before claiming that Asians may speak their language in public spaces without being reprimanded. Due to the scrutiny Hispanics receive for language use, certainly a response to the hyper-presence of Hispanics, Joseph self-monitors his use of Spanish in order to be accepted in the business community and inclusive of sensitive monolingual English speakers.

Similarly, Marta Colon, a county employee from Puerto Rico, has taught her children not to speak Spanish when they are outside of their home to be respectful to their monolingual English speaking elders and peers. On one occasion, the teacher of Marta’s youngest daughter asked her to translate for another Spanish speaking student during a classroom activity. Her daughter refused, explaining to the teacher that she is not permitted to speak Spanish outside of her home. The teacher then asked Marta to permit her daughter to help translate for some of her classmates; only then did Marta make an exception, granting her daughter permission to use Spanish outside of the home.

A similar reaction is expressed by bloggers that responded to the *Hispanosphere* post about the need for quality Spanish language television programming. These bloggers do not discount the significance of Spanish/English bilingualism; however, they oppose an emphasis on Spanish, claiming “proper” English is what ensures success:

> They should be teaching their kids English. Before anyone calls me a racist let me tell you that is exactly what my grandmother & grandfather did for my father. After they moved here from Puerto Rico they taught him the language he would need to successfully succeed here in the USA was English. Your handicapping your kids if they aren’t taught to speak proper English.  

The comments and actions taken by Marta Colon and the bloggers, for instance, reveal two different ideologies about language usage: “zero-sum ideologies” and “monoglot standardization.” First, these individuals reveal society’s investment in the existence
of a “proper,” standardized English, which ignores the many diversified dialects that have existed throughout the nation’s history. Standard English is constructed as “natural,” “patriotic,” and necessary for the unity and identity of the nation. Thus, the ability to speak “proper” English is connected to personal value, worth, Americaness, and both personal and professional success. These norms and ideas about “proper” English usage are institutionally maintained, and “[linguistic] practices acquire an explicitly-recognized hegemony” over other linguistic forms. Additionally, these individuals mistakenly presume that one language must be lost in order to gain proficiency, thereby presenting English in zero sum terms with one language “existing at the expense of the other (Zentella 1988).”

Likewise, the next poster, metiche, explicitly advocates for assimilation, and associates becoming American with speaking English and forgetting Spanish:

The article is very good for adults who come from Latin America and don’t want to forget their language and roots. But kids born in the USA, full-americans by birth, need to master the language of the land if they are to compete and succeed as equals . . . the ultra-hispanics aim at creating a sub-class of citizens with deficient language skills, but that is bad news for hispanics that want to overcome existing stereotypes, who want to become mainstream americans and compete for the good schools, good jobs. . . I know what I have to do and that is to speak English and forget the Spanish language, assimilate and become American first, second and last. Capish?

Ironically, metiche ends his statement with the term “capish,” a word borrowed from the Italian language. While metiche is displaying the zero-sum ideology that believes the Spanish language must be lost in order to learn English, he/she is also constructing English as a pure, homogenous language. In this case borrowing a term from the Italian language is legitimated and the hybrid linguistic practice is erased, however Spanish language usage or its co-existence with English is stigmatized.
The significance of the Spanish language for the labor market, for accommodating the influx of Hispanic migrants, and for the preservation of one’s ethnic identity continues to be contested, and both Hispanics and non-Hispanics have differing ideologies about what it means to be a “real” American. Opposition to the Spanish language continues, and circulates not only amongst adults, but amongst young people as well. In the “contact zones” of Metropolitan Orlando, where non-Hispanic whites encounter Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics, and confront the Latinization of the region, racialized subjects are produced and ideologies about language use, migration, and belonging in the United States are circulated and refined. The use of Spanish in residential and commercial spaces, and the increased desirability of bilingualism results in the reaffirmation and strategic deployment of a white racial identity by non-Hispanic whites. At the same time the privileges of whiteness are defended, and lead to allegations of reverse discrimination and white victimization; but, Hispanics have not remained silent. While some Hispanics agree with the attacks on the Spanish language, other Hispanics take a defensive position and warn others of the United State’s ensuing transformations.

While visiting the high school classroom to share my initial data a male student who remained quiet throughout the discussion timidly raised his hand: “It is not that we are afraid of Spanish, we are afraid of “change.”” And, since Hispanics are at the forefront of demographic shifts in the United States, the resulting social, cultural, and political changes continues to be a point of contention.
CHAPTER 5
PLACE-IDENTITY AND THE FORMATION
OF A SUBURBAN SLUM

On June 17, 2008 a senior member of the city-data.com website, poodlestix,
reached out to the online community to find out whether or not the Lakeside subdivision,
located within the BVL zip code (34744), was a good neighborhood. She noticed a
broken window, possibly caused by a bullet, heard loud music, and was therefore
suspicious of the area:

Poodlestix (Senior Member): Lakeside subdivision in Buena Ventura Lakes?: I
was looking at homes with the realtor and found a house at the corner of Lakeside
and Anhinga that I really liked. I heard some loud music playing a couple of doors
down that evening, and it kind of got me concerned about the neighborhood. I
also noticed a broken window on the side that faces Lakeside which looked like
could possibly have been made by a bullet. Is that possible? I'm not familiar with
whether this is a good neighborhood, but I loved the house.374

In response Wilshire81182 warned Poodlestix that BVL is a “lower income
neighborhood” with safety concerns and uncared for property. Therefore, the poster did
not recommend the area to the potential buyer:

Wilshire81182 (Senior Member): Buena Ventura Lakes is a lower income
neighborhood in general. I would not recommend the area, but I know it is not the
worst area to move to overall. I am sure it has some safety concerns and people
may not take the best care of their property or yours given the nature of the area.
The area is synonymous with the posts about Kissimmee and the reasons why
people advise to avoid it.375

The moderator of the forum provided a much more diplomatic response, mentioning
overcrowding and a lack of community spirit before directing the potential buyer to the
nearby gated community of Remington, which is safer and more secure:

Cmj_flia (Moderator): I think that if you have a bad feeling about it then you
should really trust it. Lakeside is a newer neighborhood for BVL but still has
some of the problems associated with the area: Overcrowding and lack of
community spirit. If you are interested in the area then you could probably get the
same deal on a home in Remington and have a better sense of security and safety.376

It is not until NowInGreenville responded that the conversation turned to the ethnic make-up of the community, lack of diversity (meaning a majority of Hispanics instead of non-Hispanic whites), and the presence of the Spanish language:

NowInGreenville (Member): You're coming from Texas so maybe you speak Spanish. If not than you may want to take lessons. If I'm not mistaken, BVL is about 80-85% Hispanic. That doesn't mean it is a bad area, it just means that area of central florida is not as diverse as others. In most other area of CF, the racial make up is much more evenly distributed.377

This respondent slightly overestimated the percentage of Hispanics, like so many others, and claimed that Spanish was necessary to live in BVL. Hispanics comprised 69% of BVL’s residential population during the 2010 census while non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks comprised 15.1% and 10.5% respectively. Furthermore, respondents are characterizing BVL as an undesirable place based on security concerns, aesthetic conditions, community spirit, and the class position of the residents. However, the most inadvertent criticism came from the comment about the lack of diversity, a comment that reveals the perceptions of some non-Hispanic whites. A community with a majority of whites and a smaller demographic of ethnic or racial minorities is considered diverse, whereas a community with the reverse demographic, a majority of ethnic or racial minorities and a smaller population of non-Hispanic whites, loses its “diverse” nature. This reveals a “fear of others” and the discomfort experienced when whites are no longer the demographic majority.378 Hunters Creek, for instance, 28.3% Hispanic, has maintained a positive reputation and is considered diverse. This is an indicator that there is in fact a “tipping point,” whereby a certain percentage of minorities, Hispanics in this case, can tip the reputation and identity of a community from a “diverse” space, suitable
for progressive, middle-class, non-Hispanic whites to a space racialized as non-white, reserved for and associated with ethnic or racial minorities. After all, the respondents were able to persuade Poodlestix to purchase a house outside of BVL, with her mentioning her white racial identity and limited Spanish repertoire as reasons to live elsewhere:

Poodlestix (Senior Member): Nah, I'm just a white girl with a limited Spanish repertoire. The house was lovely, but I was leery about the neighborhood for sure. Too bad you can't pick up your ideal house and set it down on a lot in a better neighborhood! We're going to go with the other house we had our eye on in what seems to be a better part of Kissimmee. Thanks for the input!  

In this chapter I examine the character, reputation, and place-identity of the Buenaventura Lakes suburb. The negative portrayal of BVL was striking, especially since some journalists and academics referred to the subdivision as a “middle class enclave” in the press and in academic reports. However, this suburb, once described as a place of luxurious, country club living, is now perceived as a low-income slum. The Hispanic dominated community of BVL is portrayed as poor and a liability to the county due to its large number of foreclosures, decreasing tax base, congestion, and high call volume of crimes, while the population is seen as inassimilable, lazy, and inactive citizens for their inability to mobilize and maintain the aesthetic quality of their properties and the larger community. Despite the populations’ income diversity, the residents of BVL are described as poor, lower class, low income, or working class, but rarely as middle class. Additionally, the concentration of Hispanics is interpreted as a lack of diversity; thus, BVL is constructed as a non-white space, where non-Hispanic whites would not feel comfortable living.
In the media, on the Internet, and during everyday life conversations class position, ethnic identity, racial identity, landscape aesthetics, and crime are connected in discussions about the perceived “niceness” of the suburb. But, what is considered aesthetically pleasing, and the characteristics that make a community desirable are based on subjective perceptions and understandings of “niceness” that are closely linked to cultural capital, class positionality, and white privilege. Furthermore, the connections made about the growing presence of Hispanic residents, their social class position, social practices, and the aesthetic transformations to the suburb ultimately results in the production of racial meanings and social class distinctions. And these discourses, which circulate in the press, the Internet, and in private conversations reveal how the built environment is an active agent in the formation of ideas about race, identity, belonging, exclusion, and minoritization.380

The New Suburban Poverty

The strong connection between suburban living and prosperity is unraveling, and BVL is a declining suburb representative of the changing social and economic conditions, and demographics in the American suburbs. Two demographic trends have been noted in the American suburbs, an increase in poverty rates and an increase in the foreign-born population. Suburbs are more than a physical or geographic location; they “have become physical manifestations for American values and cultural ideas.”381 Historically, suburbs have been associated with success, upward mobility, and attainment of the American Dream.382 Downward mobility and poverty were never the dominant images of suburban life; the inner cities were always imagined as hectic, immoral, instable, and dangerous,
whereas suburbs were “havens of American values of morality, simplicity, and purity.” As one researcher points out:

Stories of downward mobility in America’s suburbs have not exactly cluttered the headlines over the past decade. Gated communities of dream homes, mansions ringed by man-made lakes and glass-cube office parks: These are the images typically evoked by the posh, supersized subdivisions built during the 1990s technology boom. Low-wage jobs, houses under foreclosure, families unable to afford food and medical care are not.

However, in the 1990s many of the deteriorating conditions associated with inner cities were being found in the American suburbs as poverty rates decreased in the city and increased in the suburbs. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of people living below the poverty line in American suburbs rose 21 percent, but only 8 percent in the cities. And, by 2000 “49 percent of all people living below the poverty line resided in the suburbs, making the suburbs home to the greatest share of the American poor (Berube and Frey, 2002; Lucy and Phillips, 1995).” By 2008, the Brookings Institution was naming the nation’s suburbs as home to the largest and fast-growing poor population in the United States. It is not only the inner ring suburbs directly bordering the cities that are being affected; poverty has reached second-ring suburbs and exurbs, like BVL, as well.

A number of reasons have been attributed to the growing poverty and the declining conditions of the American suburbs. First, the suburbs grew as new subdivisions sprung up and the overall population increased. Thus, poverty rates increased since there were more people living in these areas overall. However, population growth alone does not fully explain the transformations. A number of reasons have been offered including the income decline of long-term residents, the migration of low-income households from the city to the suburb, and the out migration of middle and upper middle
class families from first and second ring suburbs to exurbs further removed from the cities. Additionally, low-income households have been driven to the suburbs by urban renewal projects and gentrification in the city, and by the decentralization of low-wage employment or “job sprawl,” whereby residents are following low-wage jobs to the suburbs. Thus, there is a reversal of the classic migration story, and the “white flight” first documented in the 1960s has taken a new form. The jobs and housing that once attracted migrants to inner cities are now leading them to the suburbs, and non-Hispanic whites that once fled the inner cities are returning from the suburbs or leaving their suburban residence for a “nicer” exurb community. One of the consequences has been economic and political disinvestment in the aging suburbs, which is certainly the case in BVL. These conditions were compounded by a housing crisis and recession that devastated some Florida communities, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

In addition to the increasing poverty in America’s suburbs is an increase in the foreign-born, immigrant population. According to the Brookings Institute, more immigrants now live in suburbs than in central cities, 52% vs. 48%. However, suburban poverty is NOT an immigrant problem: “immigrants accounted for almost a third (30 percent) of overall population growth in the suburbs from 2000 to 2009, but less than a fifth (17 percent) of the increase in the poor population.” Suburban poverty accelerated most amongst the U.S. born population, who accounted for 83 percent of the growth in suburban poverty. These number, however, are regionally specific and vary from place to place. Figures XIX, XX, and XXI show the Foreign born and native born poverty rates in the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area and the surrounding suburbs. Consistent with national trends, poverty rates have increased
amongst the native born and foreign born suburban population, with the native born population comprising the majority of the suburban poor.

**Figure XIX. Foreign Born and Native Born Poverty Rates, 2000 and 2009
Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Born</th>
<th>Native Born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Source: Compiled by Brookings Institute, 2000 Census Data and 2009 ACS_

**Figure XX. Native-Born Poor Population in the Suburbs, 2000 and 2009
Suburbs of Orlando-Kissimmee, FL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
<th>Native share of Poor, 2009</th>
<th>Native share of poor population growth, 2000-2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>119,010</td>
<td>193,257</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Source: Compiled by Brookings Institute, 2000 Census Data and 2009 ACS_

**Figure XXI. Foreign-Born Poor Population in the Suburbs, 2000 and 2009
Suburbs of Orlando-Kissimmee, FL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24,437</td>
<td>42,037</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Source: Compiled by Brookings Institute, 2000 Census Data and 2009 ACS_
How has Hispanic suburbanization been interpreted? Since some studies have shown that Hispanics are less segregated from whites in suburban areas than in central cities, Hispanic suburbanization has been viewed as a reflection of upward mobility, economic and cultural incorporation. However, some scholarship shows that Hispanic suburbanization “may increasingly take the form of new ethnic enclaves or multiracial ‘melting pot’ suburbs (Frey, 2001),” as is the case in BVL. Suburban Hispanics are increasingly living in Hispanic concentrated neighborhoods. As a result of these shifts, the suburbs “as the epitome of the mythical ‘American Dream’—rooted in the idea of homeownership, the heteronormative family, and white supremacy—” is being challenged. It is argued that the suburbs are becoming “a symbolic battleground for who has access to rights (legal or natural) in the United States as the Latino and immigrant population increase.” Indeed, suburban Orlando is a site where white privilege, powerful and pervasive, is being revealed and contested. First, lets take a closer look at the discourses circulating about BVL.

**Internet Representations**

In 2007 a question was posted to citydata.com by an Internet user that goes by the name Indiana-to-Florida. Indiana-to-Florida wanted to purchase a house in the $250,000 price range, within a 30-mile radius of the Orlando International airport. But, she needed to know more about the reputation of the community: “Does anyone live in the Buena Venture Lakes area?? If so, is it a nice, clean, affordable area?” Indiana-to-Florida received a number of responses between June 10, 2007 and May 4, 2008 attacking BVL, and describing the community as horrid, bad, trashy, overcrowded, rundown, horrible, “the pits,” drug and gang infested, and a poor investment; while others defended the
quality and reputation of BVL. Those defending the BVL community argue that some respondents are nostalgic and upset that Florida is not like it used to be, or that some individuals are afraid of diversity, an inadvertent reference to the large Hispanic population living in BVL. This nostalgia, for the undeveloped, old Florida landscape rejects the tourism mecca that Metropolitan Orlando has become, but also reflects a yearning for a time before the massive influx of Hispanics and the Latinization of the region.

In response to Indiana-to-Florida, current residents of BVL, former residents, and non-residents provided their opinions about the character of BVL:

BVL is HORRID the crime is outta hand in that area, there are some nice homes there but I would not move to that area if you gave me a house . . . your better off looking on the other side of the Airport or even the Hunters Creek area which is South Orlando and just down the Road from BVL

I have to completely agree with AJ67 on this. BVL was a nice place even up until 3 years ago but now it’s pretty bad.

Since the first two responses were so critical of BVL’s character, Indiana-to-FL was skeptical about the accuracy of these opinions:

So much negativity! Or is the first two responses due to another Floridian just upset due to its not like it use to be!! Lets see some facts! Or maybe some responses from some others in here. Maybe this is a better question, ‘where would everyone suggest to live say 30-minutes away from Orlando international airport that is safe and affordable??

Then, a post by a moderator, cmj-fla, convinces Indiana-to-Florida that BVL is indeed a bad choice. In these posts the population of BVL is not mentioned, only the overcrowding and crime that makes this place undesirable:

I have lived in Kissimmee my entire life and do have to agree with the other 2 posters and I am generally a positive person on this board. BVL is overcrowded and the county has ignored this and allowed it to become ‘run-down’ with exception of 2 subdivisions: Remington and Kissimmee Bay (if you asked these residents they would deny they live in BVL) and they are gated communities on a golf course. Lakeside is not that bad but again it is overcrowded and has had it’s crime problems. I wish I had stats for these but you have asked for opinions and I
believe I have a very educated opinion on this area—that being said, I think it would be irresponsible to tell anyone to live there at this moment. I would look into Hunter’s Creek like the other poster said or if it is financially possible then I would definitely check out Lake Nona/Narcoossee area near the airport.  

With a response like that, I believe you. Thanks for your honest input. So many just seem so negative that it’s hard to tell what to believe. Your reply was sincere and explained why you felt not to live there... I’m trying to stay in the $250,000.00 house price range.

But, the conversation thread does not stop there. Bloggers defended their opinionated posts, arguing that they are positive people and not Floridians nostalgic about how things used to be. Instead, they claim that they are offering their opinion about the community’s “true” character and the poor investment that Indiana-to-Florida could potentially make:

Indiana, What size home are you looking for? I live in the Hunters Creek area and love it here. Good schools, parks, community events, restaurants and very convenient to everything. There are currently a few homes here that would fit in your price range and in my opinion a much better investment than BVL.

no not just upset about how ‘it use to be’ it’s the Fact BVL is horrible and run down looking.

Don’t ask people questions and then shoot them down when they give you answers. I too am very positive about Orlando. If you didn’t want to hear the truth then don’t ask. I couldn’t care less what BVL used to be. To me it’s always been the pits but recently it has gotten extremely bad.

It is not until June 20th 2007, 10 days after the initial post, that the ethnic and class identities of BVL’s residents are articulated. One post mentions the “working class identity” of BVL’s population and the Hispanic residents that are a majority in the suburb, while another respondent, Noodles, defends the appearance of BVL, arguing that others live secluded lives and “are afraid to come out of their caves:”

BVL has been a working class, predominately Hispanic neighborhood for at least the past 20 years I’ve been visiting friends there. The crime rate is above average, but not out of control. Remington & Kissimmee Bay are nice & not part of BVL, although they are just a short distance away. As is the county jail & Houston
Astros spring training facility. I would also recommend Hunters creek as my top choice.

I’ve lived in BVL for the past five years and I love it here. Be very careful of what other posters say, most of them live secluded and afraid to come out of their caves. You say Hunter’s Creek do you, WOW look at the news today, it doesn’t matter where you live and BVL doesn’t look that bad either.

Like many of the previous posts, Hunters Creek is mentioned as an alternative to BVL. During my fieldwork I also spent time living with a Colombian family in Hunters Creek, which is described as a solidly middle to upper class suburb. There is a sizeable Hispanic population, 28.3%; however, the appearance is strikingly different than BVL. Hunters Creek is extremely well maintained, orderly, has modern architecture, and the presence of Hispanics is not as noticeable.

The Internet conversation then continues, with BVL’s Puerto Rican presence being highlighted. To provide additional information about BVL and its high concentration of Puerto Ricans, blogger blueoktober provides a link to the Orlando Sentinel newspaper article entitled, “Between 2 Worlds-Puerto Ricans remember roots as they sink new ones,” which calls BVL “Little Puerto Rico,” “a Puerto Rican Levittown,” and states that Hispanics, mostly Puerto Ricans, are the majority there; but, the bloggers do not attack Hispanic residents directly for the suburbs decline. Instead, blame is placed on the county, the developer, and the social practices of residents. A respondent that goes by the name of Meinbvl criticized the commentary of other posters, arguing that many of them do not actually live in BVL, whereas he/she has lived in the community for 23 years. Although, Meinbvl admits BVL is “run down a bit from 23 years ago,” he/she blames the appearance on the county, who allocates the residents taxes to other subdivisions, forgetting about BVL. Meinbvl goes on to say, “if you are afraid of
diversity then don’t live here. But if you can be tolerant of others then BVL is fine,” a reference to the Hispanic majority that provides “diversity,” and requires “tolerance.”

The next respondent, who claims to have lived in BVL for 18 years, from the early 80’s until late 1998, blames the community’s problems on the developer who did not come through on their promises. According to respondent Hogladyrider, there was supposed to be a homeowners association (HOA) and restrictions; but, the HOA never happened and the restrictions were never enforced causing the development to become rundown. During my interview with the developer he explained that the HOA was created as an entity where participation was voluntary. Additionally, the golf course, which was part of Landstar’s marketing campaign about “affordable luxury” closed down, and the community became overdeveloped. During an interview with Ariel, a Cuban car salesman and former realtor, he mentioned that BVL used to be a “money area,” and that there was a golf course. However, the transformation was dramatic. Hogladyrider describes the home he/she purchased with “a nice oversized corner lot, two bedroom, two bath with a two car garage and a built in pool,” before mentioning that “The people I sold to, are using the garage as a living space!” The use of the garage as living space was evident in a few of the homes I passed while driving through the community on a daily basis. In some instances this social practice, using the garage as a space for socialization instead of for parking a vehicle, was perceived as something “cultural” and unique to the Hispanic population. In March of 2012 I visited one such home, which deceptively appeared to be a single family home. Instead, the garage was sealed and turned into two separate studios with private entrances that could be accessed from outside. Within the studio apartment a doorway was sealed with cinderblocks to
prevent the tenant from entering the main section of the house. The house’s central air conditioning was not extended to the studios; instead, a window air conditioner could be seen only from the back of the house. The use of garages as living space is detested by some residents who see this as a violation of building codes, and a cause of the declining “niceness” of this suburban community.

On July 9, 2007 the conversation thread started by Indiana-to-Florida continued with respondents defending BVL for its affordability and lack of outrageous HOA fees. These individuals argued that BVL is in fact a good place to live for “most normal people with common sense” that are “not afraid of everybody.” Still, others continued to criticize BVL for its drug and gang activity, robberies and murders, unfriendly nature, and its overall problems. Again, some of the problems were attributed to the absence of an HOA that could potentially enforce laws and regulations; although, many BVL residents have opposed the idea of an HOA, arguing against outrageous fees and the lack of freedom over one’s property.

On February 21, 2008, eight months after Indiana-to-Florida’s initial post, the discussion about BVL’s place-identity continued as respondents continued to weight in on BVL’s character. Blogger CJC2008, a new out of state homeowner to a house in BVL, suggested starting an HOA “to bring the level up there,” specifically mentioning “parking cars in driveway instead of on yards etc.” Some respondents go on to claim that drugs and gangs are getting worse, that a nice suburb has started turning bad, and that safety and a feeling of belonging are missing; although, the cost of living is low, taxes are low, and the government is not oppressive. In contrast, others argue that BVL is safe, especially in comparison to other cities, the homes a bargain, and the community
ethnically diverse, a sharp contrast to an earlier post stating that BVL is “predominantly Hispanic.” The deterioration of the community is once again blamed on the lack of regulations and the absence of an HOA to control the appearance of BVL in addition to the age of the homes. I have included a transcript of this commentary in the appendix.

Very few forum conversations explicitly connect the decline of BVL to the increasing presence of Hispanics. However, the responses to Indiana-to-Florida’s inquiry reveals the inner feelings and associations shared by some non-Hispanics and Hispanics alike. For almost a year this conversation thread about the character of BVL circulated on the Internet. The working class identity of the population is mentioned and the Hispanic identity of many of the residents is mentioned as well. And, by circulating discourses that connect class and ethnicity to a discussion of aesthetics, living conditions, crime, and the desirability of a community, social class distinctions are articulated and reinforced, and the racialization of space occurs. The social practices of the residents, for instance using the garage as a living space; parking on the grass; the lack of community involvement; the inability to maintain the appearance of properties and the landscape; and the crime-talk about escalating gang activity, drugs, and crime rates is what makes BVL a slum in the public imagination. A reading of the forum transcript portrays BVL as criminal, unpleasing aesthetically, lacking organization, predominately Hispanic, and therefore undesirable. These descriptions and the meanings attributed to this geographic place gets attached not only to the space, but to the residents that inhabit these places as well. These circulating discourses linking class, ethnicity, and the character of place (place-identity) leads to the ghettoization and criminalization of Hispanic people and the places they occupy. Thus, both the people and the place take on an undesirable character, and BVL is
then perceived as a “Hispanic place” that is not fit for non-Hispanic whites. Thus, spaces, places, and people become racialized as non-white.

The Internet commentary about BVL’s place-identity—the suburbs’ character, desirability, ethnic makeup, and “niceness”—correlates the aesthetic quality of the landscape with the community’s residential population. Niceness “is about keeping things clean, orderly, homogenous, and controlled so that housing values remain stable.” However, violations to the previously established public order brands BVL’s newest residents, Hispanics, as offenders who have disturbed, ignored, and challenged standards of middle class, suburban living. In the BVL subdivision residents are not shielded from the behavior of others due to the absence of enforced regulatory social controls of HOA’s, deed restrictions, covenants, social ordinances, or policing policies. Thus, the landscape aesthetics becomes an indicator of the type of people who reside in BVL, and is interpreted as a representation of their social class position, values, morals, and active citizenship. Additionally, respondents that were more positive about BVL’s place-identity reveal that some residents have a fear of others, and therefore perceive BVL negatively. NoodLes and Meinbvl, for instance, mention this fear by noting that, “most of them live secluded and afraid to come out of their caves,” and comment on the fear of diversity.

In combination with a “fear of others,” the discourses about niceness result in the racialization of BVL. Setha Low (2009) attributes discourses of niceness, the expressed desire for niceness, and the “fear of others” to the maintenance of whiteness within gated communities, arguing that these discourses are a hidden way to talk about racial difference and a loss of white privilege. Whiteness “refers to the systematic
advantage of one group over another,” whereby a white racial identity becomes the advantaged, un-marked racial categorization. The terms “whiteness” and “white privilege” describe a structural position of social privilege and power with identifiable advantages.

These observations and reactions to the BVL landscape can be interpreted as a deeply imbedded white privilege, which is causing some to flee and/or avoid suburbs like BVL and contest the observed transformations. “Historically, rights in the suburbs have often been expressed as white homeowners’ rights.” An interdisciplinary literature reveals how white homeowners attacked new populations that threatened their property rights and the racial homogeneity of suburban spaces. First, white privilege is based on the preservation of the privileges of white people, and “whites do not necessarily intend to hurt people of color, but because they are unaware of their white-skin privilege, and because they accrue social and economic benefits by maintain the status quo, they inevitably do.” The “possessive investment in whiteness,” and the assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany being white can take different forms including “higher property values, better schools, or the ability to exclude people of color from the workplace.” White privilege is also expressed spatially, and in this chapter I examine how white privilege is expressed and protected in the spatial arrangements of suburban neighborhoods. “The full exploitation of white privilege requires the production of places with a very high proportion of white people. ‘Too many’ people of color might reduce a neighborhood’s status, property value, or general level of comfort for white people.” And, in BVL this discomfort and “fear of others” gets masked in talk about increasing crime, aesthetics, declining property values, and the lack of diversity. At its inception,
suburbanization was a form of white privilege, allowing “whites to live in inexpensive, clean, residential environments (Jackson 1980).” Most people of color were denied the opportunity to live in the suburbs initially, yet they subsidized white suburbia directly through their tax dollars, and suffered from the declining conditions in inner cities when white fled and the cities became spaces of disinvestment.418

A fear of others and the desire for niceness makes gated communities exclusionary, but also brands residential ethnic enclaves as excludable and undesirable for non-Hispanic whites. BVL is racially marked as non-white, whereas Hunters Creek maintains an un-marked racial categorization and therefore remains desirable, diverse, and race-neutral in the eyes of some residents. However, in BVL the negative perceptions of the community are not only linked to perceived racial positionality, white or non-white, but to social class position as well. Certainly, some utterances are reactionary responses to the county and the BVL subdivision’s aesthetic and economic decline, and the decreasing non-Hispanic white population. Yet, the negative commentary by Hispanics points to differentiations based not only on race or ethnicity, but also to inter-ethnic social class distinctions, and the perceived differences between Puerto Ricans from the island and Puerto Ricans from the states, which I will discuss in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.419

Arguably the Internet and websites like city-data.com are steering non-Hispanic whites away from communities with a higher concentration of Hispanics or other racial or ethnic minorities. The negative commentary about BVL is emulated in the many posts about Kissimmee, which was 58.9% Hispanic at the time of the 2010 Census. Warnings that might be unacceptable or awkward during face-to-face conversations, or impossible
to communicate to residents living in other states are now possible on the Internet, under the protection of screen names and hidden identities. Racism and classism has in fact taken a new form, a virtual form whereby neighborhood composition is not only influenced by realtors, former redlining practices, mortgage lending, and zoning ordinances, but also through new media (social networking sites, bloggs, and forums) where strangers can warn one another about a Hispanic concentrated community by circulating discourses that brand BVL as aesthetically undesirable, bad, crime-ridden, poor, and simultaneously a “Hispanic place.” The Internet is not the only place where commentary about BVL circulates. In fact, the forum respondents claim to have some knowledge of the community as either residents, former residents, or as individuals that have some familiarity with the area. And, for those individuals that offer commentary about BVL, but have never resided in BVL and perhaps never been to the location, their knowledge is generated from conversations and media representations.

**Media Representations**

What I found most damaging to the reputation of Puerto Rican concentrated communities, like BVL, were the many newspaper articles reporting on the criminal activity, arrests, and maintenance issues the community faced. The local news is accessed by far more people than a conversational website forum, and the details were at times frightening. For instance, on July 11, 2009 investigators arrested a trio of convicted felons in BVL, who were believed to be behind a series of crimes across Central Florida. Then, several months later a 19-year-old man was stabbed to death and the body was found near Alameda Drive in BVL. A few houses away on the same street another man was arrested for holding an open-house party, and giving people younger
than 18 access to alcohol. Later, in April of 2010, reports came out about Osceola County’s street gangs. The newspapers claimed that Osceola was home to 20 street gangs with more than 400 members. The reporter went on to mention three more gang related deaths, one of which happened at a BVL house party. Most alarming to many of BVL and Osceola County’s residents was the escape of Bloods gang leader, Michael Rigby, on February 19th 2010 from the Osceola County jail, less than 3 miles away from BVL. Rigby was being held on five attempted-murder charges, was featured on America’s Most Wanted (a Fox network series), and was apprehended on April 28, 2010. Of course the list of crimes goes on and on, from BVL homes serving as drug stash houses to a bank robbery at the BVL Bank of America. On January 26, 2010, for example, a grow house with 39 marijuana plants was found on 487 Floral Drive, just a few houses away from the home I once occupied.

BVL, once a community for “country club living” and “affordable luxury” had turned into a “ghetto” or “slum” in the eyes of both residents and non-residents. In a 2009 Orlando Sentinel article entitled “It’s time to clean up this neighborhood,” a resident claimed that, “Several years ago, we had a home built in a beautiful subdivision known as BVL. We joined the country club for the golf, swimming pool and clubhouse activities. There was a good school, and plans for another in the area. This was an ideal location for my family.” The resident continued, “As of today, there are no clubhouse activities, no swimming pool, no major golf course and fewer activities at the community center. We have lost at least three businesses, and now we have even lost our grocery store.” The suggestion offered was that BVL residents start by being good neighbors and cleaning up the debris in the community. It was also suggested that code-enforcement do their job,
and “bring our neighborhood back to standards set in my legal papers when I purchased the home. NO one wants to live in a dump.” In closing, the resident claimed that, “you could start a trend in your neighborhood by being a good citizen,” a comment that connects good, active citizenship to cleanliness, and requires self-governance. In an April 2, 2009 article John Sidley admitted that he and his family moved to Florida from Massachusetts 20 years ago because they fell in love with the weather, Disney’s Epcot, and the golf course in BVL. “‘The area was beautiful,’ said Sidley, a retired hotel employee. ‘My backyard was a lush, green golf course in a thriving community.’”

Like the former resident, Sidley was disillusioned with the current state of BVL since it was nothing like the luxurious, country club community he bought into years ago:

The golf course is now deserted, shut down about 10 years ago. A smaller executive golf course in the neighborhood is no longer operating. BVL Boulevard, the community’s main artery, is riddled with potholes. The neighborhood streets lack sidewalks. Drainage ditches cut through people’s yards. And the problem is compounded by unkempt yards and facades—some of them boarded up—of hundreds of homes facing foreclosure or already in the process.

BVL, 30 years old at the time, had not aged gracefully according to reporter Jeannette Rivera-Ilyes. “‘No one likes to talk this way about the place where one lives,’ Sidley said. ‘But BVL has turned into the slums.’”

Honest Reflections

Perhaps you are wondering about my impression of BVL as an anthropologist, resident of the BVL community for 6 months, and as an individual of Puerto Rican descent. In many of the Internet posts the suburbs of Hunters Creek is recommended instead of BVL. During the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, Hunters Creek was 28.3% Hispanic with 3,578 out of 12,661 people identifying as Hispanic. Of the 3,578 Hispanics, 1,859 individuals identified as “Other Hispanic,” Puerto Ricans
numbered 1,420, and Cubans and Mexicans numbered 215 and 84 respectively. After 6 months in BVL I did in fact rent a room in a luxurious Hunters Creek home, and observed a remarkable difference between the two locations, which are located less than 8 miles apart. I began to understand why there were so many negative comments about BVL when I saw the way Hunters Creek was cared for. In 2007, three years before I became a resident of BVL, I first drove through BVL and Meadow Woods, Landstar’s other Puerto Rican concentrated community. On this occasion I was surprised to find a suburb that was quiet, well maintained, and nice, which I captured in my fieldnotes at the time:

On my way to South Chase I miss the turn and end up in Meadow Woods. It’s nice! There are no people though. The area is lacking commercial space and it’s in the middle of nowhere, yet everything is surprisingly close. I only see US flags, people are only present in their garages. The houses are nice! It is surrounded by beautiful, undeveloped landscape! (Field Notes 6/27/07)

I saw BVL. Beautiful! (Field Notes 6/29/07)

Several days later I drove Carolyn and Roberto Mendez, a couple that was visiting me in Orlando, through the BVL and MW communities. Carolyn commented that, “it looks like anywhere else in America, that’s America,” while her husband Roberto noted a hot pink house, which he described as “Puerto Rican colors.” The area reminded the Mendez family of Puerto Rico, they explained, while they pointed out that several homes had people socializing in front of the house instead of in the backyard. Still, they agreed it was very clean.

Landstar’s Meadow Woods and Buenaventura Lakes subdivisions impressed me in 2007, as did the neighboring planned community of Sawgrass as a brief visitor driving through the area. But, the remarks of one particular respondent, Ktownbound, now
resonate with me: “I would not recommend Kissimmee, Poinciana, or BVL. Looks nice on the outside but locals know that it is trashy.” As an outsider, briefly driving through the community, my perception of BVL was quite positive. However, this is a sharp contrast to my impression three years later, when I became a resident of BVL. I recorded my observations in my fieldnotes when I returned to my fieldsite 3 years later:

Today was my first day back in the field since the summer of 2007. So much has changed. In 2007, I believed BVL and MW to be middle class. I couldn’t understand why the online sites were so negative. Now I get it. What I saw in BVL was a great deal of construction outside the subdivisions, to the roads. The women of house #186 told me that Disney is funding the construction. A four-lane road is supposed to be constructed, she didn’t attend “the meeting” but that’s what she has heard. It looks like they were working on drainage. The developments themselves look horrible! Graffiti, the fences are all different and there probably is no regulation. The fences are mostly wood and many of them are broken and shabby. Cars were parked on the lawns when there appeared to be driveway space . . . Different use of space. The house exteriors are run-down (I observed faded paint and peeling paint). Lawns were un-manicured . . . I went to the subway (restaurant) and asked the two teenage boys behind the counter about the area. They both agreed that Boggy Creek is not a good area. When I told them I was studying Puerto Ricans they then said this was “little san juan” and communicated that this is in fact the perfect place for my study.

Today I visited Hunters Creek and South Chase. South Chase was definitely a step above Meadow Woods. Hunters Creek even nicer! The homes were well taken care of. Saw graffiti in BVL, garbage on the grass. The communal grass was un-mowed.

Being an outsider versus a resident had an impact on my perceptions. My fieldnotes indicate a shift in my perceptions of BVL and led me to believe that there was some validity to the criticisms of BVL. Certainly the foreclosure crisis impacted this community greatly. In fact, BVL had the second highest rate of foreclosures in the county, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Poinciana, another Hispanic concentrated suburban subdivision had the highest rate. The unoccupied homes became the responsibility of the bank, and it was clear that some of the foreclosed
homes were not being maintained. During my time in BVL I noticed elements in the landscape that led me to believe that this was no longer a middle class, luxurious neighborhood. The two golf courses were shut down; the country club had been demolished; the grass maintained by the county wasn’t manicured as often as it needed to be; some houses were in need of a paint job; lawns weren’t mowed; graffiti was evident on fences and even on the sides of a select few houses; newspapers were piling up on driveways and ignored by residents; broken fences went unrepaired; advertisements, written on poster boards, were displayed on front lawns advertising food for sale, rooms for rent, and yard sales; and lawns were damaged, revealing patches of dirt due to tire tracks that resulted from parking on the lawn. BVL is an older development without a homeowners association to enforce any aesthetic standards. Because some houses were designed and developed in the late 70s/early 80s, the architectural design of some of the oldest homes appear outdated in comparison to the sections of BVL that were built much later. Many of my observations, and the commentary I received from residents and non-residents alike were consistent with the Internet criticism of the BVL and MW communities. Additionally, these remarks reveal the different tastes, aesthetic preferences, and expectations about suburban living.

At first skeptical of the negativity, I began to understand why BVL and the surrounding areas were perceived and described as undesirable as I observed signs of structural deterioration. Developer’s descriptions of BVL as a place of luxury and “country club living” were far from accurate in the present day, and Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike shared these perceptions. Of course it is important to realize that my judgments are skewed by my own experiences and expectations of middle class suburban
living. The first practices I noticed, which were different from my prior experiences living in suburban communities, was the renting of rooms within single-family homes and the advertisement and selling of food from front lawns, parking lots, and roadside. For instance, on July 16th, 2010 while on my way to pick up my roommate Pedro from work, I passed a couple a few houses away from my own. They had a grill set up in the middle of their front yard, and a man was cooking while a woman was sitting on a white plastic chair surrounded by other people and chairs. On the corner of the street was a poster board that read Pinchos, with an arrow pointing in the direction of their home. I noticed that same neighbor selling pinchos on numerous occasions on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. I also became accustomed to seeing poster boards that advertised garage sales and/or the sale of pastelitos, mofongo, bacalitos, or pasteles from people’s houses. While this practice was interpreted by some as a way of making some extra money in hard economic times, or as a form of entrepreneurship, still others saw this practice as a health code violation and eyesore that violated acceptable suburban living.

During an interview with one of the county commissioners, we talked about the lack of understanding amongst non-Hispanic whites. He mentioned the homes in BVL and the possibility that Hispanics look at the structures differently. He asked, “how do you deal with something that is a problem to me, but acceptable to them?” As an example, we talked about the cars being parked on the front lawn and the renting of rooms. The commissioner said he couldn’t quite understand why the rooms of single-family homes get rented out, and why single-family units are being turned into multi-family dwellings. “Is it because children take care of their parents, and parents take care of their grandparents?” he asked.
On one occasion the commissioner visited the home of a BVL resident to discuss educational programs in the county. I was present for the conversation and as we exited the house, when the meeting was over, the commissioner appeared disturbed, pausing for a moment and glancing over at the neighboring house with a poster board on the front lawn advertising a room for $350. Perhaps it was the sign that drew the attention of the commissioner, the overgrown front lawn (county regulations mandate grass height), or the numerous cars parked in front of the house. But, the commissioner was well aware that the renting of rooms is common practice and only briefly commented on the advertisements presence. At times yes, parents, grandparents, and other family members live under the same roof, but the renting of rooms to strangers is something altogether different, and emulates the *encargado* system present amongst El Salvadorians in the suburbs of Long Island, New York. In Long Island one immigrant or family rents a residential space and then sublets it to several people to cover the cost of rent and hopefully make some profit. Again, this system of renting rooms is a form of entrepreneurship, a way of making money in a low-wage economy, and a way to pay the mortgage or the rent while pocketing a little extra.

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork I asked non-residents and residents of BVL about their opinion of the community. At times I would bring outsiders to the community and drive them around to have them comment on the homes they saw and the surrounding landscape. During an interview with a Jamaican-American male in his early 20s, working in the insurance industry, I asked what people think of BVL. He moved from New York City to the Lakeside suburb, which neighbors BVL. “Good question,” he responded, before telling me about a girl he met. In the process of getting to know her, he
asked if she lived in BVL, to which she responded offensively, “I’m not poor! I live in Hunters Creek.” “But, BVL isn’t poor,” he said, “but people don’t say positive things about it.” He went on to explain that it used to be nice, but it has changed a lot, particularly as Hispanics moved in and non-Hispanics increasingly moved out. “Do you know about white flight?” he asked, a term that came into use during the mid-20th century to describe the large-scale migration of non-Hispanic whites from racially mixed urban regions to racially homogenous suburbs. “But, perhaps the changes I’ve noticed are because when I moved from New York City I had a different perspective, and everything looked so different,” he suggested. However, the houses are getting older now, he explained, and the houses are not being maintained. He went on to mention people fixing their old cars in front of their houses, parking on the grass, and the February 1998 tornado that caused a lot of damage.

Not only did non-residents respond negatively to BVL, residents quickly admitted that the community was rapidly deteriorating. During an interview with a long-time, non-Hispanic white resident of BVL. I asked why he chose to move to BVL. He claimed it was the location. The community was close to the I-4 turnpike, close to the airports, and close to the oceans and seaports. Twenty-four years ago when he was searching for a home he was impressed by the appearance of BVL, referring specifically to the lakes and surrounding landscape. He purchased his house from South Americans, who used the house as a part-time vacation home, but did not occupy the unit with frequency. He talked about the golf courses for entertainment, the close proximity to Disney World, and the country club where he used to socialize. There was “community spirit,” and the big attraction was the country club with its tennis courts, pool, restaurant, golf, and Christmas
party. “But it’s all gone now, there is nothing for adults” he said. “What would you tell
someone who wanted to move here?” I asked him. “Go someplace else! This is not a
good place to invest!” he responded without hesitation. “Crime is a problem, it is unsafe,
and the community deteriorated from the appearance of a good place to the appearance of
a poor place,” he added. The upkeep of the houses and of the property is rapidly
deteriorating as well, he said sadly, and the property values have decreased. “Do you
know about the broken windows theory?” he asked, a criminology theory that argues that
the prevention of minor crimes, the physical maintenance of the landscape, and the
maintenance of social order can prevent more serious crimes. As a retired law
enforcement agent he claimed to recognize the symptoms in the BVL community, and the
resulting increase of gangs, drugs, robberies, assaults, home burglaries, and other crimes.

Crime-Talk

During an interview with the Osceola County sheriff, an elected position, he did
not draw a connection between the county’s levels of crime and the Hispanic population.
During our interview I asked him which areas have a lot of problems with crime or high
call volumes, and he immediately mentioned Poinciana, BVL, and the area on Interstate-
192, near the turnpike exit. I later moved into an apartment complex directly across the
street from 192 and the turnpike exit to assess the quality of life. In the complex tenants
were only notified of one incident of theft, although the apartment complex is gated,
which provides greater security. The sheriff attributed some of the problems with crime
to the “things” in the area, most notably the jail and juvenile assessment center less than 3
miles away from BVL. Still, he did not draw a link between Hispanics and crime; instead,
he explained that it is not the community’s ethnic makeup, it is the population increase
that inevitably brings more crime. He provided an example by comparing St. Cloud and BVL, and argued that if both places have 30,000 people, then they will both have similar numbers of crime calls. What may change is the type of crime. But, he did confirm the existence of gangs in both BVL and Poinciana, and admitted that there have been gang related murders. The gang unit, he assured me, monitors everything constantly. And, while the local newspapers claimed that 14 different gangs existed in the area, the sheriff refused to confirm that number, but mentioned the Latin Kings, Bloods, Cryps, and the existence of motorcycle gangs. Michael Smith, a resident of BVL, claimed, “if there are gangs here, I don’t see them.” Although, he admitted that he did not know exactly what to look for. But, Smith did explain his theory on BVL’s “crime problem:” in the older portions of BVL, on the other side of the Florida Parkway, the criminal activity is much worse, he argued. This resonated with me as I recalled another BVL resident complaining about the drug dealers stationed at the run-down apartment complexes located in the older section of BVL, on Royal Palm Drive.

As I told more and more people where I lived, in a rented room in BVL, I received words of caution. “Be careful!” I was told over and over again. When I first told a Puerto Rican family that resided in Seminole County where I decided to live, Marco explained that Boggy Creek is a bad area. “Once you pass Medieval Times and the Kmart, it gets bad,” he said. “All of the gangs are here, Bloods, Latin Kings. Be careful,” he warned. “I have a friend in the St. Cloud police department that’s told me a lot of stories about what the sees.” His family member Magdalena mentioned that Clermont is a nice area where Puerto Ricans are moving to get away from Kissimmee. Then, at a social networking event I got into a discussion with Jose, of Cuban ancestry, and I mentioned
my study of BVL. “Be careful in those areas,” he warned me. If you want to find more upper class Hispanics go to Hunters Creek.

During an interview with Sarah Michaels she recalled looking at homes in BVL back in the 1990s. Michaels is an Osceola County public school teacher with a Masters Degree. She felt that there was more crime in BVL, which dissuaded her from living there. She went on the explain the gang activity that she has witnessed in the classroom, mentioning a student in her class that told her, “we don’t respect you people.” “They still think their gang leader is better,” she explained. “The amusing thing,” she added, “is that parents move from New York and New Jersey to get away from gangs, but they just bring it with them. Plus there are adult leaders.” We went on to talk about the involvement of student’s fathers. “It’s not just juvenile,” she explained, “adults have gang memorabilia for their babies.”

Yet, during my time in BVL I heard few residents complaining about actual crimes committed and some residents admitted to leaving their doors unlocked when they left their house. The crime-talk, however, portrays the BVL community as dangerous and therefore undesirable, and both Hispanics and non-Hispanics share these perceptions. Teresa Caldeira” (1996) City of Walls is a study of fear, crime, and segregation in the changing urban spaces of São Paulo, Brazil. She describes the increase in violent crime and fear in Brazil as the “justifying rhetoric” for residential segregation and the construction of protective physical barriers or fortified enclaves, similar to the gated communities that mark the American suburbs. The fear of crime changes public interactions in these spaces, and in BVL the increasing crimes and the discourses that
circulate about crime provides the justification and rationalization for describing this community as a dangerous, undesirable, slum that should be avoided.

**Inter-ethnic Class Distinctions**

The ghettoization of BVL is a result of discourses circulated by Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites alike. For instance, I conducted an interview with Maria Santos, a county worker and native of Puerto Rico with a BA from the University of Puerto Rico. Maria mentioned that her mother lives in BVL, although she admitted that she would not want to live there. “There is a lot of freedom there,” she explained. “We don’t like people to tell us what to do so there are no restrictions.” Hence, on a number of occasions BVL has been described as Boricuas Viven Libres due to the lack of enforceable restrictions and the large population of Puerto Ricans. BVL used to have drugs, Maria went on to claim, but it is much better now. She attributed the improvements to “John Q,” the districts Puerto Rican commissioner. Yet, she went on to say, “It’s almost, you can call it the ghetto,” referring to the place-identity of BVL.

Some individuals, a former resident of BVL in this instance, admitted to leaving BVL, like so many others, when the community began to “change.” During my interview with Sandra Lopez she explained the transformations she witnessed during the 19 years she lived in BVL. Lopez is Puerto Rican and relocated to Osceola County from New York City to work in the Osceola County Public School system. “When I first moved to BVL,” Sandra explained, “I had a community of neighbors. It was a neighborhood.” Her kids played with neighboring children and they had sleepovers. But, in the mid to late 90s people started to move out, and new people started to come in, she said.
Then the neighborhood changed, it became more Hispanic. Sandra claimed about 75% of the people in BVL were Hispanic; however, “BVL became less of a community. People stayed to themselves.” She did not know what the catalyst was, but things just started to change. “There were fewer Hispanics before, but it was more tight-knit.” Maybe it was the young kids that brought people together, she mentioned, although the population of children has certainly increased in more recent years as the suburb’s population continues to grow. “If you needed an aspirin you had several people to ask. But as time went on it wasn’t like that, and that’s when it was time to move.” She no longer had the comfort level to communicate with her neighbors and ask for something. That signaled her need to move. When I asked about aesthetic changes to the landscape she mentioned: the presence of gates and bars on homes, “like you see in PR,” and the way that people cared for their property. “Why do people need gates and bars on their homes?” she asked before mentioning the “cultural change” that took place. She went on to mention the changes to the front lawn, which either were not taken care of or were ornate.

When her home was on the market, Sandra ended up selling to a Puerto Rican single mother with three children. The woman spent 6 months looking for a house, and immediately fell in love with Sandra’s home. Sandra decided to drive by that same home about one to two months after the sale, and was shocked by the condition of the home:

The garage was dented because one of the kids had backed into the garage. Out front were collapsed tents. They had been set up for the kids to play, but had been left there in disarray for some time and remained in front of the home. The moving boxes were still out front and the grass was growing tall. Maybe it was a result of there being no man in the family. The new resident had two sons, but they aren’t doing much, obviously.
Sandra recalled that the woman did not have much furniture when she was moving, “she was buying a shell, but she was proud to buy a home,” Sandra explained. After 19 years in BVL Sandra moved to St. Cloud, to a brand new community. The people in her new community, Sandra mentioned, say good morning.

As I continued to receive commentary about the character of BVL and the surrounding area, the social class positionality of the residents and their island origins became interwoven with reactions to the landscape. On June 26, 2010 I drove Carolyn and Roberto Mendez around BVL and MW. Their family members Magdalena, a resident of Seminole County, and Rosalyn, also from South Florida, accompanied them. The group was visiting me and was curious about where I lived. Magdalena and her husband Milton own a 4-bedroom, 2-bathroom home with a pool, lake, and boat, while Rosalyn owns an apartment in a 55+ complex. Magdalena, Milton, and Roberto are of Puerto Rican ancestry, but born and raised in New York City; while Magdalena described herself as black. As we drove through the streets of BVL we commented on piled junk in people’s garages. Magdalena also mentioned a hammock she saw in front of one person’s home. “The hammock,” she said, “is supposed to go out back!” The group also commented on the uncut grass, a clothesline hanging in a garage, the lack of maintenance, and the absence of plush landscaping. A Puerto Rican flag serving as a window curtain caused laughter amongst the group, as did the two houses with plastic flowers planted in flowerbeds in front of the house. In the car the group continually mentioned that “beautification is not important to these people,” and that there must be no HOA. All the cars parked on the front lawns, even when there was room in the
driveway, also astounded the group in addition to the people drinking beers outside in front of their house or in the driveways.

As we continued to drive around the 5.8 mile subdivision the harsh commentary continued. We agreed that part of the problem was that homes only contained a 1-car garage, and there were possibly several inhabitants in need of transportation in this sprawling suburb. However, as we continued our drive the three mentioned the “Puerto Rican mentality” of the BVL residents, a reference to Puerto Ricans from the island, and the practices they associated with islanders. But, what is a “Puerto Rican” mentality? Magdalena, Milton, and Roberto perceived Puerto Ricans from the island of Puerto Rico negatively, a sharp contrast to the more common criticism of Nuyoricans. Puerto Ricans from the United States are frequently stereotyped as “Nuyorican,” a term that implies a lack of cultural capital, ignorance of island life, and a lower social class status. But, to these New York City Puerto Ricans it was islanders that were problematic, and to them a “Puerto Rican mentality” included an inability to care for their property due to laziness, which one member described as a “mañana” attitude (meaning they will put something off until tomorrow), and a lack of concern for beautification. The tastes, practices, and aesthetic preferences displayed by some residents of BVL went against the group’s notion of acceptable middle-class suburban living, thereby causing them to label BVL as a “low income” community. The group commented on one house that they described as a “birdcage,” which they compared to houses in Puerto Rico with gates, bars, and fences. They laughed at another house that still had Christmas lights decorating the front of their home, in June. “No blanco would come here and put up their house,” said Magdalena. The group continued their criticism, remarking that the people here put no money into
their homes, just like in Puerto Rico. Magdalena then mentioned Levittown in Puerto Rico, claiming that the appearance of those homes “kill her,” due to the lack of maintenance. The brightly colored homes disturbed the group, as well as the multi-colored homes pained with a combination of green and red, for instance.

The real estate market, they explained, brought in lower income people, although there was some debate about this. Carolyn felt that owning a home does not make you lower class or low income. Ownership, she argued, means middle class or possibly a lower middle class position. In contrast, Magdalena insisted that BVL was a low-income suburb. Roberto claimed that income is the real test, while Magdalena mentioned the significance of property taxes and property values for assessing the social class of a community’s residents. A house that is worth less than $100,000, said Magdalena, is low income, a middle class family’s home is $200,000-$400,000, and an upper class family owns a home that is priced above that. In BVL the average household income of a Hispanic or Latino household was $47,981, and the median value of owner occupied housing units, according to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey, was $189,000. However, the value of owner-occupied units varied greatly, with the majority falling between $200,000 and $299,999, although there were a small number of homes priced at $1,000,000 or more. Of course the mortgage crisis caused a drop in value, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 6. Figures XXII, XXIII, XXIV. reveals the income of residents and value of housing in BVL, revealing the class diversity of this suburb.
### Figure XXII. Average Household Income by Race and Ethnicity
Buenaventura Lakes, FL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race or Ethnicity</th>
<th>Average Household Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino Householder</td>
<td>$47,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Alone Householder, not Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>$56,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Alone Householder</td>
<td>$50,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American Alone Householder</td>
<td>$58,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Alone</td>
<td>$54,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Other Race Alone</td>
<td>$54,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races Householder</td>
<td>$42,963</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2006-2010 (5-Year Estimates)

### Figure XXIII. Household Income and Benefits
Buenaventura Lakes, FL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $14,999</td>
<td>523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 to $24,999</td>
<td>1,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $34,999</td>
<td>986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>1,701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>2,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,000</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 to $199,999</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Statistics</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$46,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Household Income</td>
<td>$52,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>8,643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2006-2008 American Community Survey
While Magdalena applied a quantitative measure to determine social class positionality, the groups discussion of what they perceived to be aesthetic preferences signals the significance of embodied cultural capital to perceptions of class identity and to the articulation of class based distinctions. Of course it is quite possible that homeowners could not afford the cost of maintenance in Osceola County’s service-sector economy. But, the group perceived the landscape aesthetics as a choice and a representation of tastes, thereby leading the group to the assumption that this is a low-income suburb. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that tastes are revealing of our position, and the way we conduct ourselves—in this case the way we choose to live—is judged through hierarchical distinctions that determine who has good taste and who has vulgar and cheap tastes. Thus, this class talk reveals that the group perceives their position in the class hierarchy and their tastes as superior to the residents of BVL.

The group then left the boundaries of BVL to visit and assess the aesthetic integrity of neighboring communities. In a subdivision, just down the street from the county jail, which is positioned across the street from a variety of educational centers or
programs (Adult Learning Center Osceola, Technical Education Center Osceola, Professional and Technical High School, Challenger Learning Center, and Endeavor), we encountered homes that Carolyn, Roberto and Magdalena described as “lower middle class.” These homes, they said, can be distinguished from BVL because of the landscaping and the presence of sidewalks. A place without sidewalks, Roberto said, is a red flag, while Carolyn mentioned the importance of the types of cars present for determining social class positioning. When we drove through Meadow Woods they agreed that the community was a step up from BVL. They noticed better landscaping and more trees, which was lacking in BVL. In Meadow Woods the group pointed out all of the non-Hispanic white families that they saw, and commented on an American Flag hanging in the front of one home. “That is to let Puerto Ricans know that this community is theirs,” Magdalena joked. Still, the group concluded that the people in Meadow Woods care more for their homes, decidedly middle-class values, based on the maintenance of their lawns and the landscaping. Then Magdalena once again mentioned the cars she observed, saying, “if you want to know about an area and the people in it, just look at their cars! These are simple cars.” Her comment connected consumption practices and material items, objectified cultural capital (the material goods associated with economic capital), to the performance of class positionality.

In contrast, I often found myself observing the clothing of BVL’s residents—another form of embodied cultural capital—instead of their vehicles, particularly in the mornings when people left to work and during the evenings when the residents returned. I kept my eyes out for individuals wearing suits or other formal business attire, another signal to possibly, although not conclusively, determine the occupation of an individual.
Instead, I found many people wearing uniforms labeled with the name of a retail establishment or tourism-based establishment, neon construction vests, or the one pieces worn by mechanics. Clothing became an indicator of the occupational status of BVL’s residents, with the highest percentage of workers in office and administrative support occupations, sales and related occupations, and, construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations (See Figure XXV). Figure XXVI. Lists the educational attainment of BVL’s population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Employed Civilian Population</th>
<th>12,429</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office and administrative support occupations</td>
<td>1,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and related occupations</td>
<td>1,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations</td>
<td>1,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and material moving occupations</td>
<td>1,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and related occupations</td>
<td>1,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation and serving related occupations</td>
<td>1,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management, business, and financial operations occupations</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production occupations</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care and service occupations</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare support occupations</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Protective service occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming, fishing, and forestry careers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2006-2010 (5 Year Estimates)

### Table

#### Figure XXVI. Education (Population 25 years and over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>16,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>1,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 12th grade, no diploma</td>
<td>1,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (includes equivalency)</td>
<td>6,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>2,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>1,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>1,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>708</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2006-2008 American Community Survey

Interestingly, the individuals most vocal and adamant about living in a Puerto Rican concentrated community were other Puerto Ricans. Yolanda, a supervisor at a nearby hotel and native of Puerto Rico claimed, “Hispanics ruin everything!” While Marco, of Puerto Rican descent and owner of an apartment in Altamonte Springs remarked, “Puerto Ricans are bringing the property values down.” Marco expressed his disappointment when he noticed more and more Puerto Ricans purchasing property in his apartment complex, fearing for the upkeep of the property and the potential devaluation of his unit. Similarly, many of the comments from Magdalena, Rosalyn, Roberto, and Carolyn attributed the run down appearance of BVL to the lifestyles and practices of Puerto Rican people, particularly those form the island. Milton also made a comment about his good friend, a doctor that relocated to Orlando from Puerto Rico: “Julio says, ‘I love my people, I love my Puerto Rican food, and I love my salsa music;
but, that doesn’t mean I have to live with them!” Likewise, Miguel, a Puerto Rican who has a PhD, expressed a desire to be identified as a “professional.” He did not feel the need to find or live by other Puerto Ricans: “It’s not like Nebraska, where there are so few Puerto Ricans that you get excited,” he said. Marco, a Puerto Rican law enforcement agent visiting his family in Orlando explained, “if I moved here, to Orlando, I would move to an area that isn’t majority Hispanic. What’s a Hispanic community anyway?” he asked. “I want to be with everyone!”

How can the reactions by Hispanics and other Puerto Ricans be explained? Certainly the undesirability of BVL’s aesthetic landscape points to the social class aspirations of some Hispanics, and the heterogeneous nature of the Hispanic community. My Hispanic informants would certainly defend their decisions to live outside of BVL or even the county by making a justifiable argument about property values, quality of schools, proximity to jobs, aesthetics, and population density. Academics have interpreted Hispanics’ and Asian Americans’ desire to live in gated communities, a sharp contrast to a residential ethnic enclave, as an interest in becoming white, and a “preference for access to white privileges and benefits encoded in the built environment.” In the case of BVL, I doubt that Hispanics have chosen to live elsewhere in an effort to become white, after all many of the Hispanics in BVL and the surrounding counties already consider themselves to be of the white race. In BVL 49.9% of Hispanics identified themselves as White alone, while 2% identified as black or African American. Instead, it is the “privileges” (ex. good schools, larger homes, lower population density, lower crime rates, HOA’s that monitor the landscape to protect property values and aesthetic integrity) that are available in non-Hispanic white
dominated spaces that Hispanics want access to, and feel equally entitled to. Hispanics want access to the resources that come with white privilege in the United States. After all unmowed lawns, cars on lawns, and poorly maintained houses affect the reputation of a suburb, and therefore the ability to sell the house, making BVL a poor financial investment indeed. Can it still be considered racism or the defending of white privilege when Hispanics, as opposed to non-Hispanic whites, do not want to live with other Hispanics whose social practices differ from their own? Perhaps everyone helps sustain white privilege. And, do Hispanics’ choice to live in a more affluent, better maintained community necessarily connote a desire for a white racial identity, or is it more likely the desire for upward mobility, which can be expressed through residence in a more desirable community? While ethnic identity and race are entwined in discourses about BVL’s declining landscape, social class distinctions, based on middle-class notions of suburban living, are equally imbedded.

**Community Decline**

A number of factors can be attributed to BVL’s decline: the economy, the absence of a Homeowners Association, the local government’s neoliberal practices, the developer, and the aesthetic deterioration resulting from aging homes and the carelessness of residents. Educator Sarah Michaels, for instance, highlighted the big impact of the economy on the county and BVL’s continual decline, making reference to the impoverished residents that are making the county their home. She remembered how the parking lot of the school used to be filled with cars, but now there are only about 20 cars, she explained. The students that now attend her school cannot afford vehicles. “This is a title one school, she said, meaning there are a lot of kids in poverty who therefore receive
reduced cost lunches.” The school buses, she added, stop at the hotels on Highway 192. There are 67 school bus stops along U.S. Highway 192, and an estimated 1,300 children living in hotels, another form of poverty and homelessness. According to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey, 14.6% of families in the City of Kissimmee have incomes below the poverty level, 10% of families in BVL have incomes below the poverty level, and 10.7% of families in Osceola County have incomes below the poverty level. These numbers are not very different from poverty rates nationwide. According to the 2010 US Census 13.2% of families are living below the poverty level nationwide. Similar to Sarah, Mark, a resident of BVL for 24 years, claimed that the economic situation has a lot to do with the community’s decline. Osceola County, which is known to many as the service-sector county has a plethora of low paying jobs. “Therefore,” John explained, “people who are less fortunate, uneducated, or undereducated are attracted to the area.” After all, he added, “the major employer here is hospitality, and that spawns other social problems.” He went on to list the communities resulting social problems: foreclosure, high crime rates, gang activity, burglary, and graffiti, before explaining that there is no way to voice complaints and no local representation.

Mark’s frustration with the lack of local representation can be attributed to the absence of a Home Owners Association (HOA) and ultimately to the developers that were unable to enforce deed restrictions as the community aged. In 2005, Toll Brothers acquired the Orlando Division of Landstar Homes through a corporate merger; therefore, Landstar was no longer accountable for the aging development. According to one Commissioner, the community’s problems can be traced back to the late 1970s when the
community was first built. He argued that BVL was not properly planned, faulting the developer and the county:

It was done in a rush. There isn’t enough parkland. The small community center is not big enough . . . On many streets, the county did not retain easements—a slice of land between the road and front yards—for future utilities, sidewalks or drainage ditches.

Furthermore, in the absence of a HOA residents are forced to rely on the county’s code enforcement bureau to voice complaints about the maintenance of county owned property and private property. Residents complain that the authorities are unresponsive, and tell the residents to report the issue to the HOA. However, BVL no longer has an HOA.

“When Landstar was still in business,” said Mark, “the meetings used to be packed, but that ended 10 to 15 years ago. There are deed restrictions that are supposed to be enforced by the HOA, not the county, but again nothing is enforceable.” This, according to Mark, is what caused the community’s downfall: the inability to enforce regulations and maintain the integrity of the community’s properties. In other words, the policing and control of bodies is necessary to maintain order and the “niceness” of a community.

In the absence of regulated, enforceable social controls, mechanisms enacted to help regulate desirable and undesirable behaviors through a series of rewards and sanctions, the behavior of residents goes unchecked and uncontrolled. Indeed, the informal social norms of suburban living and the regulations—like deed restrictions or the counties requirement that lawns not exceed a certain height—that previously dictated acceptable social practices are not enforceable, and are therefore being violated in the community of BVL. But, why is it necessary to control behavior? People of color have been overly controlled and monitored throughout history and in the present by metal detectors, surveillance cameras, clerks who follow people of color in the store, and racial
profiling. Nevertheless, a comparison of BVL and Hunters Creek’s landscape reveals why it is necessary to control all people—not just people of color—to maintain the “niceness” of a landscape, protect property values, and maintain a community’s desirability. For instance, while living in Hunters Creek I would see a jeep with an HOA label on the exterior that would slowly drive from street to street inspecting the exterior of the homes. On one occasion, the woman I lived with received a warning for her grass since it was dry, browning, and needed to be attended to. This maintains the appearance and uniformity of the exteriors. People have different tastes and what is beautiful to one person might be distasteful to another, but there are still dominant ideas about suburban living. Thus, control ensures that a house won’t be painted pink, the lawn won’t be damaged, and cars won’t be parked on front lawns since the maintenance of a community impacts its desirability and perceived “niceness.” Moreover, the only way to ensure that a family mows their lawn and doesn’t leave bags and bags of garbage in front of their home is to enforce regulations and control an individual’s actions with the threat of violations, which carry a monetary fee.

Spatial governmentality (Foucault 1991), a neoliberal form of social control, which enlists citizens and populations in the project of self-governance has not succeeded in BVL. For example, an effort to clean up BVL’s graffiti after concerned residents voiced complaints resulted in legislation that requires homeowners to be responsible for vandalism and graffiti on their property. This angered residents who felt the county should be responsible, and much of the graffiti I originally observed remains. Additionally, a neighborhood watch was in existence for a short period of time, whereby residents were trained by the sheriff’s department and provided with a county vehicle to
patrol their neighborhood, as opposed to county police officers being present. While I was living in BVL the neighborhood watch was no longer in existence, despite meetings being advertised on the Sheriff Office’s website, due to the time commitment and required training obligatory for volunteers.

Although the county was initiating mechanisms of spatial governmentality, residents also expressed a desire for self-governance. On May 19, 2010 one Hispanic homeowner explained to me that BVL has no HOA, and that she wanted it that way! They charge another $200-$300 per/month and you don’t get anything, she complained. Then, she mentioned the constraining regulations before saying, “It’s not like we are going to paint the house pink! ” Although some BVL residents did in fact live in pink houses.

During an interview with Sandra Lopez, she admitted that the look of the community has changed. It was pristine once, but she thinks BVL can be turned around and can go back to being a good “neighborhood” and “community.” She went on to mention that some parts of BVL do in fact look different from other sections; but, ultimately she suggested more interactions between neighbors. “You can say something to your neighbor if their grass is growing too long, you can offer to lend a lawnmower if theirs is broken etc,” said Sandra. Again, she continued to emphasize the importance of a relationship between neighbors, which has disintegrated in the new BVL. By emphasizing the significance of open communication between neighbors, Sandra interpreted relationships between neighbors as an effective form of spatial governmentality. If you socialize with your neighbors and build a friendship, for instance, it makes a resident more accountable for their property, and even gives a resident the
ability to comment on or police the practices of their neighbors. If you do not know your neighbors, it is more difficult and more offensive to make suggestions or offer assistance in an effort to protect property values and maintain social order.

In the hearts and minds of some residents and non-residents, Hispanics were the ones to blame for the community’s decline. After all, the community’s decline corresponded with the increasing presence of Puerto Ricans. Of course this is an aging community built in the late 70s/early 80s and the decline could have begun before the massive influx of Hispanics, and the shift to a Hispanic majority. Nonetheless, during my formal and informal interviews it was Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics that more readily attacked and blamed the Hispanic population for the community’s deterioration. Most non-Hispanic whites never openly correlated BVL’s “problems” or “badness” with the presence of Hispanics, at least not in front of me. Of course I’m Hispanic so it’s quite possible that I would not be included in these conversations. Instead, they attacked the hyper presence of the Spanish language, the lack of diversity due to the large number of Hispanic residents, and the physical appearance of the community. Acceptable suburban living, to my informants and interviewees, includes caring for your property, maintaining order and cleanliness, and following the regulations that makes one a “good,” active citizen and therefore a good American. Few were aware of the changing conditions in many of the nation’s suburbs. More and more suburban subdivisions around the nation are coming to resemble the social and economic conditions once correlated only with inner city life.
CHAPTER 6
THE FRACTURED AMERICAN DREAM

In 2007, three years before returning to the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area to begin my fieldwork, I selected Buenaventura Lakes (BVL) as the field site for this project. In 2007, I spent one month of the summer visiting all of the Puerto Rican concentrated neighborhoods in Metropolitan Orlando: BVL, Meadow Woods, Azalea Park, Poinciana, Pine Castle, Kissimmee, Oak Ridge, and Union Park. I selected BVL because it was the largest Puerto Rican community, had a large number of homeowners, and it was in the suburbs. At the time, I had no idea BVL would become one of the two census tracts with the highest number of foreclosures in Osceola County, following the 2008 Mortgage Crisis. Osceola County had the highest foreclosure rate in Central Florida, and these foreclosures are disproportionately concentrated in African American and Hispanic communities.  

Homeownership and Foreclosure

In the U.S. social imaginary being a homeowner is a measure of success, wealth, and social class status. Promoting homeownership has long been an objective of US housing policy. The Internal Revenue Service, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, state housing finance agencies, and local community development corporations promote homeownership. This is because homeownership is believed to benefit individuals both economically and socially, and is associated with upward mobility. During a keynote address at the 2007 Hispanic Summit in Orlando, Henry Cisneros, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development during Bill Clinton’s administration and former Mayor of San Antonio, Texas, spoke about homeownership as the key to building the Hispanic middle class: “It’s the door for the middle class. Just as
is access to higher education. It’s not only about gangs and keeping kids from dropping out. Homeownership and equity is a strategy for upward mobility.” Indeed, the ownership of a home and the location of that home is a reflection of an individual or family’s social class position in the United States’ hierarchy.

In October of 2009, the Florida Association of Realtors published an article in the *Orlando Sentinel* entitled, “The Upside of Florida Real Estate: 15 Market Positives” that highlights the benefits of purchasing real estate in Florida. These positives include “low mortgage rates,” “federal incentives for homeowners,” and “a greater sense of well-being.” Policy reports and academic scholarship claim that the cost of owning a home can be lower than renting, that homeownership results in preferential tax treatment, and provides even low and moderate income homeowners the opportunity to accumulate wealth through principal payments and asset appreciation. Compared to renters, homeowners are more likely to participate in local organizations, engage in informal social interactions, develop stronger commitments to their local community, keep dwellings in good condition, and show a higher sense of well being. Still, the 2008 Mortgage crisis made many families rethink the benefits of homeownership after the destruction to individual lives, families, and communities.

Much of Florida’s prosperity and growth was based on construction and real estate. In parts of the Sunbelt the economic dependence on construction reached unhealthy levels in recent years. Data from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis reveals that construction and real estate accounted for almost 33 percent of all economic output by private industry in Orlando, FL during 2006, compared with a national average of about 20 percent. According to Ernest Beck (2007), an *Orlando Sentinel* journalist,
for several years the defining images of Florida real estate were crowded open houses and speculators flipping preconstruction condominiums. However, since 2005 home sales have plummeted, construction has been halted, inventory has soared, prices have been cut, and foreclosure and mortgage delinquency rates rose. The slumping property values are compounded with the rising taxes and insurance costs that followed the hurricanes in 2004 and 2005. According to Greg Rand, managing partner at Better Homes and Gardens Rand Realty, a brokerage firm in New York, “Florida is in a storm right now . . . It’s overdeveloped, over speculated, and overleveraged.”

The US cities with the highest rates of foreclosure were concentrated in four states: Florida, California, Arizona, and Nevada. In 2006, Florida had the seventh-highest foreclosure rate in the country, and by 2008 the situation had worsened. Realty Trac, a site that collects and aggregates foreclosure data, indicated that Florida registered the nation’s second highest foreclosure rate with 4.52% of its housing units (1 in 22) receiving at least one foreclosure filing during 2008. According to a CNN ranking, it was Sunbelt cities that dominated the list of metropolitan areas with the biggest foreclosure problems during the first six months of 2009. In the four county Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area, 46,843 properties received at least one formal foreclosure filing in 2008. By 2008, amongst Florida metropolitan areas Fort Lauderdale ranked number six nationwide with 5.95% (1 in 17 housing units) receiving a foreclosure filing, Orlando was number 7 with 5.48% (1 in 18 housing units), and Miami was number 8 with 5.21% (1 in 18 housing units). In Central Florida, Osceola County had the highest foreclosure rate with 10,529 or 9.6 % of all households receiving a foreclosure filing. This was three times as many homes as in 2007, and 10 times as many as in 2006.
According to an *Orlando Sentinel* article, the majority of foreclosed homes in Osceola County are in BVL and Poinciana, two Puerto Rican concentrated subdivisions. An interview with an Osceola County housing specialist confirmed the article’s claim. The high number of foreclosed homes in BVL can be attributed to the number of homes that are “underwater” since home values dropped, and the prevalence of subprime loans. An underwater mortgage or home refers to a home purchase loan with a higher balance than the free-market value of the home. In 2009, for instance, home prices in BVL ranged from $65,000 to $239,000, with most properties costing a little more than $150,000. By 2010, these same homes were selling for between $40,000 to $170,000, with the majority costing a little more than $75,000. Figure XXVII. shows the 6.5% decrease in Puerto Rican owner-occupied housing units between 2007 and 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure XXVII: Change in Home Owner Characteristics from 2007 to 2009 Florida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(Puerto Rican)</em> Owner-occupied housing units:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Value:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Total Population)</em> Owner-Occupied housing units:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Value:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2007 and 2009 1-Year American Community Survey Estimates Compiled by Patricia Silver, Puerto Ricans in Florida, Socio-economic Conditions, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College*

Thus, homeowners who purchased before property values dropped can easily owe their financial institution as much as 50% more than the value of their house.
Nevertheless, other Osceola County properties have suffered more than a 50% drop in property value. The 304-unit Cascades complex in Kissimmee, for instance, has experienced the biggest price drops in Osceola County with sales ranging from $140,000 to $185,000 per unit in 2009, before dropping to between $16,000 and $48,000 a year later, a drop of over 70 percent. These price drops, leading to underwater homes, placed BVL in the top 10 zip codes that saw the largest volume increases of foreclosure as the crisis took off in 2008. The zip codes were all found in communities with larger concentrations of Hispanics: Meadow Woods, Kissimmee, Poinciana, Deltona, BVL, Remington, East Orange, Pine Hills, and Hunters Creek. In BVL, there were 984 foreclosures in 2008, an increase of 657 from the prior year. According to Wayne Archer, executive director of the Bergstrom Center for Real Estate Studies at the University of Florida, the areas most affected were the more affordable communities, farther from the big employers.441

In 2010, when I moved into a house in BVL, the foreclosed homes present on street after street, at times with graffiti, un-mowed lawns, and broken windows, was a reflection of the community’s decay, and the effects of the 2008 mortgage and foreclosure crisis. Yet, despite the communities decline, BVL continues to be a community with a concentration of Hispanic homeowners, consistent with one of the distinctive characteristics of Central Florida’s Puerto Rican migration: a higher number of Puerto Rican homeowners in comparison to national rates. In 1980, Puerto Rican households had the lowest national homeownership rate (21%) compared to Cuban (44%), Mexican (50%), and other Hispanic households (46%).442 The national Puerto Rican homeownership rate increased to 25% in 1990, 34.9% in 2000, and 38.8% in
The homeownership rate amongst Puerto Ricans in Florida is significantly higher than the averages throughout the continental US. In 2000, nearly 56% of all Puerto Rican households in Metropolitan Orlando were homeowners. Although, on the island of Puerto Rico homeownership rates reached far higher proportions, 71.5%, in 2009. The Clinton era boom helped break the downward spiral of poverty amongst Hispanic families, impacting homeownership rates. On September 20, 1999 President Clinton announced the strong gains in income and the substantial reductions in poverty levels. The Census Bureau’s *Annual Report on Income in the U.S.* revealed that all groups, from the wealthiest to the poorest, had seen their incomes rise since 1993. Income for Hispanic families had risen almost 16 percent in the three years preceding the report’s release, the largest three-year increase in the Hispanic income on record. And, as income levels rose, poverty levels decreased. The national poverty rate was at its lowest level in two decades, and the Hispanic poverty rate dropped to its lowest level since 1979. It is no coincidence that the increasing incomes and decreased poverty during the Clinton administration coincided with the growth of Hispanic homeownership in BVL and Central Florida.

**Attributing Blame, The Causes of the Mortgage Crisis**

A number of factors have been identified to explain the US foreclosure crisis including an increase in subprime originations, borrower and lender exuberance, poor underwriting, securitization, aggressive marketing, unscrupulous mortgage brokers, fraud, naïve borrowers, a declining housing market, tightened credit, servicer accounting errors, and a lack of regulation. Yet, amongst my informants and during interviews the emphasis was on a few particular factors: the greed of buyers, predatory lending, loan
qualification standards, fraud, job loss, and Osceola county’s economic dependency on tourism. My informants had such critical insights into the crisis, and their opinions were formed by their personal experiences, the experiences of others, and from the information that circulated in the media.

When attributing blame for the mortgage and foreclosure crisis, most often the greed of prospective buyers was highlighted and condemned during interviews and informal conversations. My informants argued that homebuyers knew their financial situations and what they were capable of paying; however, they were greedy and purchased above and beyond their means. This leads outside observers to speculate about the personal responsibility of the buyers, as opposed to the fault of lenders and the government. During an interview with a high ranking county official I asked about the county’s overwhelming number of foreclosures and he immediately responded, “that’s what happens when you give people who make $30,000 a $300,000 home,” which emphasizes buyers’ inability to afford their homes, despite bank approval. But, is it the lenders or the buyers that are to blame?

John Lopez, a licensed broker in Osceola County’s real estate industry, claimed that it used to be easy to get funding for a house since credit was not tight. John, who is Puerto Rican, works in a real estate franchise less than a mile away from BVL with 14 realtors and a clientele that is almost 99% Hispanic. During our interview he claimed that Hispanics are not educated and they would think, “oh, my buddy can get me a mortgage, so lets do it. It was impulse.” In the past, Lopez argued, there were limited homeownership opportunities for Hispanics, and then suddenly people jumped at the opportunity. He did go on to mention job loss and unemployment as the number one
reason that his clients have defaulted on their mortgages before the conclusion of our interview. We ended our interview discussing the transition away from the red taping and exclusive lending practices that prevented Hispanics and other minorities from purchasing property in the suburbs; however, we realized that the Hispanic consumer is instead targeted by housing lenders, at times under predatory conditions.

According to Michael Smith, a 65-year old, non-Hispanic white homeowner in BVL, there was fraud and greed by both parties, the realtors who changed the numbers to get the loans approved, but also by the buyers who doctored their numbers to get a mortgage. “The law,” he claimed, “did not require employment or income verification;” thus, he blamed the government and financial institutions for being careless. He claimed “Clinton’s 1996 Bill, which didn’t let people’s income be verified,” was to blame. So, Michael attributed the factors that spurred the mortgage crisis to government policies and greedy people, including the lenders who embellished the finances on the paperwork and the buyers who he deemed personally responsible for pursuing loans above their means.

Similarly, Sarah, a housing specialist for Osceola County, emphasized lending practices and financial institution’s willingness to lend more than what was affordable. “The income to debt ratio should be at 30% to be considered affordable,” she explained, and “that is including principal taxes, insurance, homeowner association fees, and interest.” Nonetheless, some banks were willing to accept a 50% income to debt ratio, meaning 50% of an individual’s income was going to go toward housing. “That’s what got people into trouble,” according to Sarah. So, when Sarah and Michael are talking about “greedy people” they are faulting the individuals who work for financial institutions, but also attributing responsibility to the homeowners for purchasing more
than they could ultimately afford. The two cannot be disentangled and neither remains protected from blame.

During an interview with Margarita she recalled the different financial circumstances of her prospective buyers. Margarita worked for a developer in Poinciana selling homes. She remembered one man in particular, a trucker who wanted to buy a house “so bad.” Stephanie denied him a loan, since the mortgage would have cost him 80% of his income; still, he begged her and begged her to approve him, promising he would in fact pay on time, before telling her that he really needs this house for his family. Stephanie did not budge, but she is certain that he went elsewhere and probably found another lender to finance his home.

Like real estate broker John Lopez, some of my interviewees mentioned job loss or other unforeseen circumstances like illness, which prevented them or people they knew from working, thereby leaving them unable to afford their mortgage payments. One of the sectors of the labor market particularly affected by the mortgage crisis was the construction industry, which halted development and cut jobs when home sales started to decline. In a 2009 Orlando Sentinel article entitled, “Every time I open the door and see the boxes there, I know my time is coming” journalist Mary Shanklin recounted the foreclosure nightmare endured by the Batista family. According to Inez Batista, “her husband worked in the construction industry. But when work dried up in the past two years because of the real-estate bust, they were unable to make their payments. The realities of foreclosure are everywhere, she said.”

Not only did the U.S. economic crisis take a toll on the construction industry, but also on the tourism industry since vacationing in Florida is not a household necessity. As
hotel occupancy rates and amusement park visitation declined, hours at service sector jobs were cut and the labor market became increasingly competitive. According to John Lopez, “Osceola County does not have a good pool of professional jobs, they are all low to middle income, and as a result it is difficult for the area to prosper.” Osceola County, he claimed, is not bringing in the “good” jobs, and when tourism is down the entire county struggles. The people that come into Osceola County, Lopez explained, have trouble with credit and can only spend $120,000 to $125,000 for a house. He went on to describe his Hispanic clientele as “regular people,” explaining that he does not have doctors, lawyers or buyers with a PhD purchasing homes, “it’s just not the area.”

According to Pastor Rodriguez, who has witnessed foreclosure after foreclosure amongst his parishioners, individuals were losing their homes for two reasons: because they lost their jobs or because the lenders made promises that were not true. While some of my informants and interviewees placed blame on the greed of individuals or the county’s overwhelming number of insecure, service sector jobs, individuals like Rodriguez emphasized the role of the real estate industry, financial institutions, and the complacency of the government. In 2009, for instance, Representative Darren Soto, a politician serving in the Florida House of Representatives, advocated for a foreclosure Bill of Rights. His biggest focus was going to be mortgage fraud and mortgage reform.

Representative Soto mentioned three classic examples of fraud that were occurring in Osceola County. First, there was outright fraud or misrepresentation happening, where individual’s signatures were being forged and buyers were told outright lies. According to Soto, “a lot of Hispanics who come here with money from Central and South America or from the islands are trusting the folks out here. They speak their
language and they don’t speak a lot of English, so they’ve just been victims to fraud.

Second, the representative mentioned the issue of loan qualifications, and explained that individuals are being approved for loans that their incomes do not justify:

    we are talking about five, six times what a person makes, and they think ‘Oh, they are getting a deal/and they trust this mortgage broker, and the loan officer, and they tell them ‘Oh you’ll be able to flip them later on.’ And then what do we have? We have a person sinking a nest egg into a house that they could never have afforded.

Finally, is the issue of “equity scamming,” whereby an individual that has received a foreclosure notice is approached and offered $10,000 to $20,000 for their title, or in other instances an investor buys the property from the homeowner and agrees to lease them the home as a tenant; but, the homeowner does not realize that they are giving away both their property and more importantly, their equity.

    During a conference in Washington DC Lawrence Yun, chief economist for the National Association of Realtors, attributed the mortgage crisis of the late-2000s to the rise of subprime mortgage delinquencies and foreclosures. Government sponsored institutions, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae for instance, bundled prime loans into investment packages that were sold as bonds on the open market, although they tended to avoid subprime loans. However, between 2004 and 2006 the percentage of subprime mortgages rose from 8% to 20% nationally. This increase happened when investment banks and other financial institutions began bundling subprime mortgages into securities and offering investors a higher return as compensation for the increased risk of default. As lenders placed these newly approved subprime mortgages on the market for sale to investors, they simultaneously loosened the credit standards used to approve borrowers, at times giving loans without a down payment or proof of income. This new leniency for
issuing loans coincided with a rise of adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs). In 2006, for example, over 90% of subprime loans were ARMs. ARMs are used to entice borrowers with a low, “teaser” interest rate that increases a few years later.

Initially, the housing boom kept homeowners with subprime loans from defaulting since homeowners and investors could easily refinance or sell their homes. Though in 2007, for the first time in decades, the nationwide median home price dropped and continued to decline, unraveling the subprime market. So, as the interest rates on ARMs began to increase monthly mortgage payments increased, while the value of homes decreased. At times this left homes underwater, whereby the borrower owed the bank more money than the house was even worth since they took out a subprime mortgage before the price of their house dropped. The rising costs of subprime loans in conjunction with a drop in housing prices therefore increased the number of mortgage delinquencies and foreclosures. As a result, the securities that were backed with mortgages, held by financial institutions, lost most of their value, which made global investors skeptical of the US credit and financial market. The purchase of mortgage backed debt and securities declined, economic growth in the US slowed down, and there was a tightening of credit worldwide, thereby contributing to the Great Recession, which began in December of 2007.

**The Homeowners Affected**

While the foreclosure crisis has spread across broad segments of the US population, a 2009 study by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) found that minorities experienced disproportionately high rates of foreclosure as a result of disparities in the types of loans they received (subprime, predatory or prime). A
subprime or high-cost loan has an interest rate higher than competitive rates in order to compensate for the added risk of lending to a borrower with imperfect credit. A predatory loan is defined by the NCRC as an “unsuitable loan designed to exploit vulnerable and unsophisticated borrowers.” Predatory loans are a subset of a subprime loan and have one or more of the following features: (1) charge more in interest and fees than is required to cover the added risk of lending to borrowers with imperfect credit, (2) abusive terms and conditions that trap borrowers and lead to increased indebtedness, (3) does not take into account a borrower’s ability to repay the loan, (4) violates fair lending laws by targeting women, minorities, and communities of color.

High cost loans are supposed to compensate lenders for the increased risk of lending to borrowers with an imperfect credit history, but ethnic and racial minorities are receiving a disproportionately large amount of high-cost loans, after controlling for income levels, gender, creditworthiness, and other housing market factors. The NCRC study argues that minority communities in the inner cities were the epicenter of the foreclosure crisis, but the crisis is spreading from these neighborhoods towards suburban communities. The NCRC suggests, “that as the crisis spreads towards suburban areas, suburban minority communities, including middle- and upper-income ones, appear to be the next in line for rising rates of mortgage default and foreclosure.”

What is wrong with high-cost loans? Subprime loans have significantly higher default and delinquency rates than prime loans. The Federal Reserve Board estimated that 28 percent of adjustable rate mortgage subprime loans were seriously delinquent by May of 2008. Secondly, borrowers lose home equity and the opportunity to build wealth since subprime loans are estimated to cost $50,000 to $100,000 more than comparable
prime loans because of the high interest rates. In the Central Florida region more than 200,000 subprime mortgages were issued between 2004 and 2006, that is about three of every ten mortgages; additionally, the Central Florida census tracts with the most subprime loans have the highest number of mortgage defaults. In 2007, the region had about 22,000 mortgages in default, more than triple the number of defaults in 2006.  

Previously, subprime loans were few in number and were limited to low-income, minority concentrated, urban neighborhoods where homeowners had low credit scores, made minimal down payments, or faced discriminatory lending practices. Consistent with the NCRC findings, however, the Orlando Sentinel made the public aware of the shift of subprime loans from poor, urban neighborhoods to the region’s suburbs in 2008.

In a historic shift that continues to fuel the housing crisis here, high-priced mortgages known as ‘subprime’ loans broke out of Central Florida’s mostly poor and urban neighborhoods in recent years and multiplied by the thousands in the region’s suburbs, according to an Orlando Sentinel analysis of federal lending data.  

In Central Florida only eight of the 100 U.S. census tracts with the highest numbers of subprime loans were in low-income, urban areas, the remainder were in suburban communities. In 2008 the Central Florida census tracts with the highest concentration of subprime loans were in the suburbs of BVL, Meadow Woods, Poinciana, and Celebration. Figure XXVIII. from the Orlando Sentinel article, reveals the number of subprime loans and defaults in Orange and Osceola counties subprime hot spots.
One of the most important findings of the NCRC study is that middle-class or upper-class status does not shield minorities from receiving problematic, high-cost loans. In fact, NCRC observed that ethnic and racial differences in lending actually increase as income levels increase. Figure III reveals this trend in the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area. Middle-to-upper income Hispanic females and Hispanic males received a higher percentage, 37.02% and 37.05% respectively, of high-cost loans than their white female and white male counterparts, 16.45% and 17.08%. Yet, when we look at the differences in the types of loans to low–to-moderate income Hispanic females and Hispanic males, 23.09% and 22.96%, in comparison to low–to-moderate income white females and white males, 15.08% and 18.62%, there is less disparity (See Figure XXIX).
Playing the Race Card

Although studies, like the NCRC community survey, show that minorities have been disproportionately affected by the foreclosure crisis due to lending practices, there is resentment that turns into displays of nativism when racial or ethnic disparities are pointed out. My informants used the expression “playing the race card” to describe a situation when race or ethnicity was used as an explanation for a disadvantage or for victimization. Instead, they believed in a color-blind ideology that de-emphasized the significance of racial and ethnic inequalities. They felt that people all over the United
States were suffering from the mortgage crisis, regardless of race or ethnicity, and to claim that Hispanics were being disproportionately victimized was bringing race and ethnicity into a crisis that was in fact race neutral. An Internet conversation about the foreclosures crisis, which emerged in response to a *Hispanosphere* blog post is revealing of the nativist feelings and the colorblind ideologies that surface during everyday life interactions.

On February 17, 2010 Victor Manuel Ramos, a reporter, posted a story to the *Orlando Sentinel*’s Hispanosphere blog entitled, “Study: Hispanic families hurting under foreclosure strain.” In the story, Ramos discusses the Nogaleses family’s foreclosure experience, and the effects of the mortgage crisis for Hispanic families in particular: frequent moves, strained family relationships, marital discord, anxiety, depression, and poor academic or job performance following the foreclosure. The Nogaleses were part of a study discussed in the Sentinel story, which claims that the mortgage crisis is impacting Hispanic families far beyond the loss of a home and creating a “foreclosure generation” of downwardly mobile Hispanics:

> the housing crisis is forecast to cause 1.3 million Hispanic families to lose their homes between 2009 and 2012 and erase up to $98 billion in Hispanic household wealth. The crisis has created a ‘foreclosure generation’ that threatens to devastate the Hispanic community . . . ‘We can assume that many of these families are going to be pushed back into poverty . . . They were knocked off that path to the middle class.’

The responses that followed Ramos’ post challenge the emphasis on Hispanics, as opposed to acknowledging that individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity, were equally affected. Furthermore, the endurance of discriminatory lending practices is debated with disagreement about the effectiveness of anti-discrimination housing statutes.
In the conversation thread that followed the Hispanosphere post, Hispanics and non-Hispanics debated who in fact was hardest hit by the crisis or if the crisis impacted everyone indiscriminately. Additionally, there was disagreement over who was to blame for the crisis, who was victimized, and who was exploitative: the government, the county, the real estate industry, or the individual. This debate led to nativist remarks by non-Hispanics: “If you don’t like life here in this country then go back to where you came from,” “It sickens me to see you immigrated people come here to the USA to complain and whine.”

Still, the mere mention of ethnicity was interpreted as “playing the card,” and generated hostility in the conversation thread:

Sad as this story is . . . it’s happening to everyone. All over.457

Are u kidding me? You think Hispanics are the only ones suffering? Give me a break . . We are all fricken suffering because people cried the race game and demanded special loans with no proof of income . . . you think because your Hispanic your house is worth less? Get in your car and take a tour of Florida and see all colors of people who’ve lost fortunes. Thats what bubbles do. . Market bubbles see no color, no race, no preference.

In this post the victimization of Hispanics, based on discriminatory lending practices, is challenged. Instead, Hispanics are blamed for playing the race card to obtain home mortgages in the first place. So, there is a lack of tolerance for any kind of denunciation of racism or racist practices, not just anti-Hispanic sentiments. This same respondent continues to post, equating “acting American” with a colorblind ideology that does not see or acknowledge the existence of racial difference or inequalities:

Stop blaming your neighbor, your friends, your bank your race your opposite race and take responsibility- Start acting American and get your head out of your racial pity party because that is the only way you will survive.458
As the Internet thread continues the respondents turn the conversation into a debate about the existence of de facto (what happens in practice) versus de jure (what the law says) discrimination.

For some posters, the end of de jure discrimination, prompted by the end of Jim Crow Laws and the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, meant that racial discrimination was non-existent since it is forbidden by law. The existence of the fair housing act, which outlaws discrimination in housing related transactions like the rental or purchase of homes, led posters to believe that de facto discrimination is non-existent:

As for loans, they cannot approve or deny based on race, so assume your less than favorable rate is based on your credit score...another thing you can only blame on yourself if it is bad. Your people, as you call them, are not hit any harder than any other people. Based on this article, it appears that Hispanic just think that more is owed to them, which is a crock of bull. It is happening to everyone, but the only ones who feel the need to cry the blues as a culture are the Hispanics...

In response to this post a Hispanic blogger takes a defensive position, pointing out that de facto discrimination does indeed occur since lenders are “pre-disposed” to give Hispanics less favorable loans

Yeah but Hispanics are harder hit than the rest of the people because usually we don’t have fall back, we don’t have money in the bank, we don’t have relatives in the area that can offer safe haven, and banks are pre-disposed to give Hispanics less than favorable rate compared with the other groups. So yeah it is happening to everyone but my people are hit the hardest.

The next poster goes even further, pointing out the discriminatory practices of Japanese and American dealerships that were forced to settle out of court. The dealerships were giving different rates for car loans based on the race and ethnicity of buyers, despite equivalent credit scores:
In case you haven’t heard or read about them, many discriminatory lending practices have been dismantled here in Florida because people like me have complained about people like you, who want to keep the status quo and rake all minorities over the coals. Auto loans in South Florida is a prime example, were the rates were ‘cooked’ so that applicants with the same credit score, same down payment and same earnings and savings history, but with different races, would get different rates . . . But let’s be clear that a proved to them, in court, without a doubt that they knowingly offered different rates depending on the race of the borrower, whites received low rates, blacks high rates and Hispanics received the highest rates available. And you people keep saying that racism and discrimination are over in the USA I have earned the friggin right to complain so keep your racist comments to yourself and leave me alone.\textsuperscript{460}

Despite the debate over who is most victimized by lenders, no one contested the fact that the foreclosure crisis affected individuals of all races and ethnicities, and the aftermath continues to affect individuals, families, and the larger community.

**The Effects of the Foreclosure Crisis**

The Hispanosphere respondents in the previous section mentioned several entities that were to blame for the foreclosure crisis: the county, individuals, predatory lenders, and an unstable economy. But, the article highlighted some of the effects that extend beyond losing one’s home to reveal the human suffering that was endured.\textsuperscript{461} The Nogaleses family, for instance, suffered a number of psychological effects, which have been found amongst individuals that have foreclosed on their home. Additional effects—homelessness, psychological and familial instability (ex. depression, anxiety attacks, divorce, and suicide), downward mobility, deteriorating properties and communities, underfunded homeowner associations, and a depleted county tax base—have been found in Hispanic families, Hispanic communities, and throughout the US.

In addition to psychological effects are the long-term implications for family’s finances, and therefore their stability. Amongst the Hispanic families that participated in
the study an average of $89,155 was lost because of the foreclosure. Some of these families were forced to rely on food stamps and other forms of public assistance. All but one of the families exhausted their savings in their efforts to keep their home, but none of their lenders were willing to offer a loan modification. Since homeownership is one of the primary vehicles for wealth accumulation in the U.S., the crisis will result in greater financial instability for millions of families in the present, but long term as well. Furthermore, most of the families in the study claimed that their children were having academic or behavioral problems due to the family’s crisis. Similarly, during my interview with an Osceola County teacher she described the instability many of her students suffered because of the foreclosure of their home and the effects on their parent’s relationship. These home issues were evident in the classroom, she claimed, and in her students daily behavior.

When I moved to Buenaventura Lakes it was clear, visually, that the suburban subdivision was greatly affected by the foreclosure crisis. For sale signs could be found on street after street, lawns were un-mowed, and newspapers were piling up in driveways. Some homes even had graffiti on the exterior and broken windows that went unfixed for weeks and weeks. Not only is there visible, external damage and neglect to the bank owned properties, but some homes have also been structurally damaged internally and stripped. During an interview with Marlena, an employee in one of the chambers of commerce and a native of Puerto Rico, she spoke about the anger and resentment felt by those who lose their home. She shared the story of her Hispanic neighbor who stripped the house before being evicted and poured cement down the kitchen sink, destroying the internal plumbing of the house. An Osceola County teacher and several other
interviewees also mentioned the homes that are stripped by evictees in an attempt to recuperate any money they could by selling doors, doorknobs, stoves, refrigerators, ceiling fans, and anything else of value. Additionally, squatters have been known to enter foreclosed homes or youth who vandalize home interiors. This is destroying whole neighborhoods and HOA’s, which are without the resources to maintain the external appearance of a suburb.

One of my close informants, Marisa, a native of Guatemala, stripped her home when the bank seized her large property in a wealthy Osceola County suburb. Her home was already deteriorating from neglect prior to her eviction. But, she refused to put any money into the home knowing that it would not be hers for much longer. The home was in foreclosure proceedings for over a year, but prior to the bank seizing the home, Marisa sold everything of value including the fence that surrounded the back of the home, enclosing the swimming pool.

Removing the enclosure, however, resulted in a notice from the Osceola County code enforcement department, and Marisa called me to help her rectify the situation. The home, without the private swimming pool enclosed with a barrier, was in violation of the 2007 Florida residential building code, which states that a barrier may not have any gaps, openings, protrusion, or structural components that could allow a young child access to the pool. If the violation was not corrected, the county could impose a fine of up to $250 per day or $500 per day if the violation was not corrected within the specified amount of time. Fortunately, a phone call to the code enforcement officer quickly cleared up the notice and the bank was to assume complete responsibility for the property; the counties files had not yet been updated after the seizure. After losing that home, Marisa moved to
a nearby townhouse in a gated community, owned by her family, which is also undergoing foreclosure.

When Marisa moved to the second house I began staying with her when I made my monthly visits to Florida, after completing the majority of my fieldwork. She is one of the few individuals that spoke openly about her situation to me. It was extremely difficult to locate individuals in BVL, for instance, that had already lost their home since it was difficult to find out where they had gone. Those individuals that were undergoing foreclosure were often silent about their situations, and on several occasions I learned of an individual’s situations from gossip that spread within our social network. Instead, individuals were more willing to talk about their other family members or friend’s experiences.

One of the consequences of losing one’s home is finding affordable housing, particularly since many families drain their savings accounts in an attempt to save their home from foreclosure. Some individuals, with an established support system in Central Florida, can live with family until their living situation stabilizes. Although, for other individuals there are few options, and finding affordable housing can be a challenge.

According to Cathy Jackson, executive director of Homeless Services Network of Central Florida, approximately 1,830 people experienced homelessness in Osceola County in 2011.

There are a few stages families undergo before moving into a motel or living on the streets. Initially, families are “precariously housed,” which means the household is paying more than 50 percent of their income for housing. Jackson claimed that there are 12,300 families considered precariously housed in the county, and there are 3,300 low-
income households that are on the verge of becoming homeless. The next step is for families to move into weekly rentals when they can no longer afford permanent housing. Families that have experienced a crisis and have therefore lost their homes and jobs are increasingly finding themselves in Osceola counties “motel corridor,” along the main east-west thoroughfare of US-192, which is conveniently located close to service sector jobs, bus lines, and other necessities. Motels are so often used because they do not require a credit check, utility deposit, or security deposit. If a family can no longer afford weekly rentals they then find themselves in homeless shelters, if available, or live on the street if they are without family or government support. Arguably, Osceola County is way behind in providing affordable housing and homeless shelters for those in need. Cathy Jackson told an Osceola Gazette journalist that Osceola County has 22% of the homeless in Central Florida, but only 4% of the available homeless shelter beds.

In a January 2010 Hispanosphere post the overwhelming number of children living in the motel corridor of Osceola County’s highway 192 was highlighted. Children, age 18 and younger, make up more than half of Osceola County’s homeless population and at least 15% of those children are Hispanic. Once a family loses their home and moves into a pay by week motel it becomes difficult to save enough money for permanent housing. A month in a hotel room costs about $800 per month, whereas a one-bedroom apartment can be found for $600. Furthermore, these motels lack kitchen facilities, adequate space for children’s recreation, and can place young children in contact with drug users, prostitution, and sex offenders. Rumors circulated that the county was going to clean up the hotels because of the squalid living conditions (bed bugs, mold, and other health issues), but also because the hotels and motels are zoned for
short term rentals and families are living in rooms beyond a six month stay. The clean up has not yet happened, but what is to blame for the county’s homelessness? The bloggers that responded to the Hispanosphere post did not blame the county’s increasing homeless population on the mortgage crisis. But, it is difficult to know what happens to those families that have lost their homes and exhausted their savings.

The county commissioners were blamed for not doing anything about homelessness and for the county’s close link to the tourism industry. One respondent to a Hispanosphere post, Tim, claimed, “over the years many persons have come to the area lured by jobs in the tourism industry and when the recession hit, many went unemployed and then homeless.” Another poster echoes the commentary about the county’s dependence on the tourism industry and service sectors jobs, blaming the Puerto Rican commissioners in the area who are neglecting the needs of the “boricuas who have been lured to move to Kissimmee with promises of job and higher earnings than they were making in the island.” Then, the first respondent, tim, shifts the conversation to a nativist discourse, blaming undocumented immigrants who are employed in the area for taking the jobs of US citizens.

HOME, a non-profit organization working to break the cycle of homelessness in Osceola County by providing housing and life skills to homeless women and their children, also emphasize the contributions of the service sector economy to Osceola County’s homelessness. In fact, the HOME website states, “Osceola County’s tourism industry is our double-edged sword: it attracts revenue and stimulates growth, but at the same time is kept alive by service-based jobs that keep many families on the edge.” During an interview with a HOME supervisor she explained that the rumor of Florida
being the happiest place on earth, due to the presence of Disney, persists. Her clients come in to her office saying they came to Orlando to work at Disney, but the economic crisis hurt the tourism industry and service sector jobs have become increasingly competitive although low-paid.

During an interview with an employee of HOME, Marissa, we discussed the foreclosure crisis and Osceola County’s homeless population. She explained that the county does not have a homeless shelter, very few housing assistance programs, and those that exist are underfunded and contain long waiting lists. She went on to say that some families are precariously housed or living with family members, at times in overcrowded spaces, after undergoing foreclosure proceedings. At the same time, individuals that are renting homes that are in the foreclosure process are being hurt as well. Marisa shared stories about tenants that have paid a security deposit, first month rent, and subsequent months of rent only to be suddenly evicted when the bank seizes the house, unbeknownst to them, and their deposits go un-refunded. We went on to talk about her personal experiences, the foreclosure of her home, and a decision that she has agonized over: strategically defaulting.

On more than one occasion individuals who are able to make their mortgage payments decide to default on their home loan and proceed with the foreclosure process. In the cases of strategic default, the value of a house has plummeted and the individuals end up owing the bank more than the house is currently worth. They are able to continue making payments, yet they actively decide to default on their mortgage. During my interviews I encountered community activists and pastors that have suggested a homeowner strategically default. Their advice is to purchase another home, if possible,
and then foreclose on the house that is underwater, even though the owner could in fact continue to pay the mortgage. The HOME employee I interviewed agonized over her decision to strategically default when the value of her home declined. Consequently, Marisa and her husband decided to view their home as a business and make the best possible financial investment, so the couple decided to let go of the house. It bothered the employee to have reneged on her contract, and she was concerned about the drop in her credit score, but she felt like she did not owe anything to the financial institution since they were clearly a business driven by profits. Websites and books, like www.strategicloandefault.com, have sprung up on the Internet to guide homeowners like Marisa, as they make the decision to stop paying their mortgage.

**Foreclosure Assistance**

What has been the local response to the foreclosure crisis, which has deeply affected Central Florida? Many of the respondents affected by the crisis have been shocked by financial institution’s unwillingness to renegotiate the terms of their mortgages and offer solutions. Additionally, the local government’s efforts have been sparse considering how many people have defaulted. As one blogger mentioned, “My house is under by ninety thousand and I don’t want any handouts. I want Wells Fargo to sit down and negotiate and redo the loan changing interest from variable to fixed . . . Just wanted to add my comments that the lenders don’t want to work with us, the government promised home mortgage relief by [but] my neighbors and me, have not seen a problem that applies to us.” What does the poster mean by “a problem that applies to us”? One of the criticisms of the government’s relief is that it does not help families that are already undergoing foreclosure proceedings. My conversations with a wealthy informant, who
often spoke about the home relief assistance she and her sister were receiving from the “Obama plan,” assured me that those who needed help most were not necessarily the ones receiving the assistance. In fact, to the dismay of many homeowners, an Osceola County judge openly condemned intervening to mediate between homeowners and the bank, calling it a waste of time.

In a 2009 Orlando Sentinel article, the sentiments of Osceola County administrative Judge, R. James Stroker, who has spoken out against mediation for homeowners undergoing foreclosure, are discussed. In February of 2009, 9th Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Belvin Perry, who oversees courts in Osceola and Orange counties, issued an order that makes mediation mandatory in foreclosure cases. Similarly, judges in other Florida counties, Seminole, Duval, and St. Johns, have encouraged mediation. In February of 2009 former Miami-Dade U.S. Attorney, Kendall Coffey, filed a petition with the Florida Supreme Court asking that the court enact its emergency rule-making power and make mediation in foreclosure cases mandatory. Judge Perry’s 2009 order claimed that homeowners and banks do not discuss a resolution until they get to court, and that this failure to communicate was wasting time and resources.

The order, introduced by Judge Perry, does not apply to Osceola County since Judge Stroker opposed, and wrote a letter to Perry in objection to mandatory mediation. Stroker told a Sentinel reporter that mediation would prolong the foreclosure process, create a backlog of about 6 months, and place increased pressures on the court while only benefiting a minimal number of homeowners. In Stroker’s defense, he is the only judge in Osceola County handling foreclosure cases, whereas Downtown Orlando has eight or nine judges. As of Wednesday March 11, 2009 Osceola County had 10,456 foreclosure
cases pending. Still, Stroker insisted that the foreclosures in Osceola County were being processed efficiently by putting those homes back on the market for homeowners able to make payments and maintain the homes.

For many Osceola County families, the banks unwillingness to communicate and negotiate with the homeowners by putting them in touch with a decision-maker was one of the harshest and most frustration realities of the process. Representative Darren Soto strongly supported mandatory mediation. Soto, who covers Orange and Osceola counties, introduced a bill that set the ground rules for mediation, going so far as to require renegotiation of the house price to its current market value. While the local Osceola County government is tackling the onslaught of foreclosure cases, the national government has become involved, providing financial assistance through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP).

On July 30, 2008, President Bush signed into law the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 (HERA) to address the severe housing crisis. Title III of the Act appropriated $3.92 billion of grant funds under the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) for emergency assistance to state and local governments. Under the recovery act, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA) targeted areas with the greatest need based on the number of foreclosures, subprime mortgages, and mortgage delinquencies and defaults. The legislation required that states and cities purchase and redevelop foreclosed and abandoned homes and residential properties that could be sold to low and moderate-income buyers with a qualifying credit score. Funds from NSP could be used for activities that included: establishing financing mechanism for the purchase and
redevelopment of foreclosed homes and residential properties; purchasing and rehabilitating residences that were abandoned or foreclosed; establishing land banks for foreclosed homes; demolishing blighted structures; and/or redeveloping demolished or vacant properties.

The goal of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program is to prevent the visual blight and crime that communities like BVL are facing as a result of abandoned homes and neglected bank owned properties. These efforts are intended to help stabilize property values in some of the hardest hit communities. Osceola County, with the highest foreclosure rate in Central Florida, was slated for $14.1 million, and Orlando was to receive $6.7 million to purchase foreclosed homes. Osceola County planned to use $8 million toward purchase assistance to acquire about 250 foreclosed homes, they dedicated $2.56 million for a housing project for the elderly, and the remainder was for a mixed use development in Poinciana, with the balance covering administrative costs and transaction fees. Maps that depicted the county’s areas of greatest need were made available at the Osceola County’s Human Services office, and included parts of St. Cloud, Poinciana, BVL, and Kissimmee. One of the criticisms of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, however, is that the residents that were undergoing foreclosure proceedings would not qualify for the affordable home loans sponsored by the program, but financial institutions would benefit by unloading their foreclosed properties.

During an interview with an Osceola County Housing Specialist we discussed the implementation of the NSP, and the degree to which the program was assisting homeowners and the community at large. According to Marisa, one of the challenges is the location of the majority of foreclosed homes. Most of the foreclosed houses from
which to choose are in Poinciana and BVL, due to the affordability of those subdivisions, and some of her clients are approved for a home loan of only $50,000 to $60,000. Typically, Marisa’s clients are approved for a home between $55,000 and $80,000, but no one is approved above $120,000. However, her clients are skeptical about purchasing a home in BVL or Poinciana. Recently, newspaper stories have revealed the presence of gangs and gang related crimes in Poinciana and BVL, which made potential homeowners increasingly cynical to purchase in the declining communities.

During our interview, at a time when the program was less than one year old, Marisa had only 6 clients in houses. Clients were dragging, she explained, and taking too long to select a home. But, the biggest challenge was finding individuals a lender to purchase the home. She had 300 people on a waiting list, but many of them had credit problems or were unemployed. A credit score of around 620 was necessary, although Bank of America, she mentioned, was taking scores as low as 580. Still, many Hispanic families in BVL and throughout Osceola County have managed to pay their mortgage payments, despite steep drops in housing values, job loss, and fluctuating adjustable rate mortgages to remain homeowners. During my fieldwork I became familiar with one particular strategy adopted by families to continue mortgage payments during tough economic times: the formation of an *encargado* industry.

**The Encargado Industry**

In her account of Salvadorian migration to suburban Long Island, *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*, Sarah Mahler (1995) discusses the formation of an *encargado* industry, a housing rental market parallel, but marginal to the mainstream market. In Osceola County, taxes, mileage rates, insurance premiums, and
mortgage payments are squeezing the working class. As a result, homeowners and renters participate in a system of room renting that profits the leaseholder or homeowner. The renting of rooms is a strategy for subsidizing one’s income and making mortgage payments. Consequently, these reactive spatial arrangements have transformed single-family suburban homes into small businesses operating in an informal, underground ethnic market.

In June of 2010 I moved into a one story, three-bedroom, two-bathroom home in BVL. From the owner of the house, a Venezuelan male in his early 20s, I learned that the property was underwater. Marco paid about $110,000 for the house and it was now worth $80,000; but, he currently owes the bank $130,000 since he refinanced on his home previously. To pay his monthly mortgage Marco lives in one of the bedrooms and rents out the two other rooms for $350 per month. Then, I lived in Wanda’s home for two months, paying $450 per month for a room. Wanda rented one of the rooms on the first floor to a Hispanic male that appeared to be in his late 20s/early 30s, but he worked long hours and I rarely saw him or spoke to him. One of the second floor rooms was rented to a young Mexican couple that worked in Marco’s restaurant, and the room next-door was rented to a male in his early 20s, a friend of the couples. Wanda occupied the master bedroom.

My experiences in the first two houses were fraught with tension, and the challenges of communal living, particularly with non-family members, were quite evident. My roommate in BVL, Marco, often said that we “were all a family.” He called me sister and my other roommate carnal (brother), and Wanda made the same references to family when I lived in her home. In these cases discourses that emphasized the familial
bond of the residents contrasted sharply with the many instances when one was being taken advantage of. Marco attended a Pentecostal church twice a week, often spoke about God, and as I saw it, was deeply religious. He and his girlfriend often involved Pedro and I in conversations about God and invited us to their prospective churches. They spoke often of giving and hospitality. Nonetheless, I always knew if someone couldn’t pay their rent, they were out. Marco, after all, often reminded me that his house was his business, and he was indeed an entrepreneur. Still, in some ways we were like a family. We sat down at the dinner table together night after night and ate together. Sometimes one person would cook for everyone or would bring take-out. We talked to each other about our lives and our problems, and saw each other on a daily basis. But, sometimes in communal living you sacrifice the privilege of privacy.

When I rented rooms, the homeowner always resided in the house as well. This meant that they managed the care of the home, regulated the air conditioning to keep their electric bills down, and generally set the pace of life in the house. But, what rights does a person have in this living situation, and how much does that $350 get you? For Alejandro, who rented my room in Marco’s house prior to my moving in, he was not entitled to increase the air conditioner when he slept at night. This often caused problems with Marco, who wanted to keep the temperature between 76 and 77 degrees Fahrenheit. I once changed the temperature, and in a passive aggressive manner I too was confronted about the change. These tensions that appear to be minor and petty often cause tensions in the home, and eventually lead the renter to seek out another room. I decided to leave Marco’s house when his girlfriend revealed that he enters my room when I am not there to check things out, and make sure everything is in order. I had also seen him go into
Pedro’s room on numerous occasions, and he has scolded him, in front of me, for being messy and leaving his clothes thrown around the room. This reminded me of a parent, scolding his child for a messy room.

So, I chose to leave the first room I rented, but found similar privacy issues in Wanda’s home. I liked to keep my bedroom door closed, but every time I returned to the house I found the door opened again. This is just one of the petty problems that arose while I lived in Wanda’s house. But, the thing that pushed me over the edge, causing me to move, was when I returned after my New Years holiday in New York to find my room, everything in the closet, and all of the furniture re-arranged and reorganized. She called it a Christmas present. I went on a crazy apartment search thereafter, although Wanda and I did keep in touch. Perhaps, the closeness of a family with open doors and minimal privacy was too much for me to handle with strangers. Still, there is a fine line between hospitality, helping out someone in need, and taking advantage of others.

Those homeowners renting out rooms do not think of the arrangement as exploitative. Rather, it is a way of improving their financial situation and in their minds, helping someone, particularly if the room was rented to family or friends. After all, renting a room, which usually costs between $300-$450 per month, is substantially cheaper than renting an apartment, which starts at around $600. Additionally, renting a room usually requires a small down payment of $0-$400 and there are minimal credit and security checks, if any at all. This monthly rent enables the homeowner, depending on how many rooms they rent, to cover a substantial cost of their mortgage and other expenses.
For Maria Martinez, who has had many different tenants, renting rooms provided an important part of her income. When I met her in 2010 she was living in a large, luxurious home in Kissimmee that was undergoing foreclosure. Her service sector job was not enough to maintain the house she once shared with her x-husband. Maria no longer made payments on the mortgage, but was charging rent to an undocumented Guatemalan hotel worker, Miguel, and to an undocumented Colombian hotel worker, Alejandro. This supplemented the cost of utilities and her living expenses. However, everyone was struggling financially, and it was not uncommon for someone to pay the rent days or weeks late; yet, she was always accommodating and socializing with her tenants like close friends or family. For $50 more per month she would even provide the tenant with meals, and include the tenant when she cooks large dinners for her three children.

Maria developed familial bonds with her tenants and began referring to one particular renter as her son. When his cousin arrived suddenly from Texas, with no place to stay and no money, Maria allowed him to stay out of generosity. But, while Maria is known for her occasional generosity, she also has a reputation for being manipulative and using people for favors and money. So, despite the development of familial bonds, both tenants and homeowners were out to make a profit and work an entrepreneurial angle. As such, Maria had issues with different tenants over money.

In one instance, Maria and her tenant Miguel found out that Alejandro had been ripping them off. Alejandro agreed to open phone lines for both Maria and Miguel under his name since neither of them had good credit. However, the monthly phone bill cost substantially less than the two were told. Alejandro was pocketing the difference, and
they found out by invading his privacy and opening his mail to review the cell phone billing statement. Maria then asked Alejandro to leave her house, she felt like she could no longer trust him, and was especially hurt since Alejandro knew she was struggling financially to manage the house and support her three children. Likewise, Miguel and Alejandro had a falling out when Miguel stole a television from Alejandro before returning to Guatemala. Maria continues to run into different issues with the tenants she rents to, be it their lack of cleanliness or their inability to pay on time. Still, her goal is to purchase a new home of her own and rent out a few of the rooms when her current home is seized by the bank.

The foreclosure crisis has increasingly made homeowners find creative solutions to manage their financial instability. One of the mechanisms for paying housing costs and earning extra income is by participating in the *encargado* system, part of an underground real estate economy where homeowners rent rooms to friends, family members, and strangers. At times these rooms are unadvertised, and the information and transactions take place verbally. In other instances, poster boards on a front lawn advertise available rooms, a family places an ad in one of the local newspapers, or the information is placed on a website like craigslist. In these situations, a single family home is transformed into a multi-family dwelling where garages are converted into living spaces, and a new form of entrepreneurship emerges. Multiple unrelated individuals living under one roof collectively leads to familial type bonds, although the realities of communal living include infighting, privacy issues, disagreements over the management of the home, and discrepancies over finances. In these settings the tenant’s rights are unclear and therefore unprotected, which leads renters to move from house to house until they find an optimal
environment. During the two-year period of my ethnographic fieldwork, Alejandro, Miguel, and I have lived in three different rooms, and my 18-year old roommate has lived in 6 different rooms. While room renting certainly has financial benefits for the tenant or the homeowner that is collecting the money, there are always the dangers in bringing a stranger into one’s home, the discomforts that result from overcrowding, the invasion of privacy, and the compromises that come with communal living.

The 2008 Mortgage and Foreclosure crisis has undoubtedly impacted individuals, families, and communities across the United States. Homeownership has indeed been supported by the national government, since a number of positive outcomes, such as wealth accumulation and preferential tax treatment are associated with property ownership. Arguably, in the aftermath of this crisis is the development of a “foreclosure generation” that has been thrust back into poverty or downward mobility due to financial losses. In Central Florida, Hispanics have been disproportionately affected, with middle to upper income Hispanics receiving a higher percentage of subrime loans than non-Hispanic whites, and subprime mortgages are closely connected to the increase of foreclosures. Blame has been attributed to a number of parties, including the government, financial institutions, the real estate industry, and homeowners, and the consequences of the crisis are far reaching. In response, individuals have advocated for mediation and negotiations between borrowers and lenders, and reactive spatial arrangements have developed to provide affordable housing to the population.
CHAPTER 7
SOCIAL CLASS DISTINCTIONS AND ORLANDO’S HISPANIC ELITE

The Hispanic migration to Central Florida was portrayed as a middle class migration. However, because of Orlando’s bifurcated economy and the dominance of the tourism industry, both service sector workers and professionals were attracted to the region. These service sector laborers were actively recruited by companies, like Disney World, that went to the island of Puerto Rico to hold employment recruitment drives, and placed advertisements in newspapers to make potential employees aware of Orlando’s job opportunities. The unequal distribution of economic capital leads these two groups, laborers and professions, to live in different communities and inhabit different spaces; and, in Orlando, Florida a Hispanic elite has emerged. In the elite spaces of social clubs, golf courses, and business networking groups the formation of a Hispanic upper class occurs, and these spaces of exclusivity only deepen existing class-based inequalities. The elite and the working class are quite conscious of their social class positions, and during everyday life activities these individuals draw distinctions between those Puerto Ricans on the higher end of the socioeconomic hierarchy and those below. These social class distinctions are lived, embodied, articulated, and contested.

Middle Class Discourses in the Media

There is a very conscious attempt to portray Orlando’s Puerto Rican population as well educated, wealthy, and professional. I have found Puerto Rican professionals in Orlando who are very determined to disprove existing stereotypes, and these efforts become evident in the representations that circulate on the Internet and in the press. Therefore, there are opposing discourses, which emphasize the middle class element of
this migration on one hand, and the overwhelming number of low-paid, low-skilled migrants on the other. And what these opposing discourses tell us is that this migration is in fact bifurcated, containing a substantial middle and upper class, which is distinct from the working class Puerto Rican migration to New York City during the middle decades of the 20th century. In public discourses, the working class migration to New York is juxtaposed with the presumably middle class migration to Orlando.

On April 7, 1988, for instance, an Orlando Sentinel journalist, Dora Delgado, cited an interviewee in an article entitled, “Hispanic Community Is Growing.” That individual told Delgado, “low-and middle-income Puerto Ricans move to New York because they want a decent paying job, while professionals such as lawyers and doctors are coming to Central Florida.” In article after article the media emphasized the financial stability and educational credentials of Orlando’s Puerto Rican migrants, and juxtaposed this population with the working class migrants that settled in New York during the 1950s. A 2004 Orlando Sentinel article draws a sharp distinction between the unskilled poor migrants that settled in the Northeast, and the middle class migrants that are currently settling in Orlando:

Puerto Rican migratory waves during the middle decades of the 20th century were mostly composed of poor, unskilled, rural migrants displaced by the island’s fast-paced processes of industrialization and urbanization. They mostly migrated to New York City and other Northern urban centers. In contrast, the more recent migration of Puerto Ricans to the Orlando region reflect a wide representation of the island’s population, with a large percentage of professionals and members of the middle class.”

Similarly, in a November 1993 Orlando Sentinel article journalist Sean Holton claims,

Unlike the waves of destitute farmers who left for New York and Chicago in the 1950s, most of these Puerto Rican have money and education. The Puerto Rican migrants of the 1980s and 1990s are looking for a place to buy homes, find jobs,
raise families and enjoy weather and an overall pace that makes them feel closer to home.\textsuperscript{466}

In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, these middle class discourses continually circulated in the press, leading me to believe that there was a substantial population of upwardly mobile Puerto Ricans in Metropolitan Orlando. Journalists and the individuals they interviewed claimed that this wave of migrants were educated, financially well off, business owners and entrepreneurs, professionals, property owners, white collar workers, affluent, and/or in search of greater opportunities. In 1989, for example, an \textit{Orlando Sentinel} article emphasizes the upper class segment of the Puerto Rican population that is attracted to Orlando:

Orlando is getting one of the best immigrant groups ever available anywhere. The Puerto Ricans who have come here during the last five years are businessmen, entrepreneurs, professionals and wealthy retired people who are contributing to our economy.\textsuperscript{467}

The journalist does acknowledge the presence of “some poor and unskilled workers” that are migrating as well, but quickly adds, “But they’re not looking for welfare, They’re looking for jobs and opportunities.”

In yet another instance, a Sentinel article emphasizes the educated, professional laborers that Orlando has attracted, and refutes the presence of agricultural workers, despite the recruitment and migration of seasonal workers that was arranged through private employment agencies. Miguel Lopez, president of a chamber of commerce, emphasizes the professional and skilled occupations of Orlando’s Puerto Rican migrants in an attempt to refute the stereotypes of marginality:

There is a stereotype that Puerto Rican immigrants are poor and uneducated\ldots To the contrary\ldots many are college-educated, professional business people, such as accountants and medical personnel. Most immigrants are skilled workers, such as mechanics. They’re not coming here to pick up vegetables.\textsuperscript{468}
While this statement disassociates Orlando’s Puerto Rican migrants from their agricultural past, another article attempts to distance Puerto Ricans from the service sector industry: “Hispanic lifestyles are no longer dominated by jobs in the service industry;” instead, the article emphasizes the growing number of Hispanic professionals moving into technological fields. While this is perhaps true for a segment of Orlando’s Puerto Rican population, the service sector labor market, fueled by Orlando’s booming tourism industry, does in fact employ a large segment of the area’s population, including Puerto Ricans. Still, the media refutes Puerto Rican’s connections to the agricultural sector and the service sector industry by capturing statements, like the above mentioned quotes, that defend the middle class position of Orlando’s Puerto Rican migrants. On numerous occasions the media has also featured the lives of individual Puerto Ricans in an attempt to portray a middle class, professional, assimilated Puerto Rican subject. Thus, these media discourses are trying to portray Orlando’s Puerto Rican population as neither backward farmers nor urban welfare recipients.” Instead, the image of the “good Puerto Rican” is of upwardly mobile homeowners, professionals, and entrepreneurs.

In a 1993 Orlando Sentinel article, reporter Jeff Kunerth captures the upwardly mobile aspirations of Jay Bravo, a middle class Puerto Rican with a management position at a doctor’s office. At the time, Bravo had been in Orlando for two years, was working 55 hours a week, studying at night, and had ambitious plans that included two masters degrees and a certification in public accounting. Bravo was also portrayed as a family man with a wife and two children. The article claims that Bravo, with a salary of more than $35,000 per year in 1993, placed him into “Central Florida’s expanding Hispanic
middle class whose membership has skyrocketed from 761 households in 1980 to 11,353 in 1990.” More importantly, in describing his life as decidedly middle class, the article highlights the particular characteristics, such as English language skills, income, and education, that make Bravo part of Orlando’s Hispanic middle class. Also, beliefs and social practices become an indicator of membership in the middle class and belonging in the United States. For instance, the article highlights Bravo’s belief in the American Dream, his Americanized ways, and his assimilation into mainstream culture, which enables him to be perceived as middle class.

The article reads, “In the life of Jay Bravo, the American Dream lives on,” since he believes in “hard work, free enterprise, fair play, and may the best man win.” The journalist goes on to mention that Jay “is quickly becoming Americanized.” To further emphasize Bravo’s desire to become Americanized and assimilated into mainstream American culture, the reporter mentions that Jay “forgot last Monday was Columbus Day and was unaware that October is Hispanic Awareness Month.” It is this combination—income, occupation, assimilation, and ideologies—that have earned Bravo a position in the American middle class. Indeed, educational attainment, English language skills, employment, and/or income are often emphasized when defending the middle class position of Orlando’s Puerto Rican population. However, as will be discussed later in the chapter, there are many subjective elements that are a part of our embodied cultural capital, which plays a significant role in determining social class positionality.

In a 1996 Orlando Sentinel journal article, it was argued that Central Florida’s Hispanic population is doing as well as or better than the area’s population as a whole in three particular categories: education, employment, and income. First, 40 percent of
Hispanics that live in Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Lake, and Western Volusia county have one to three years of college, compared with 34 percent of that area’s population as a whole. The “population as a whole” includes non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics, African Americans and all other ethnic and racial groups. Additionally, the article claims that the largest segment of student population growth at the community college was amongst Hispanics. The article also states that 65 percent of Hispanics living in Orlando have full time jobs, in comparison to 55 percent of the area’s entire population. And finally, two-thirds of Hispanics earn between $20,000 and $49,999 a year, while only 57 percent of all Orlando area residents earn between $20,000 and $49,999 annually. 

The article considered the $20,000 to $49,999 category to be the “middle income” range, although middle income does not necessarily mean middle class. Of course these statistics are rather vague, and the article does not highlight the inequalities between non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics, and Blacks.

A 2005 Orlando Sentinel article made similar claims, highlighting the educational attainment of Orlando Puerto Ricans, their English language skills, and their income. According to the article Central Florida’s Puerto Rican population is better educated than Puerto Rican’s on the island and in other mainland states. The article mentioned that two-thirds of Orlando Puerto Ricans say they speak English very well, compared to 28 percent on the island. Additionally, one-third of Orlando’s Puerto Rican families earn more than $50,000 a year, in comparison to 11 percent on the island, and 25 percent of Puerto Ricans nation wide. However, the distinctions the article makes between Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland did not address the fact that Puerto Ricans from
the island have consistently had a higher percentage of the population with a Bachelor’s degree (See Figure XXX).

![Figure XXX. Educational Attainment, 2008](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>US Total Population*</th>
<th>US Puerto Rican</th>
<th>Florida Puerto Rican</th>
<th>NY MSA Puerto Rican</th>
<th>Islander Puerto Rican**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school diploma</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or associate’s degree</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes Puerto Ricans in the 50 states and the District of Columbia
**Includes the total population living in Puerto Rico

Sources: 2008 American Community Survey. 2008 Puerto Rico Community Survey

The article, however, does go on to admit that Puerto Ricans have not attained socioeconomic parity with the other major ethnic groups in Central Florida, despite their educational achievements. For Puerto Ricans, educational achievement does not automatically translate into economic and employment opportunities. In an attempt to emphasize the presence of middle class, Puerto Rican professionals, the low-income Puerto Ricans that are in fact a part of the population are at times silenced and hidden.
This conscious attempt to highlight the presence of middle class Puerto Ricans is a direct response to the media coverage that has criminalized Orlando’s Puerto Rican population.

**The Criminalization of Puerto Ricans**

While the Puerto Rican migration to Orlando has at times been depicted as middle class, in other instances Puerto Ricans are stereotyped and associated with crime, gangs, and drugs, much like the culture of poverty arguments that highlighted Puerto Rican people’s criminality, dysfunctionalism, and maladjustment to the larger society. One of the most notable instances of Puerto Rican stereotyping, which was received with a strong counter response from the Puerto Rican community, professional Puerto Ricans in particular, occurred in 1996. A July 14th article entitled, “Heroin is Back-Killing Teens-In The Past Year, Central Florida Has Had More Teenage Heroin Deaths Than All-The Rest Of The State,” connected heroin related deaths in Central Florida to Puerto Ricans. Additionally, an October 1996 article reported on a witness protection program that was dumping Puerto Rican criminals into Orlando at a time when Puerto Rican migration to Orlando was dramatically increasing. The July article claimed that drug dealers from Puerto Rico were the likely source of heroin that killed over a dozen Central Florida teens and young adults during the past year:

Puerto Rico appears to be the source of the heroin in Orlando. Law enforcement officials say there's a likely connection between recent growth in Central Florida's Puerto Rican population and capital city San Juan's status as the major U.S. port of entry for South American heroin . . . some of the arrivals are drug dealers looking to make mainland-level profits, drug agents said. 'Our stereotypical (heroin ) dealer is a Hispanic, usually a Puerto Rican male in his early 20s,' Orange County sheriff’s Lt. Ernie Scott said. 'All the heroin dealers we have encountered are recent arrivals to Florida from Puerto Rico and from New York and Detroit.' . . . All but two or three of the 26 people Scott's street drug unit arrested this year on heroin trafficking, possession and dealing charges have been young Puerto Rican men.
On Thursday, August 1, 1996 Charles A. Rodriguez, Puerto Rico Senate majority leader, published a response in the *Orlando Sentinel*. He claimed, “the article wrongly implies that we in Puerto Rico are responsible for the influx of drugs into Central Florida.” Instead, Rodriguez blamed the tragic presence of drugs in both Central Florida and Puerto Rico on the federal government, who failed to stop the entry of drugs from South America into Puerto Rico, before adding, “I am sure that, were Puerto Rico a state with two senators and six congressmen, our borders would be better insulated from this menace.” He went on to defend the Puerto Ricans of Central Florida, arguing that they are playing a constructive role in the economy, culture, and civic life of Central Florida.

The July 14th article enraged Puerto Ricans in the Central Florida community who accused the Sheriff’s Office and the *Orlando Sentinel* of fostering prejudice against Puerto Ricans. A meeting was arranged to facilitate a discussion between the media, law enforcement, and the Puerto Rican community. Edna Rodriguez Negron, an Orange County educator, claimed the meeting was very emotional “because this has been going on in this country under this flag for more than 40 years . . . We have been stereotyped in New York and Chicago. We’re not going to let you stereotype us here.” What upset Puerto Ricans most were the published comments from the drug unit supervisor of the Sheriff’s Office, which claimed that the typical heroin dealer arrested in Orange County were Puerto Rican males in their 20s. At the meeting Sheriff’s Lieutenant Ernie Scott defended his comments, handing out a list that stated 24 of the 26 people arrested on heroin charges between January of 1996 and June of 1996 identified themselves as Puerto Rican. Members of Central Florida’s Puerto Rican community continued to be outraged,
arguing that they were being stereotyped as drug dealers, and were therefore victims of discrimination.

Still, the media continued reporting on the increase of drugs in Central Florida that arrived from a pipeline that originated in South America, passed through Puerto Rico, and arrived in Orlando. In an article entitled, “Heroin Flow Has Orlando In a Crisis- Pipeline of Drugs Brings San Juan’s Problems Here” the Orlando Sentinel argued that the migration of more than 100,000 Puerto Ricans to Central Florida included a small, but active number of drug dealers seeking new markets. They went on to claim that the island-style violence that so many Puerto Ricans left the island to escape has in fact followed the population to Orlando, and they went on to list the different incidents. The Puerto Rican community continued to express their outrage with the media, and on October 14, 1996 the media responded to the Puerto Rican community. They acknowledged that their reporting has angered Central Florida Puerto Ricans who were now fearful that their neighbors and the police will be looking at all Puerto Ricans as potential drug dealers. The Orlando Sentinel even admitted that these fears were in fact legitimate: “It would be wrong to argue that their fear is unfounded. Look at the record. Their experience with police in the Northeast has been one of mistrust and, too often, harassment. It’s similar to how African-American males have been stereotyped time and again as likely criminals.” However, the Sentinel assured the Puerto Rican population that they were not only covering negative incidents, but also providing coverage of more positive events in the Puerto Rican community: Latino theatre, quinceanera parties, and politics and events on the island.
Then, on Friday, October 11, 1996 the media continued to publish articles about Puerto Rico’s criminals. The Orlando Sentinel learned that dozens of drug dealers from Puerto Rico were being “dumped” into Orlando and other U.S. cities for years, without the knowledge of local law enforcement agencies. These dealers serve as witnesses in major drug and murder cases on the island of Puerto Rico, and are then relocated for their own safety. According to the Orlando Sentinel, “Orlando remains the favorite destination for moves to the mainland.” The Sentinel claimed the Puerto Rico Witness Protection Program, in operation since 1987, was “another dimension of the growing drug pipeline between San Juan and Central Florida.” The paper mentioned that about half of the witnesses moving to Florida are low to mid-level drug dealers who have no job skills and do not speak English, adding that an unknown number are suspected killers. How did knowledge of the Puerto Rico Witness Protection Program’s Central Florida operations come to light? On June 15th of 1996 Florida Highway Patrol troopers and undercover cops from Puerto Rico moving a witness almost shot each other in Osceola County, in an event that came to be known as “The Osceola Incident.” The troopers thought the Puerto Ricans were criminals posing as FBI agents; whereas, the Puerto Ricans thought the troopers were assassins coming after their witness. For months thereafter the controversy over the portrayal of Puerto Rican people played out in the press.

Puerto Rican leaders began organizing a march for November 3rd of 1996 to kick off a fight against drugs, while other Puerto Ricans wrote letters to the editor of the Sentinel providing their credentials, defending Puerto Rican people, and accusing the press of stereotyping and unbalanced reporting. On Sunday, October 20, 1996 the
Sentinel published a letter by Dennis Freytes emphasizing that Puerto Ricans are Americans too, and that a segment of the population is being unfairly stereotyped:

we should be careful not to stereotype a segment of our population indirectly by characterizing them when reporting drug-related criminal activities. The Sentinel (I think unintentionally) is doing this through a number of articles that it has printed emphasizing the Puerto Rican connection with the drug trade. We are all Americans. Let’s unite, not divide, people. United, we can do more.477

Another letter to the editor, written by Wanda Barreto and published that same day, emphasized that she and her husband were in fact professionals, and that the stereotyping and second-class citizenship experienced by Puerto Ricans has only been intensified by hurtful and insulting reporting that portrays Puerto Ricans as low-class citizens and undesirables:

I WAS deeply hurt with the recent front-page article ‘Heroin flow has Orlando in crisis.’ As a native from Puerto Rico, I am insulted that, once more, Puerto Ricans have been stereotyped, this time as drug dealers. True, there is a very serious problem with crime and drugs in Puerto Rico. That is the main reason many families, like us, decided to come here, to provide our kids with a better environment and better quality of life . . . . My husband and I are both professional, decent people, and we moved here with the best intentions of making this our permanent home. We offered our sincere friendship to our neighbors. I went out of my way to feel part of this community. Everybody was welcomed at my house. What did I get? Rejection, indifference, coldness. It has not been easy to live with that, because we are very warm people. . . . It was hard enough to feel that, in general, Americans look at us as ‘second-class citizens,’ and now these articles make all of us look like low-class citizens, drug dealers, trouble-makers and so on. It is not fair that, by the actions of a few, we all have to pay the price and be labeled as undesirable.

A day later the Sentinel published another letter to the editor, whereby Dr. Jose Marcano, much like Wanda Barreto, emphasized his professional status. He argued that the Sentinel has a great deal of power and influence in molding reader’s perceptions of the issues, and arguably perceptions of Puerto Rican people. Marcano objected to the frequency of publications on crime and drugs amongst Puerto Ricans, and accused the
Sentinel of looking for a scapegoat (people from Puerto Rico) to justify the problems of a fast-growing city. He went on to emphasize his credentials, and defended the status of other Puerto Ricans in Central Florida:

I am proud of the fact that I was born and reared in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Having an Ivy League education and a doctorate degree from an Ivy League school does not make me an exception. On the contrary, there are many just like me helping this community grow in a positive way.\textsuperscript{478}

Of course, the negative reporting did not stop there and the coverage, labeled “Hispanic Bashing,” continued to challenge the respect, and injure the pride of Orlando’s Puerto Rican community.\textsuperscript{479}

On October 27, 1996 the \textit{Orlando Sentinel} published an article entitled, “An Island Under Siege.” The article mentioned that the commonwealth has one of the highest murder rates in the United States: 864 murders in an area comparable to the size of four Central Florida counties that experienced only 87 murders during 1995. They claimed that the island has more than 15,000 heroin addicts in treatment, in comparison to fewer than 4,000 in all of Florida. One thousand street-corner drug markets called “puntos” dot the island, claimed the Sentinel, while Puerto Rico has the second-highest rate of AIDS in the nation due to addicts sharing of needles.\textsuperscript{480} The article provided a vivid description of life in the “New San Juan,” a doorway for shipments from Colombian drug cartels:

The streets of Condado are safe at night. Couples can walk anywhere, as long as they stay within the beachfront tourist district. But even here signs of the new San Juan- and its scourges of heroin, cocaine and violent drug-related crime- mar the image of a Caribbean paradise. Steel fences and razor wire separate once-gracious neighborhoods from the street. Iron bars guard most doors and windows. Even third-floor balconies are protected by “ornamental grilles” that stop thieves from swinging down from the roof. Car burglar alarms wail at all hours. Police wearing bulletproof vests seem to be everywhere. Puerto Rico is an island under siege since Colombian drug cartels decided to use it as a doorway for drug shipments to major U.S. cities.
Most disturbing and damaging to Orlando’s Puerto Rican population was the linkage the media created between Puerto Rico and Orlando, arguing that Orlando became a stop along the cartel’s drug route:

Orlando, linked to the island through its international airport and growing Puerto Rican community, is one of the stops on the trade route that brings hundreds of pounds of heroin and tons of cocaine to the mainland each year.

At the height of the Puerto Rican migration to Metropolitan Orlando, the character, professionalism, and desirability of Puerto Rican people was brought into question and attacked in a public forum. These damaging representations, which non-Hispanic residents could observe and internalize to formulate racialized perceptions of Central Florida’s newcomers, has led to conscious efforts at de-racialization as Puerto Ricans fight back against a second-class citizenship and the stereotyping that once branded New York and San Juan’s Puerto Rican population as an underclass, living in a culture of poverty. By defending their middle class position, and emphasizing their worth, education, and/or professionalism Puerto Ricans are attempting to undue previous stereotypes, claim belonging, and position themselves as part of the American middle class, and for some, part of the Hispanic elite. But, what does it mean to be a “professional,” a word that Puerto Ricans constantly used in everyday, un-prompted conversations with me?

**Cultural Capital and Class Position**

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) conceptualization of class, in his book *Distinctions*, builds upon Marx and Weber’s framework by emphasizing the significance of not only economic resources, but cultural and social resources as well. Using surveys that reflect different social factors affecting the French bourgeoisie’s choice of clothing, furniture,
leisure activities, dinner menus, and other indicators of “tastes,” Bourdieu concludes that the choices we make are a reflection of the deeply imbedded social class distinctions that we make in opposition to other social classes. In other words, to an extent our likes and dislikes, tastes, preferences, or fondness for something is linked to our social class position, although we believe our choices reflect only our individual preferences.

As Bourdieu argues, “taste may appear as an innocent and natural phenomenon, but it is an insidious revealer of position.” Class is therefore inscribed in our bodies, and part of our habitus. Often times these so called individual preferences are the same preferences as individuals with a similar amount of economic capital.

In his analysis Pierre Bourdieu highlights the significance of four different types of capital in the process of social class formation: economic, symbolic, social, and cultural. Symbolic capital refers to the resources available to an individual on the basis of honor, prestige, or recognition, while social capital is based on the value of networks. But, how do bodies become marked and representative of inequalities and social class distinctions? Cultural capital is the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners due to their economic resources. Bourdieu discusses three types of cultural capital: objectified, institutionalized, and embodied. Objectified cultural capital refers to the material goods that are associated with economic capital. For instance, consumption practices are an exercise of power that makes social class positionality visible and explicit, what Thorstein Veblen (1899) refers to as conspicuous consumption. The second type of cultural capital is termed institutionalized, and refers to the certifications that officially recognize our knowledge and abilities such as a university degree. Third, embodied capital, the most significant to Bourdieu’s discussion
of tastes in Distinctions, is the cultural capital that lives in us and is expressed through the body, and manifested as “tastes.”

Cultural capital is embodied in our habitus, which functions as a marker of our social class position. Bourdieu defines habitus as the organization of our body and its deployment in the world. Habitus is a result of our socialization, is internalized, becomes part of our identity, and generates specific bodily dispositions that are evident in our thoughts, feelings, actions, postures, and language, for instance. Bodily dispositions are ways of talking, walking, eating, and conducting ourselves, for example, that are judged, legitimated and recognized through hierarchical distinctions made between the superior and inferior, between those who are considered to have good taste, and those whose tastes might be considered vulgar and cheap (Harbord 2001).

As such, we make conscious and unconscious distinctions between ourselves and others based on dispositions, and in this effort we place ourselves and our tastes in a relational position within the social hierarchy. Through the performance of our class position, via our habitus, we replicate and affirm our class position. These tastes or dispositions, for example a preference for playing or watching golf and polo as opposed to boxing and football, are the imbedded social practices that classify and position us. Our social class position is imbedded with meaning, therefore when we identify someone as middle class, we are assuming and expecting an individual to exhibit specific values, behaviors, mannerisms, and lifestyle.

During our everyday interactions we articulate social class distinctions, thereby communicating a person’s position in the United States’ hierarchical class system. Many of the Hispanics I encountered referenced “professionalism” when referring to a person or place to distinguish low-paid, service sector workers from those that were presumably
superior; and, that superiority is based on an individuals economic, symbolic, social, and cultural capital. Maria, one of my key informants, would always describe me as a professional when introducing me to other people, and each time she caught me by surprise. How did she distinguish a professional from a non-professional? I always thought of myself as both a student and a teacher, but since I was one of the few people in our circle that did not work in the service sector industry, this is how she differentiated the type of work that I do and the years of education I have from the other Hispanics that were employed in the hotel.

During my fieldwork, the term “professional” was used during interviews and in casual conversations to describe not only an individual, but also a place or an event, and a “professional” place is presumably occupied by “professional” people. For instance, one day I sat in a small Puerto Rican cultural center talking with one of the volunteers that was involved with the organization of events. We were just chatting and it was not a formal interview. She was mentioning the most recent event that was being sponsored, and was telling me that it “was going to be classy, with plated dinners.” She went on to mention that this is going to be a “professional event,” and the organization was going to charge $100 per person. She encouraged me to attend. To identify a person or place as “professional” is a way of articulating a social class distinction, and in this case those individuals who could afford a $100 entrance fee and enjoyed “classy” events with plated dinners were distinguishable from some “other” spaces and some “other” people.

During an interview with Magna, a receptionist at one of the chambers of commerce, she spoke about her mother who was a realtor. She described her mother as a Nuyorican “who was very corporate.” Magna explained that her mother knew how to
dress, and her English was perfect. She was successful, according to Magna, because she had the ability to move in two worlds: “She could talk pasteles and arroz gandules with the residents she was selling homes too,” Magna said, but she was able to turn that on and off and return to her corporate persona. Her mother was acceptable in two co-existing social spaces, and her success and financial stability, which Magna mentioned during the interview, were based on her ability to navigate different spaces and either accentuate her Hispanic identity or assimilate, even temporarily, to perform a “corporate” persona. So, it is not only about assimilating into the dominant, mainstream culture, it is about having the skills and malleability to move in two worlds. These individuals, like Magna’s mother, can comfortably communicate and interact with the masses of working class Hispanic consumers, but they are also comfortable in more elite spaces where their ability to generate business within the much larger Hispanic community is valued. In the instance of Magna’s mother, her economic, social, and cultural capital were intertwined, but ultimately elevated her social class position. While discussing the cultural center event, and during the interview with Magna, the women articulated the social class position of a person or place, consciously or unconsciously, by signaling the distinctions embodied in a “professional,” “classy,” or “corporate” individual or place.

In yet another instance the reference to a professional person or place was quite explicit. During an interview with Jennifer, an executive in an Osceola County corporation, she explained that Hispanic professionals are more visible in Orlando than in other places. Jennifer, of Colombian descent, claimed that there is in fact the existence of a professional class, and a more corporate setting than her previous place of residence, Houston, Texas. In fact, she went on to mention that she is asked to sit on different
corporate or organizational boards for the purposes of gender diversity, but never ethnic
diversity. Hispanics are well represented on the boards she participates in. According to
Jennifer, all of the places in Orlando are filled with Hispanic professionals. She went on
to mention that all of her mother’s doctors in Orlando have been Puerto Rican or
Dominican to emphasize the existence of a Hispanic elite in Orlando, Florida. I have
found that cleavages based on class position greatly impact social relations in the
Hispanic community.

Elenga Sabogal (2005), studying middle class Peruvian professionals in South
Florida, found that Peruvians “classify themselves and others on the basis of socio-
economic and cultural factors.” Class ideologies and cleavages were not abandoned as
a result of migration, instead social class inequalities and distinctions are reproduced in
new destinations of migration. These distinctions are significant to social life. Laura
Lopez-Sanders’ (2012) study of religious incorporation in the Bible belt reveals that
ethnic and class based distinctions were the two key forces that explained the nature of
relationships amongst Hispanic groups in the church, and the rising tensions. Colombian
immigrants in this study, better-off and non-indigenous, “carefully guarded their
privileged class and racial standing by managing the affairs of all Hispanics and by
creating social distance between groups.” These Colombians maintained class
boundaries by limiting the role and participation of Mexican and Central American
newcomers, barring them from becoming church leaders or decision makers. These
ethnic and class based cleavages prevented the development of an ethnic based solidarity
amongst the new Hispanic population, and these distinctions and tensions are evident in
the Orlando case as well.
Creating Distance, Being a “Professional”

For my informants, being a “professional” is about embodied cultural capital, an indicator of social class positionality. It is about your actions, postures, language usage, tastes, and other bodily dispositions. In August of 2010 I contacted Marco, a transplant from Puerto Rico and founder of a for-profit business networking organization that is comparable to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce or the Kissimmee Chamber of Commerce. Marco came to Central Florida from Puerto Rico in 1980 and worked as a Fire Protection Engineer for 11 years. He started his own business in a Media Production Studio in 1997 and in 2001 made a career move in the world of finances. Paid members are offered business advising, legal advice, an annual column in a partnering magazine, and a table for advertising at one of the mini-expos the organization holds throughout the year. Marco and I met in a Colombian owned bakery in Hunter’s Creek. He pointed out a Cuban bistro, Padrino’s, to the left of the bakery where his organization hosted one of their monthly networking events. The front of the restaurant was adorned with a red carpet and a Bentley for that particular networking event, he proudly stated. Marco went on to distinguish his organization from the other business networking groups: “My organization is professional. These types of events commonly have raffles, and we give away quality prizes like radio time for advertising or free membership.” These material items, or in Bourdieu’s terms “objectified cultural capital,” signal the class position of the individuals that participate in Marco’s business networking organization.

As the interview continued, Marco explained how he interacts with other members and assists individuals as they network with other professionals. He emphasized his particular approach with members, explaining that he offers warm, not cold leads
(potential clients), to generate new business. When a member is at an event he asks them, “who do you want to meet,” and he facilitates the introduction or he makes a phone call to provide an introduction when providing a lead. He juxtaposed his approach to business networking from other organizations that simply provide a name and phone number, thereby leaving the member to facilitate their own introduction. This is how business networks are fostered in his organization.

During the interview Marco and I spent a lot of time talking about the founding of his organization, and he emphasized the significance of both image and appearance, embodied cultural capital:

I started because I saw the need. In 2007 the economy was diminishing and professionals were not coming out to network. I was the only one at some networking events wearing a suit. It was too social, people had on tennis shoes, and I asked myself ‘where are the professionals?’ The people with money to do business with?

Marco ultimately created his organization to bring together other people like him, people with money, who dressed the part, and were interested in coming together to help one another generate more economic capital. “I knew doctors and lawyers that I went to school with, but they didn’t know each other, so I created my organization,” Marco explained. But, he explicitly emphasized the significance of dressing the part at business networking events, claiming, “Image is number one.” Marco admitted that he has turned people down at the door of his events because of their dress code. “Hispanics like to dress up, but the young people like to wear jeans.” So, to participate and be accepted into this business circle of professionals, you need to embody professionalism and exhibit your position through the clothing that is put on the body.

**Elite Social Spaces**
In the Central Florida region social capital, the kinds of social networks an individual is set in, is generated through participation in membership based business organizations, and often creates a clique of Hispanic entrepreneurs and professionals working in the “FIRE” economy – finance, insurance, and real estate sectors – who socialize for both business and leisure. One description of these social spaces, depicted by an attending journalist, captures the exclusivity of these physical and social spaces that Marco, for example, has created through his organization. On February 10, 1995 an Orlando Sentinel journalist, Myriam Marquez, attended the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Central Florida’s installation banquet and reported, “If you weren’t at Church Street Station’s Presidential Ballroom last Friday night you wouldn’t know it, but what happened there was awesome. The Hispanic business and professional community of Central Florida arrived that evening- and boy, what a party!” The reporter goes on to claim that the banquet “wasn’t an exclusive affair. It was inclusive.” But, she meant ethnically and racially inclusive, but not inclusive of all social classes. After all, the sentence following her statement about the inclusivity of these events read, “Also attending were elected officials, business people, educators, lawyers, doctors and professionals in this community who, though not of Hispanic origin, recognize and appreciate the business and civic potential that Latinos represent.” In another media description of one of these networking events, the exclusivity of the attendees are mentioned:

Everyone at the cocktail party in downtown Orlando had a business card and a formal title. There was the vice president for something important at a local bank and the assistant to the Puerto Rican head of something else. Then there was Titi Chagua, a celebrity guest who needed no introduction to this Puerto Rican crowd.
What these journalist are omitting in their description of the events inclusivity is the class of Hispanics that are excluded, the service sector, working class laborers. I should also note that African Americans were rarely present at these events, although non-Hispanic whites did in fact attend and participate.

I was shocked by my first business networking event, which was a “business after hours” event, held monthly, and sponsored by Amigos Profesionales. What an elite atmosphere the founder had created. I recognized local Hispanic politicians in the crowd, and the people were beautiful and professionally dressed. At the back of the room were several information tables for businesses to advertise. There were two different attorneys stationed at one information table, another table had an agent representing BMW, and two other tables were displaying an upcoming edition of a local magazine. Amigos Profesionales always hosted their monthly events in a different venue, and I attended their “business after hours” at a number of different restaurants and in a country club where we were able to overlook the golf course.

During my fieldwork, in an attempt to interact with Hispanic professionals and entrepreneurs, I joined several of these organizations and regularly attended their events, which included leads groups, business after hours networking events, award ceremonies, galas, and ribbon cutting ceremonies for new businesses. These organizations require a membership fee and a degree of flexibility in your work schedule and home life since events occur during the day and evening. During these events everyone goes from person to person, chatting with the people they know or providing a brief introduction and quick one liner about their job before making the usual business card exchange with the
participants that they did not know. The intention is to interact with other professionals, and build one’s social capital, which can produce more economic capital.

The business after hours events and my leads groups always followed a similar format. All of the leads groups require a membership fee, but they restrict the number of participants to avoid having more than one person in the same occupation. For instance, if one attorney joins a leads group, then the group will not permit another attorney to join. The second attorney would have to find another leads group to participate in. During these leads groups everyone introduces himself or herself, their employer or business, and the type of clientele they are marketing too. The groups usually last one to two hours, and meet during a morning or an afternoon on a weekly basis. At these meetings everyone is cordial and interested in socializing with the intention of growing their clientele by networking with other professionals. Ultimately, leads groups are a way to generate economic capital. But, participation in these events expands your social network. On two different instances during my fieldwork chamber members were terminated from their jobs and were able to find a new job because of the networks they created through their membership. However, the exclusivity of these spaces and these organizations are recognized and at times contested.

On December 1, 2009, journalist Victor Manuel Ramos posted a story on the Orlando Sentinel’s Hispanosphere blog about the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Orlando’s 12th Annual Don Quijote Award ceremony. Each year the Hispanic Business Initiative Fund of Florida (HBIF) and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce celebrates the achievements and contributions of Latino entrepreneurs, professionals and activists to community life in Metro Orlando. In other words, the event is an opportunity
to bestow symbolic capital upon individuals, by honoring and recognizing their accomplishments in a public forum. Specifically, the award ceremony was intended to serve three primary objectives: recognize top Hispanic entrepreneurs, professionals, and leaders of the community, be the premier business recognition event for the Hispanic community, and serve as a fundraiser for HBIF and the Hispanic Chamber. However, the responses to the post were hostile and critical of the elitism displayed by members of the chamber, the exclusivity of the events, and the lack of outreach to the larger Hispanic community.

On the Hispanosphere blog one respondent, Maria rosario Gomez, commented, “the Hispanic chamber has become more of a social club for those people who you mentioned, always the same faces. They are very selective and protective of their recognition and unless you have done your deeds and kissed the pope’s ring, you won’t get any recognition from them.” The next respondent agreed with Maria, stating, “I think this is a scam! What does the Hispanic Chamber do except throw expensive parties on rooftops? Nothing!” This poster goes on to criticize the cost of attending some of the chamber’s celebratory events, mentioning the $100 per plate fee at the gala sponsored by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce at EPCOT Center’s World Showplace Pavilion.

The bloggers continue to respond to the post, claiming the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is an elitist, private social club instead of an organization that is supposed to assist the business community: “This is like a VIP club for people who have no sense in running a chamber,” “I don’t see what this does except have an open bar with food for the so called Hispanic elite,” and “you as a representative of the press should represent us better than through coverage of these events that do nothing than promote a ‘private
social club.” One poster goes so far as to post a sarcastic remark about the chamber president’s car: “Ramon, I love your 1957 Type W180 220S cabriolet Mercedes, very fitting for a chamber president. Congrats!” The poster finishes the comment with a link that shows a photograph of the Mercedes. The Mercedes Benz was a symbol of existing inequalities amongst Orlando’s Hispanic population. By driving a Mercedes, the chamber president was signaling, intentionally or unintentionally, his upward social mobility, evident by his material possessions—what Bourdieu calls objectified cultural capital—and securing a place amongst the Hispanic elite. Of course this is based on the perceptions of the bloggers; the ambiguities of social class positionality cannot allow us to know the president’s actual class situation.

Several months later, in February of 2010, Sentinel journalist Victor Ramos placed another post on the Hispanosphere blog to follow up on the heated debate about the role of the chamber of commerce. This time, however, he interviewed the chamber president, Ramon Ojeda, a Venezuelan immigrant, asking, “Some of our Hispanic blog readers have criticized you and the chamber’s events at times, saying the chamber’s work doesn’t benefit the small businesses. How do you respond to those complaints?” Ramon responded defensively and mentioned the criticism he received about his car. The reporter asked him to respond, and Ramon defended his purchase, explaining that he has worked hard for everything he has. But, the comments that followed the post continued to critique the chamber for not providing the necessary support for businesses, chamber members, and the larger Hispanic community.
One especially powerful and sarcastic post, responding to the February 2010 post, highlights the way in which some Hispanics view the Hispanic elite that are part of the chamber:

Enough! Enough to all you criticizing our American way of life. We came here and we conquered. Like it or not, we, at the Hispanic Chamber, are a different kind of Latinos, most of us have married Anglos and you will never see us at a ‘bodege’, ‘baile’ or public event were regular Latinos congregate. By the way, we spic English well. We have worked so hard to create our ‘click,’ developed relationship with the establishment; without our membership we have people in key position that by a secret handshake, phone call or text message we acquire contracts, get business done, and find employment for friends/relatives. Conversely, we can cut people’s legs as easy as 1, 2, 3. We have prominent members always on the lookout for own benefits. Linda Ladman Gonzalez (you see how we can use the last name thing? Depending if she want to work in a position that has to do with Latinos, then she uses the Gonzales last name). . .

The post then cuts off, abruptly. But, as I read the harsh criticism of the elitism of these business networking organizations I stopped to think about the environment and people at the events. These networking events were quite social, and did in fact create an elite clique of Hispanics. Moreover, what this sarcastic respondent brought to light were the class distinctions amongst Orlando’s Hispanic population. Furthermore, this comment reveals the strategies that Hispanics use to perform and defend their social class positions. For instance, as the blogger notes, marrying an Anglo, avoiding spaces where “regular” Hispanics congregate, perfecting the English language, building a strong business and social network, and being able to turn your Hispanic identity on and off by using an anglicized or Hispanic last name. This enables the Hispanic elite to navigate situations with both Hispanics and non-Hispanics. This suggests a degree of assimilation; although, it is not clear if these strategies are a performance, a way of conducting oneself in public, or if these dispositions are embodied and internalized, and therefore part of the individual’s identity.
The reference to assimilation and intermarriage, however, leads to questions about elite Hispanic’s ability to “become” white. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2002) points to the high rate of interracial dating and marriage between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites as evidence of the changing nature of racial stratification in the United States and evidence of the “whitening” of Latinos through racial assimilation. The historic examples of Mexican incorporation in Mississippi and New Orleans in the early years of the 20th Century reveals how intermarriage has become a mechanism for obtaining whiteness. According to Julie Weise (2012), “New Orleans presents the single case among extant historical research on the interwar period in which Mexicans experiences of racialization and assimilation were more akin to those of European immigrants, than those of their Mexican immigrant counterparts in the Southwest.” In the 1930s New Orleans was home to about 1400 Latin Americans, including middle class professionals, agents for shipping companies and refugees from the Mexican Revolution, and those immigrants reported minimal discrimination. These individuals, including the working class and darker skinned Mexicans, lived in the same residential communities as whites, and working class Mexican men were more likely to marry white women than Mexican in the southwest.

In Mississippi, Mexicans were initially categorized as non-white. However, a 1926 decree by the Gunnison Consolidated Schools prevented Mexican children from attending white schools. This categorization did not last. Using a transnational political strategy, Mexican immigrants challenged their exclusion from white public institutions and commercial spaces. “Rather than file lawsuits with the support of liberal Mexican American organization and white lawyers, as their Southwestern contemporaries did,
these immigrants called upon nearby Mexican consulates to pressure local officials to admit Mexicans to these white places (Weise, 2009, 67-178). White power holders allowed the Mexican population some of the privileges of whiteness, realizing this was the best way to preserve the social order of segregation and maintain their workforce. As a result, some Mexican families chose to settle in the Mississippi Delta, they sent their children to white schools, and married whites in increasing numbers by 1940. As a result, they eventually assimilated onto the white side of the color line. Intermarriage greatly impacts the racialization of future generations of Hispanic children, particularly those with only one Hispanic parent. Thus, Puerto Ricans, with high rates of intermarriage with non-Hispanic whites, can potentially “whiten” future generations through the marriage practices that were contested in the last Internet post.

**Articulating Social Class Distinctions**

In our everyday lives we make class based distinctions about the people and places we encounter. The distinctions are often in our head, we think about it, react to that thought, but we don’t as often verbalize those distinctions. During one interview, with a commercial banker from Puerto Rico, we were discussing discrimination against Hispanics. He could not recall any instances of discrimination he encountered while working in Orlando, although he admitted, “things still happen.” He said, “It’s hard be Hispanic, you get compared to Mexicans, and other communities, but Puerto Ricans have the same rights as Americans.” He surprised me though. Instead of criticizing Puerto Rican’s second-class citizenship and attributing the blame to the colonial relationship between the island and the states, Jorge blamed other Puerto Ricans. “If you are a professional versus a laborer,” he explained, “how you act in the community is totally
different.” He went on to explain to me why there is prejudice against Puerto Ricans: “most [Puerto Ricans and Hispanics] think they are in Puerto Rico, or in their country.” This was not the first time I heard this comment. When driving Puerto Ricans from New York through the community of BVL, they commented on the landscape’s decline and attributed the blame to Puerto Ricans from the island. They felt that Puerto Ricans from the island were continuing to live their lives as they had in Puerto Rico, and were making Central Florida an extension of the island instead of assimilating to life in Florida. Although Jorge did not go into details about which practices and behaviors were unacceptable, he went on to say, “well, whites have white trash and the red necks, and we have ours,” to distinguish between the lower class segments of the Puerto Rican population who presumably did not know how to behave in a manner that he finds acceptable.

For another banker, Miranda Otero, class distinctions were part of her daily life experiences. Miranda has been part of a chamber of commerce for 4 years, where she has developed close-knit relationships with other members. As a result of her involvement, she attends many of the networking events that are going on in Orlando. She admitted that many of her evenings are filled up with these networking events. Sometimes, she said, it is absolutely exhausting, but she does it for the exposure, so she can be known in the business community. “As a Hispanic,” she explained, “you have to prove yourself, you have to work hard, and you have to prove yourself even more.” I went on to ask her about the presence of a Hispanic middle class in Orlando. She quickly responded, “Hispanics in a certain tax bracket stick together. At the events you can tell the thigh rollers because they stick together.” She gave me an example: “if you are at a business
networking event and you are an entry level employee, you won’t feel like the group opens up to you as much in comparison to if you are a president of a company. It is all about your title, and how much money you have. Physically, though, you can tell who is who just by looking at them.” Making judgments about class positionality, based on appearances, becomes possible since we embody and perform our class position through our mannerisms, language usage, clothing, and other bodily dispositions. Although, Miranda admitted that she also knows who is who since she has been involved in the different business organizations for the past few years. She went on to give me another example, of her parents. Her parents like to go to Associacion Borinquen (a Puerto Rican cultural organization) because they can relate to the people. However, if she were to invite her parents to an event with more affluent, younger people, she said, they would not feel comfortable. “Based on your status, you stick together, you aren’t going to go to dinner with people that are more affluent because you won’t be able to afford the places they go,” Miranda explained.

During my interview with Miranda, we went on to discuss her experiences of class exclusivity, and we started talking about the house that she owns. Miranda lives in “a very nice home,” but she bought it because she saved a lot of money for the down payment. Most of her neighbors are professors, doctors, or lawyers, and when she invites people to her house, she said, you can just see their faces light up: “They say oh my god, your house is sooo nice.” Miranda claimed that her visitors expect her to have less based on her appearance. However, despite living in that community she has no longer been included in her neighbor’s social circles. Initially, she was invited over for dinner, and her family would do things together with their neighbors. Little by little, however, they
are distancing themselves. They say hello, but they don’t get together anymore. Then she will hear from another friend about whose going to dinner together or traveling together, and she realizes she has not been included. “I have the house,” she said,” but I don’t have the money to go on the trips. People think if you have the big house, you have the money.” Miranda explained that she lives comfortably, but does not splurge on big expenditures.

On another instance, when interacting with Michael Ramirez, the social class distinctions we make during our everyday lives became a subject of discussion. Michael and I met in 2011 at a Leads meeting held in the downtown Kissimmee Puerto Rican cultural center. The Hispanic Area Council, which is part of the Kissimmee/Osceola Chamber of Commerce, sponsored the leads group, where professionals meet once a week to network and help one another generate new business. When the meeting started everyone had an opportunity to give a brief statement about their company and the types of clients they are hoping to attract. When it was my turn I briefly described my project and explained that the “clients” I was looking for were people willing to talk to me about their experiences living and working in Osceola County.

At first skeptical of my project, and well aware that I was observing and “studying” everyone in the room, Michael seemed like the last person who would help me. However, when we ran into one another at another Hispanic focused networking event hosted by Amigos Profesionales, he warmed up a bit and decided to help me by introducing me to his contacts, telling people about my project, and suggesting they participate in an interview. Over the years Michael has developed an extensive network of Hispanic professionals by constantly participating in the events sponsored by the
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Kissimmee’s Chamber of Commerce, Amigos Profesionales, and several other groups that support entrepreneurs and other professionals. In other words, he has built his social capital over the years and was plugged into a network of professionals.

One morning in June of 2011, after our weekly chamber event, Michael gave me permission to accompany him while he worked. This gave me an opportunity to interview Michael and chat with him more informally. We spent the entire day driving around the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area visiting real estate agencies and insurance companies to inform them about the services offered by his employer, a national corporation that provides restoration services to homes that have been damaged by fire, flooding, or other accidents. Michael, a Cuban-American in his 40s, is originally from Boston. He received a Bachelors degree from Northeastern University and a Masters degree from Franklin College. As we drove around Metropolitan Orlando, Michael and I spoke about his experiences living and working in Florida. He mentioned a slew of interesting jobs he has held at various times in his life: photographing models, working as a martial arts instructor, working at Hewlett Packard, and owning his own business. He went on to explain the darker side of Orlando’s labor market.

When Michael arrived in Orlando with his wife, a scientist who he later divorced, they “came with money.” In Boston, his wife conducted molecular research for a company funded by German investors. Michael claimed he had a “good, well paid job” at Hewlett Packard, leading both of them to believe, like so many others, that they would find a job in Orlando “in about 10 minutes.” The couple purchased a house in Orange County and began their job search until reality checked in; the couple was in for a
surprise. Michael and his wife burned through their entire savings over the next two years, while trying to support themselves without steady work. Since that time Michael has worked at many jobs in an attempt to support himself; still, he was laid off time after time. “There is no job security,” he said, “those days are long gone everywhere.”

From my conversation with Michael it became clear that his move from Boston to Florida led to downward mobility since he depleted his savings and was forced to accept less income. I began asking him more questions about his social class position. Michael explained that he used to be “upper class” and used to make “very good money;” however, “life throws curve balls, especially if someone steals from you.” Michael was referring to a woman he got involved with after his divorce, “a con woman,” that stole $50,000 from him. When I asked him why he considered himself “upper class” he replied, “because I fit better in an environment that is driven by highly educated or financially well off people.” Michael went on to emphasize his comfort at high-end country clubs, and the invitations he receives to visit the Citrus Club, an exclusive business and social club on the 18th floor of the BB&T building in downtown Orlando. He then mentioned the University Club that was established in 1917: “until the 1990s it was attended by the good ole boys. Back then, if you were anything but white, you belonged in the kitchen.” Michael went on to mention his age, as opposed to his ethnicity or class position, as a determinant of club participation: “I belong there [the University Club] too, but then again I don’t. My boss asked if I want to be a member, but the average age is 60 and up, so it doesn’t quite appeal. I’m in my 40s.”

During our car ride we continued discussing social class distinctions and I asked Michael how he could tell if an individual is upper class. He responded, “by their
mannerisms, what they drive, where they live, their education, although sometimes that
doesn’t mean diddly squat. You can tell by their attitude and how they carry themselves,
although this can be very deceiving.” So, while Michael did not hesitate to identify the
embodied cultural capital that helps him place others within the class hierarchy, he also
revealed the ambiguous, hidden dimensions of social class when he described his
misreading of class positionality later in the interview: “I met a black man in Boston once
that looked like a derelict, but I found out later that he is a millionaire in copper
extraction. I sometimes get carried away, and judge a book by its cover. I’ve been one of
those people that sees someone and thinks ‘stay away from me.’” Still, he went on to
explain that he is able to tell if someone is middle to lower class by the way they speak:

For example, with white trash everything is F-that. They can be the best wife or
husband, but to me, stay away, I don’t want to be associated. I judge people by
how I see them, and I make my own calls. If every word out of your mouth is a
curse or you dress poorly, I don’t want to talk to you, but sometimes you can’t
help it. I’ve been this close to being homeless.

The conversation continued when I asked Michael about where he lives and why
he selected that particular location. “Winter Park,” he responded, before going on to
explain how his place of residence is perceived, and his conscious attempt to use his
place of residence to elevate his status:

Where I live is more Anglo. If you say you live in Winter Park, people think you
have money. I wouldn’t mind living in [the city of] Orlando, but I couldn’t find an
affordable place. I’m middle class, sorta kinda, but if you say you live in Winter
Park, you get the ‘oh wow, excuse me.’ People automatically put you in another
category, and I want people to see me that way.

So, we perform and defend our economic position through our accumulation of social,
cultural, and symbolic capital; hence, Sherry Ortner’s conceptualization of class as
always being made, defended, and desired. In other words, it is not only what you do for
a living and how much you make that is important for class formation, what you do with those wages and how you behave and act in society also matters. This wage and wealth differential plays a primary role in an individual’s standard of living and social experiences because economic class organizes many elements of our lives by determining, for instance, where we can afford to live, go to school, shop, eat, or entertain ourselves; thus, economic stratification and social stratification often go hand and hand. In the days that followed my initial interview with Michael, I attended barbeques, birthday parties, and business networking events that Michael made me aware of, or extended an invitation to, so I could observe people’s everyday life business and leisurely activities. But, Michael was not the only one who consciously chose a place of residence based on the class of people in the area, instead of the ethnicity of residents. These individuals did not feel any desire to live in a Hispanic concentrated community. They chose their place of residence by looking for people that were of a similar socioeconomic status, but not necessarily of similar racial or ethnic background.

During an interview with Jerry, for example, who described himself as Puerto Rican and Spanish, he emphasized the connection he has with people based on class, instead of ethnicity. I asked him where he lives and why he chose not to live in a Hispanic concentrated community like BVL. He laughed, saying that in the past people might have moved near the bodegas to be around one another and feel at home.” “A bodega, he said, “was a guarantee of a [Hispanic] community developing in the area.” However, living in close proximity to other Hispanics was not important to Jerry, “now it is more about being identified as a professional, as a success. You want to live where other middle class people live. Go to the nice restaurants and nice places that other
middle class people go to.” Jerry went on to explain that his social circle was not exclusively Hispanics, by any means. His networks and group affiliations, he said, are business related. He does not involve himself in the more culturally focused, ethnically identifiable associations. Similarly, Juanita, who worked at Disney and now a Loewe’s store, said there is only some degree of unity amongst Puerto Ricans. In her experiences class unity trumps ethnic based solidarity. She explained to me that people like her boss, who is Puerto Rican, do not care if you are another Puerto Rican or not, “the rich stay together.” And that staying together is evident in the social spaces of business networking organizations and other elite spaces.

I am not suggesting that the social class distinctions expressed by Miranda and my other informants are unique to the Hispanic population. Instead, Central Florida allows us to observe the process of social class formation in the Hispanic community, and the ways that class identities are generated and delineated amongst a newly emerging elite. As more and more affluent Hispanics migrate to the region, and more Hispanics living in Central Florida become upwardly mobile, elite spaces are being created; but, these places have only emerged in more recent years. These spaces, where upwardly mobile Hispanics congregate and network, reveal the cleavages and inequalities amongst the Hispanic population, which is undoubtedly heterogeneous.

Helen Marrow (2009) points out that scholars who have observed a triracial divide, as a result of Hispanic’s disruption of the black/white racial binary, point to growing “material, subjective, and behavioral gaps both between and within contemporary racial groups, driven primarily by class and skin color.” Social relations amongst Hispanics in Metropolitan Orlando point to many of these internal divides,
whereby elite Hispanics collaborate with non-Hispanic whites and alienate poor and working class Hispanics as they draw internal divisions based on social class distinctions. Elena Sabogal (2005), studying middle-class Peruvians in South Florida, found that these professionals are entering the US with tourist visas with every intention to remain, and like Michael, are experiencing downward mobility. Sabogal explains that there is a degree of racial ambiguity amongst the Peruvian population, in identifying an individual as Indian, mestizo, or cholo for instance. Thus, racial categorizations were linked to social status. For instance, the criteria used for ranking mestizos and whites in the stratification system “are determined by using characteristics relating to lifestyle, family name, education, manners, and social poise.” Thus, to adjust mentally to their downwardly mobile position in the United States, Peruvians upheld these ideological markers “to preserve, in their eyes, their dignity.” For instance, “some professional immigrants evoked established social markers that signal class differences in Peruvian society in order to differentiate themselves from the indigenous society.” Similarly, the professionals I encountered in Metropolitan Orlando used “social markers” or embodied cultural capital to distinguish themselves and elevate their class position.

**Tastes and Embodied Cultural Capital**

Embodied and objectified cultural capital manifests itself through our tastes, abilities, preferences, and during our everyday life activities, like reading high-end fashion magazines, attending fashion shows, or playing golf. Manny Casiano is the owner of Casiano Communications, the largest Hispanic-owned magazine and periodicals publisher in the United States. When Casiano decided to expand the magazine’s reach, he selected Central Florida because of the presence of a Puerto Rican middle class. During
an interview with an *Orlando Sentinel* reporter, Casiano said, “To me it was the natural place to start growing our magazine into the U.S. . . . In addition to the fact that the region has grown rapidly, a large segment of the Hispanic population there is educated and middle class. That’s the demographic that supports our publication.”

The magazine that Casiano was introducing, *Imagen*, has captured Puerto Rico’s cultural life, society, and fashion trends for over thirty years, and is considered “the defacto who’s who of island society.” And in Central Florida, *Imagen*, “the region’s first high-end fashion and lifestyle magazine, with local content, that is entirely in Spanish,” was to capture the tastes of the Puerto Rican middle class in Orlando. When a reporter mentioned to Casiano that the region’s Hispanic businesses tend to be small, family-owned enterprises that cannot afford to advertise in his magazine Casiano was not concerned. Instead, he explained that he is not looking for Hispanic businesses to advertise in his magazine, he is only looking for “Hispanic eyeballs.” He was attracting a different caliber of advertisers that wanted to appeal to Hispanic readers. Chanel, Coach, and L’Oreal, Casiano claimed, want to sell goods to Hispanics, and through *Imagen* Casiano was creating a publication to support that need. The article also mentioned that Gucci, Jimmy Choo, and David Yurman were excited to have the magazine in Central Florida.

While Casiano was attempting to bring high fashion to Central Florida and capture the tastes of the Puerto Rican elite in print media, Marta Haggman, a celebrity in Puerto Rico, was attempting to bring high-fashion events to Central Florida. An *Orlando Sentinel* article entitled, “High Fashion With Hispanic Accents” captured the celebrity’s story. Haggman was a model in Puerto Rico during the 1970’s, appearing on the runway, in newspapers, and in magazines on the island. In 1970 she opened a modeling school in
San Juan and went on to host a television show. She remained in the fashion industry directing fashion and modeling programs at Puerto Rico’s World University, and organized beauty pageants.

In 1989, Haggman moved to Orlando with the intention of retiring; however, she was pressured to open a school and to organize fashion shows in the region. So, in 1991 Haggman opened Marta Haggman Image Development and offered modeling, image, and etiquette classes for children, teens, and adults in both English and Spanish. She had her first show in 1992 with about 250 people in attendance, and the following year there were 350. But, Haggman hoped to appeal to a broad audience, not just Hispanics, saying, “It has a Latin flavor, but we present it in English. We want it to be an event that everyone can enjoy because we’re all part of the American community.” This is a pattern that I have found amongst business professionals and the upper class Puerto Ricans and Hispanics I encountered. There is a greater willingness to accommodate English speakers, and there is a link between language and social class positionality. Bilingualism is indeed a form of cultural capital that is recognized and acknowledged by employers and employees. However, it is a certain kind of bilingualism that is valued, and this means speaking “good” or “proper” Spanish and English. Still, this embodied cultural capital allows some Hispanics to move back and forth in two different, co-existing social networks and business communities. When amongst non-Hispanic whites, Hispanic professionals displayed a greater willingness to censor the usage of the Spanish-language to be sensitive and inclusive, even when monolingual Spanish speakers were present. Thus, the soundscape in the spaces occupied by the Hispanic elite, where there is greater interaction between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, was quite distinct from the social
spaces, particularly in the Hispanic ethnic enclaves, where the poor and working class congegated. Hence, there is indeed residential and social segregation, at times consciously and intentionally. A golf fundraiser sponsored by a local organization, and the commentary that followed is revealing of the exclusivity of the Hispanic elite’s social spaces.

On April 20th of 2007 the Orlando Sentinel featured an article about the First Latino Open, an Orlando fundraiser that hoped to attract and involve the more affluent members of the Hispanic community in a sport that is “favored by company executives and high-income professionals” alike. The open attracted more than 100 golfers, and offered prizes that included a two-year lease for a new BMW. Nancy Sharifi, a manager at a financial firm, and Patricia Urban, who sells luxury homes, are featured in the Sentinel article as women who sometimes feel excluded when their colleagues take clients out to play golf. According to Latino Leadership, “too many Hispanics [have] lost out on networking opportunities because they are unfamiliar with the game—not the most popular recreational outlet in any minority community.” Nancy Sharifi, who is Puerto Rican, claimed that it is essential for a person in the business community to play golf, and she felt that she lost the opportunity to be better known in the banking and financial world as a result. Hence, the inability to play golf is a missed opportunity at increasing one’s social and economic capital since business can be done on the golf course and networks are formed through participation in this activity.

Urban, who is Dominican, bought seven or eight golf clubs, a bag, shoes, gloves, and golfing clothes for the open, despite not knowing how to play golf. She claimed golf has been “a good old boys club,” but she was determined to change that through her
participation. In the case of golf, an individual’s class, ethnicity, and gender are statistically related to knowledge of and access to the sport, according to the National Golf Foundation. This limits the symbolic capital, earned through knowledge and skill at golf, to those who are already on the higher end of the economic spectrum, non-Hispanic white upper class males. So, with all of its exclusivity golf limits the social and economic capital, the deal making, networking, and socialization on the green, to those individuals who already obtain the most capital. For instance, according to the National Golf Foundation, Hispanics play golf less often than non-Hispanic whites, Asian Americans, and non-Hispanic blacks, and golfers fall into the upper echelons of income and professional achievement. For instance, according to the Orlando Sentinel, “among Hispanic households [ ] most of those who play golf make more than $150,000 a year,” and “nearly 2,500 Hispanic households fall in that income category in Metro Orlando.”

In 2007, Latino Leadership changed the way they fundraised in an attempt to garner corporate sponsors and appeal to the select group of Hispanic golfers. They initially threw an annual community fair with music and food to raise funds to help lower-income Hispanics. According to Marytza Sariz, Latino Leadership president in 2007, “‘In the fair we realized that when you attract so many people, the music, the loud crowd, you don’t have an environment that is conducive to educating people.’” According to the Sentinel, Marucci Beard, Latino Leadership’s vice president in 2007, corporate sponsors were more willing to participate and sponsor golfing events, but showed much less interest in participating in the other charity events. It is important to realize that this organization is committed to assisting low-income Hispanics; however,
the leadership realized that they were able to better serve this population by sponsoring fundraisers that generated the most possible revenue.

On April 22nd, 2010 the Orlando Sentinel once again covered the Latino Leadership golf tournament on their Hispanosphere blog. However, the responding posts reveal the polarized perception of the event, with class positionality and racial identity present in the critique. On the same day the story was released an individual that goes by the name of Lisa posted the following response, distinguishing between golf tournaments that are for “professionals” and community fairs that are presumably for a lower class, less respectable segment of the Hispanic community:

I am excited that Latinos are doing something that is not a festival this is an event for a professional sector of the community Congratulations to the organizers, you are helping us gain equal respect Kudos!!!

In this post Lisa is articulating social class distinctions by referencing the symbolic capital that Hispanics are able to gain through participation in golf, which results in “equal respect,” a form of prestige, for Hispanics that occupy a “professional” position in the socioeconomic hierarchy. The conversation continues when josua posts another response at 8:55 that evening:

I was a player in their first event and I was really impressed with the organization and the quality of people there I got a lot of business from that event please join the event I am a GRINGO and I recommend it, the place is a great and the food and drinks are worth it

By including his racial identity, in capital letters none the less, josua is signaling to other members of the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area that this particular social space, the golf tournament, can be occupied by non-Hispanic whites since the “quality of people,” which can refer to any combination of cultural, symbolic, social, or economic capital, are of a satisfactory position. In other words, the participants in the golf
tournament embody elements that led the poster to believe these individuals are of “quality,” and are therefore able to help him generate more economic capital, by acquiring new business.

The third poster, who responds a day later, is much more critical of the event’s race and class based exclusivity, articulating the class based distinctions that differentiate the preferences and economic resources of tournament participants:

a game for pretenders is what golf is . . . they should hold a dominoes tourney, with a $50 entry they could more hispanics to participate, but they don’t want hispanics, they cater to whites and other wealthy people in this community. . . we the economically challenged cant afford to pay $150 to show off among the wealthy whites of mickeyland.509

Indeed, there is an element of exclusivity in the golf tournament since this leisurely activity is interpreted as prestigious, expensive, and a social space occupied by “whites” and the Hispanic elite. These distinctions are simultaneously recognized, articulated, sanctioned, and contested. Still, the opportunity to increase symbolic, social, and therefore economic capital is limited to those who already obtain the largest amounts of capital, thereby furthering social and economic inequalities.

Although individuals with a higher income tend to be attracted to golf, this does not mean that individuals with a low paid, service sector job do not like or desire the opportunity to play golf. The lower rate of golf playing amongst the poor most likely reflects the results of socialization, which is reflected in our habitus, or the lower rates can reflect the inability to afford or access this sport with its costly country club membership fees, expensive equipment, and suburban locations due to the space needed to construct a golf course. Because playing golf has a social meaning, in this example playing golf becomes an indicator of economic capital (occupation and income), a minute
distinction, playing golf versus dominoes, becomes the basis for social judgments and
placement within the class hierarchy. Of course the judgment of tastes and the
stratification that results from those distinctions are only possible because of social
recognition, our ability to acknowledge our place in stratified social spaces, and the
ability to articulate distinctions between, as one of my informants puts it, “those with
money and those without.” So, our markers of class distinctions can be arbitrary, but they
become meaningful differentiators because the significance of driving a BMW or playing
golf, for instance, is agreed upon and naturalized. Similarly, our tastes, which are
reflected in our selection of material items, can mark an individual as lower in the United
State’s socioeconomic hierarchy.

For instance, in December of 2010 an Orlando Sentinel reported, Jeannette
Rivera-Iyles, posted an article entitled, “Hispanics still in racially segregated
neighborhoods” on the Hispanosphere blog. There were 9 responses posted, but a post by
one particular blogger, theforge, connects symbols, in this case a sticker in a car, with
class positionality:

Hispanics have done a remarkable job of assimilating into the American culture,
while some sub-groups have done better than others. Seeing tons of PR stickers
on a car is telling about the person driving it. They are likely to live in a
neighborhood with mostly hispanics. They probably don’t work in the corporate
world, or if they do it is likely they are at the bottom of the corporate ladder. They
probably lack a college degree as well. Meanwhile, those that don’t have the
stickers all over their cars (maybe just one) usually are better off.

During my fieldwork it was quite common to see stickers of the Puerto Rican flag, a
coqui (a frog native to Puerto Rico), or some other symbol of Puerto Rican culture. Yet,
in this post theforge determines the social position of an individual based on the presence
of a sticker, which to him or her signifies level of education, place of residence, and
occupation. Although this sticker can also reflect the culture and ethnic identity of the driver, the respondent focuses on the indication of economic and cultural capital. Thus, the sticker determines whether an individual is at the bottom of the social class hierarchy, and therefore lacking the economic capital someone in the corporate world obtains through their occupation.

In addition to equating social position with the presence of a sticker, the forge, acknowledges the presence of Hispanics who want to assimilate and can therefore be differentiated from the sub-group of Hispanics who display, through material culture, an allegiance to the island of Puerto Rico. On several instances during my fieldwork I encountered individuals who monitor the language that they use, Spanish or English, when they are out of the home and in contact with non-Spanish speakers. During my interviews they explained that this was to avoid offending non-Spanish speakers, and to display their incorporation into the mainstream. A statement by an architect to an Orlando Sentinel reporter, as far back as 1989, is consistent with Hispanics’ effort to assimilate: “It’s nice to keep the language and culture, but if you are to succeed, you have to integrate into the ‘majority’ community.”

Like the forge and the architect, a respondent to a Hispanosphere article entitled, “Hispanic Children need quality programs on Spanish-language TV” accuses “ultra-hispanics of creating a sub-class of citizens” that are lacking the cultural capital, in this instance children with “deficient language skills,” to compete in the economic market. He goes on to mention the Hispanics who “want to become mainstream americans and compete for the good schools, [and] good jobs.” Thus, the institutionalized cultural capital (an education from a good school), which influences an individual’s economic
capital (good jobs), is only obtainable, according to the respondent, if he/she speaks
“English and forget the Spanish language, assimilate and become American first, second
and last.”

The ability to speak English is critical to avoid low-level, service sector
employment. Many Peruvian immigrants in Elena Sabogal’s Miami-based research
“believed that lack of language skills would not be a barrier to economic opportunity,
they found this not to be the case upon arrival . . . Most participants had visited south
Florida during holidays and based on their tourist experience, believed that it was
unnecessary to speak English in South Florida.”

According to Sabogal, “scholarly
research often assumes that people not proficient in English also lack education (Piore,
1979; Sassen, 1988; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003).” However, her research contests
that notion. Her informants, however, believed that their educational background and
professional experiences would be enough for a favorable position in the labor market as
they perfected their language skills. They were mistaken.

Similarly, in Orlando I encountered many college-educated workers and during
interviews heard mention of many more individuals that experienced downward mobility
upon arrival in Orlando because their educational qualifications and previous work
experience in Puerto Rico were not enough. I still recall my surprise when the
receptionist I interviewed at one of the chambers of commerce told me about her
struggles securing and maintaining employment despite her Bachelors degree from the
University of Puerto Rico and years of work experience. She spoke accented English, but
her grammar was perfect and I detected no language deficiencies during our interview.
She secured her receptionist position as a result of her social connections in the Hispanic community, developed from her years of membership at the chamber of commerce.

**Islanders vs. Mainlanders**

It is clear that Orlando’s Puerto Rican population is in no way homogenous. There are divides and distinctions articulated based on class, race, generation, and as I want to now discuss, place of birth. Tensions between Puerto Ricans from or born on the island of Puerto Rico versus the mainland states are well documented. Puerto Ricans from the United States are frequently stereotyped as “Nuyorican,” a term that implies a lack of cultural capital, ignorance of island life, and a lower social class status. The term “Nuyorican” is “an epithet applied by island-born Puerto Ricans to all U.S.-born residents of Puerto Rican ancestry, regardless of their place of residence.” Jose Lorenzo-Hernandez (1999) investigates self and social categorizations of Puerto Rican return migrants, and notes the perceived distinctions in personality attributes, physical appearance, and language characteristics.

Penny Verin-Shapiro (2000) conducted ethnographic research on Puerto Ricans in Southern California and on the island to examine why Nuyorican identities are disparaged by island and mainland Puerto Ricans. She notes “some islanders blame Nuyoricans for bringing violence, street drugs, gangs, and crime of New York City to the island.” The informants from this study claimed that negative stereotypes are assigned to Nuyoricans from which other Puerto Ricans wish to distance themselves, including unconventional speech patterns. Puerto Ricans in Chicago reacted to the term Nuyorican by asserting that the term did not apply to them, and focused on the class identities and racialization processes that saturate the term on the island.
Ramon Grosfoguel (2003) argues that nationalist intellectuals and the Puerto Rican middle classes from the island do not tolerate the cultural hybridity of Puerto Ricans in the United States. By cultural hybridity, Grosfoguel is referring to the Puerto Rican identity in the US that includes elements of African American culture, which threaten island elites’ efforts to conceal their African heritage while privileging their Spanish culture. According to Ramon Grosfoguel (2003), “many middle-class Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans on the island are more assimilated to American “white” middle-class cultural practices with their suburban houses, cable TV, racist representation of Puerto Rican identity and mass consumption in fancy shopping centers than many non-Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans in the United States living segregated in urban ghettos.” As a result, there are internal distinctions amongst Puerto Ricans based on one’s identity as a “mainlander” or “islander.”

In Chicago, distinctions between “mainlanders” and “islanders” were interpreted through displays of Puerto Rican nationalism. The Puerto Ricans born and raised in Chicago characterized the island-born elite living in Chicago’s suburbs as lacking a true commitment to the performance of Puerto Rican nationalism. Therefore, residents of Chicago’s barrio associated the suburbs with a corporate, professional elite recruited from the island by US multinational corporations. To the “islanders,” the “mainlanders” lacked an understanding of contemporary life in Puerto Rico, and represented present-day Puerto Rico with folkloric images that are backward, and dated. These representations included public displays of the Jibaro, Tainos, or Afro-Puerto Ricans in festivals, and the construction of casitas. This, says Ramos-Zayas, implies that the right way of being Puerto Rican is by understanding Puerto Rico in urban, contemporary, and upper-middle-
class terms, instead of as a rural landscape with images that are equivalent to poor urban areas in the United States.\textsuperscript{522}

According to Ana Ramos-Zayas (2003), in the context of fluid migratory waves being a “mainlander” or an “islander” is a “forceful internal categorization” that is less and less grounded on geographical location.\textsuperscript{523} Thus, a Puerto Rican born in the United States continues to be a “mainlander” even after relocating to the island of Puerto Rico for good, while island-born Puerto Ricans can continue to assert an islander identity, even if they have lived in the US for most of their adult lives.\textsuperscript{524} Still, many second, third and fourth generation Puerto Ricans in the United States retain a feeling of belonging to the “imagined” Puerto Rican community, even if they have never visited the island.\textsuperscript{525} This identity persists despite the fact that second and third generation Puerto Ricans suffer rejection and discrimination when visiting the island of Puerto Rico, or when interacting with island-born Puerto Ricans in the states as is the case in Chicago.

Are distinctions between mainlanders and islanders, Nuyoricans and Puerto Ricans prevalent in Orlando, Florida? The island-born Puerto Ricans of Jorge Duany’s (2010) Orlando study “were at pains to distinguish themselves from Nuyoricans.”\textsuperscript{526} Duany’s study is based on interviews with well-known leaders of Orlando’s Puerto Rican community. The interviewees represent the highly educated and upper-class occupational sectors of the Puerto Rican population, and most of the participants were born and raised on the island of Puerto Rico. Duany’s informants describe Nuyoricans as “brass,” “assimilated,” and “in your face.” In addition, Puerto Ricans from the mainland are described as behaving differently, having a different way of dressing, and an aggressive way of speaking. As a result, the informants identified Nuyoricans as “a very different
community,” despite their shared culture, language, and experience. Puerto Ricans from Chicago were described as having a “certain idiosyncrasy.” One informant claimed, with Puerto Ricans from Chicago “you have to be careful,” implying they were more dangerous and prone to crime than Puerto Ricans migrating from the island. These depictions portray a particular segment of Orlando’s Puerto Rican population—those migrating from New York and Chicago—as lower class. As a result of these class distinctions, “those from here [the United States] don’t get along well with those from there [Puerto Rico].”

During my own ethnographic research, I rarely heard unprompted references to the distinctions between Nuyoricans and islanders. On one occasion I listened to a conversation, discussed in Chapter 5, during a car ride through BVL. The “Nuyoricans” in the car with me blamed Puerto Ricans from the island for the decline of the BVL suburb, and for the physical condition of the houses we drove pass. They spoke of an “island mentality” when observing the landscape, and of islanders’ “manana attitude.” They used these terms because they believed the lack of maintenance and aesthetics were characteristic of housing conditions in Puerto Rico, which were interpreted as a product of the resident’s laziness, carelessness, and inability to follow rules and norms. In another instance, while conducting an interview in 2007, an island-born Puerto Rican male explained the differences between the two populations by referencing different forms of cultural capital:

Nuyoricans think Puerto Ricans from the island are stuck up and shallow. For example, [on the island] you can’t go to the club if you don’t have on a button shirt, you can’t wear jeans. You have to look like Ricky Martin. It’s a different dress code, dress to impress. Jewelry is worn inside, no bling-bling. Here [in the states] people wear hats, grills. In the Bronx people have assimilated to African American culture and it wasn’t the same on the island.
Other than these two instances, I did not discuss distinctions between islanders and mainlanders with the people that I encountered very often. I also encountered far more islanders during my research, and found this population to be the majority in the social spaces I traveled to. So, there is a possibility that these individuals would be less likely to speak negatively about Nuyoricans in my presence since many identified me as belonging to this group. Additionally, amongst the islanders I encountered, many had lived in the Northeast or Northwest for a part of their life and have family and friends in those places, which complicates any strict divide between the two populations. Thus, it is unclear how exactly a mainlander or islander identity impacts one’s social class position in Orlando. Perhaps the cultural capital of mainland Puerto Ricans is different from that of the islanders, even when the two groups contain a similar socioeconomic profile in terms of education, income, occupation, and homeownership. Language usage, style, mannerisms, and other forms of embodied cultural capital are already perceived as different in a few of the above-mentioned Orlando cases. I certainly encountered upwardly mobile, successful professionals from both the island and the mainland states in the business networking organizations I frequented. However, more in depth research is necessary to systematically observe the class-based cultural imagery that divides islanders and mainlanders in Metropolitan Orlando.
CONCLUSION
DEMOGRAPHY IS DESTINY

The 2000 US Census revealed that for the first time ever Hispanics surpassed the size of the African American population to become the majority-minority in the United States. The nation’s demographics are indeed changing, and Hispanics are a significant part of those transformations as the fastest growing population. The Hispanic population increased from 35,305,818 (12.5% of the total population) in 2000 to 50,477,594 (16.3% of the total population) in 2010. The Hispanic population is expected to triple in size, growing to as much as 29% of the total population by 2050. In 2010, 36% of Hispanics lived in the South, one of the region’s that experienced the greatest growth in the Hispanic population in the last decade. The US Census has projected the entire nation to become majority-minority by 2043; non-Hispanic whites are slowly becoming the nation’s minority population. In 2007, 10% (302) of the country’s 3,141 counties were already majority-minority, amongst them Florida’s Osceola County, and another 218 counties were on the tipping point. By 2010 this trend reached 13 of the 40 largest Metropolitan areas, and four states were already majority-minority, New Mexico, California, Texas, and Hawaii, where non-Hispanic whites already make up less than 50% of the total population.

This dissertation focuses on one of the places undergoing the impact of the nation’s sweeping demographic changes. This research is a foreshadowing of what is to come in other locales across the nation. I go beyond the numbers to capture the various responses to the influx of Hispanic migrants, and the cultural, political, and economic influence of these newcomers. First and foremost this research on place, race, and class is a contribution to the growing body of literature on new destinations of migration,
particularly the scholarship that focuses on the American South. The population shifts are impacting many, many aspects of everyday life, and this dissertation focuses on the complexities of those experiences, for both the incoming and receiving populations.

Hispanic migration, settlement, and incorporation in Metropolitan Orlando have led to the Latinization of the Central Florida region. The landscape in suburban communities like Buenaventura Lakes are reflecting the residential population that now calls those spaces home. The memorization of the borinqueeners and the naming of the 65th Infantry park is just one of the many examples of the ways that Hispanics are shaping the place-identity of the region. But, not only has the landscape been altered, the hyper-presence of the Spanish-language has altered the soundscape as well. My discussion of language ideologies, and the presence and accommodation of the Spanish language in public spaces reveals how the dominance of the English language is being challenged. Additional evidence of the region’s Latinization is present in the economic realm, where Hispanic businesses are growing, the consumer power of the population is increasing, the labor force is changing, and an elite of professions and entrepreneurs is forming. The election of Hispanic elected officials has brought attention to the needs of the Hispanic population, increased Hispanics’ political power, and their electoral votes are sought in local and national elections. Finally institutions, the public school system in one example, are feeling the effects of a changing student body and the pressures to adapt to the needs of Osceola County’s new majority. This research, therefore, contributes to academic scholarship about Latinization, migration, race, and class identities.
In addition to capturing the dimensions of the region’s Latinization, this ethnography highlights the heterogeneous of the Hispanic population as both upwardly mobile professionals and low-paid, service sector workers settle in the region and make Metropolitan Orlando their home. Through my description of the early formations of a Hispanic elite, I show how class distinctions and inequalities are embodied and articulated during everyday life encounters, both virtually and face-to-face. What makes the Hispanic migration to Metropolitan Orlando distinct from other case studies examined by the new destination’s literature is the class diversity of this particular Hispanic population. Therefore, this project was an opportunity to observe class based solidarity, which at times trumps ethnic-based unity, and the distinctions and emerging factions that cause social distance and intensify existing economic inequalities within the Hispanic population. One of the goals of this project was to show the complex inter-ethnic relationships within Hispanic concentrated spaces, and the significance of class in everyday life interactions.

Finally, this dissertation begins to show how racial meanings and understandings are altered by Hispanic migration. By drawing on the theoretical scholarship from linguistic anthropology and critical race theory, we can begin to understand how Hispanics are challenging the South’s deep- rooted racial binary, which is the greatest contribution of this dissertation. First, the ethnographic vignettes throughout the chapters reveal that Hispanics were perceived as a distinct non-white racial group due to linguistic practices, national origin, and other “cultural” identifiers. I’ve emphasized how the Spanish language is racialized, as are people, spaces, and places. Additionally, Osceola County’s Latinization made some of my non-Hispanic white informants increasingly
aware of their own white racial identity, and led to the development of a stronger white racial consciousness as they became the minority population. However, much of the Hispanic population claimed a white racial identity as well, further complicating racial categorizations and identities. Will the Hispanic population continue to challenge white privilege, and expand the white racial category?

Future Directions

In an article, “The Myth of Majority-Minority America: I have one Cuban grandparent. Why does the census count me as Hispanic?” Matthew Yglesias challenges the census bureau’s racial and ethnic categories, and questions whether the US will in fact become a majority-minority nation or if the white racial category will just expand to include Hispanics. In May of 2012, in a rare occasion, a census bureau press release dominated the media with a claim that most children younger than 1 are minorities. According to Yglesias, the press interpreted the shortage of white Anglo babies as a foreshadowing of things to come in America’s future majority-minority nation. In response Yglesias said, “I have my doubts . . . I suspect an awful lot of these ‘minority’ babies are going to be white when they grow up.” Yglesias explained his own confusion while filling out the 2010 census form. The census bureau’s extension of the one drop rule to Hispanic identity seemed ridiculous, and Yglesias suspects that the white racial category will indeed evolve to include Asians and Latin Americas since there is already a deal of ambiguity about racial and ethnic identities. When asked if he was of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin he responded that he indeed was. His grandfather José Yglesias immigrated to Ybor City in Tampa, Florida, and grew up speaking Spanish in a Hispanic concentrated community. Since he is a descendent of his grandfather, clearly he
must be of Hispanic origin. However, according to Yglesias “back in the real world, though, I’m just another white dude. My three other grandparents are all of Eastern European Jewish extraction.” He grew up speaking English, but recalls taking a summer Spanish class once at New York University. It seemed ridiculous that a single Hispanic ancestor would make him part of the Hispanic minority population. Whiteness, he points out, has always been an “elastic concept” in America, and he suggests that if whiteness has always defined the sociocultural majority, than the only way to maintain that power “is to recruit large swaths of the Hispanic and fractionally Asian population into whiteness.” Yglesias goes on to point out that assimilation and interracial and interethnic marriages could potentially whiten the Hispanic population.

In February of 2012, the Pew Research Center released a report on interracial marriage, which reveals that 26% of Hispanics marry non-Hispanics. These Hispanics are more likely to be college-educated than those who married within their group, pointing to the potential links between upward mobility, assimilation, and becoming white, which I began examining in the last chapter. Of approximately 275,500 new interracial or interethnic marriages in 2010, white/Hispanic couples accounted for more than 43%, white/Asian couples 14%, and white/black couples 12%. Overall, intermarriage rates amongst blacks are somewhat lower, 17% of black newlyweds married non-blacks, and 9% of whites married someone who is not white, the lowest amongst all the groups. Still, marriages between whites and minority groups are the most common types of intermarriage. How are the children of those white and Hispanic couples going to identify racially? This dissertation foreshadows changing race relations in the United States, particularly as Hispanics become the majority-minority not only
nationally, but also in more and more locales throughout the country. As I continue to examine Hispanic migration and race relations in the South, the third generation will be of increasing importance, as are interracial and interethnic families, and upwardly mobile Hispanics.

While conducting fieldwork in February of 2012, the fatal shooting of an unarmed 17-year old African American, Trayvon Martin, by George Zimmerman occurred in Sanford, Florida. At the time of the shooting, there were contrasting opinions about race relations in Sanford, the location of the incident, and disagreement over whether or not this particular part of Metropolitan Orlando has a race problem. One reporter claimed the racial tensions unleashed by the shooting are “real and deep-seated,” in opposition to claims that dismiss the existence of widespread racism. This opposing perspective, which Jane Hill (2008) describes as a “folk theory of racism,” views racism or prejudice as isolated experiences that stem from the beliefs, intentions, and actions of individual racists. Sanford, located in Central Florida’s Seminole County, is described as “the oldest, poorest, blackest community in the most suburban and wealthiest county in Central Florida.” Additionally, Sanford has “the highest percentage of black residents of any Seminole city,” and “the lowest median-household income and the highest poverty rate of any city in Seminole County.” But, it is argued that what happened to Trayvon Martin could have happened anywhere: “Sanford is the stand-in for all of America, and in that way serves as a lens for introspection on the issues of race, profiling, selective law enforcement, crime and self-defense, independent of where the killing took place.” An Orlando Sentinel Journalist, Jeff Kunerth, wrote, “there is still an invisible line between the blacks and the whites. That's what happened with Trayvon Martin. People started
crossing the line.”\textsuperscript{541} Although, he does not elaborate or explain where exactly Zimmerman fits in Sanford’s divided racial scene and how the line was crossed.

Zimmerman’s Hispanic identity was presented as evidence to refute allegations of racism, further complicating the racial identity of Hispanics. In the press, Zimmerman’s brother is quoted as saying, “‘we didn't grow up with racism . . . We grew up with a Latino mother and white father. Theirs was an interracial love story.’”\textsuperscript{542} But again, Latino is not a race, and their parents relationship, a Hispanic woman and non-Hispanic white male, does not necessarily connote an interracial relationship. Is Mrs. Zimmerman non-white and therefore a different racial categorization than her husband? Does George Zimmerman’s Hispanic identity signify more commonality with African Americans than with non-Hispanic whites, therefore making him less capable of racism? In the press, Robert Zimmerman Jr. blamed attorneys and the media for characterizing his brother, falsely, as a white man who killed a black teen.\textsuperscript{543} Robert accentuated his Hispanic identity, pointing out that they speak Spanish, eat Peruvian food, and were part of the immigrant community in Northern Virginia, prior to relocating to Central Florida.\textsuperscript{544} The next stage of this project will further investigate Hispanics’ racial identity and their interactions with both the African American population and non-Hispanic whites in different parts of the American South.

How does Hispanic migration in different parts of the Deep South impact race relations and Hispanic’s own racial identities? I want to conclude this dissertation with the experiences of Genny, a “Mississippi dame with a Puerto Rican name,” who has chosen to share her experiences of racialization in the South with the world via a self-reflexive Internet blog. In the 1990’s her parents, born and raised on the island of Puerto
Rico, moved to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Her father was a member of the Air Force.

According to Ginny,

It was in living here that I became acutely, and painfully, aware that I was different and was always going to be. My skin was dark, ‘black’ as some of the other kids at my predominately-white Catholic school said. This, along with my mother’s constant worry that something terrible would happen to us because the South did not have a history of being kind to dark-skinned people, made the navigation of my identity in southern Mississippi confusing and difficult.

Genny rejected a black white racial identity, like so many other Hispanics, and hoped that she could cross into the white side of the color line and be perceived as white by other southerners, Her father always referred to her as a “Puerto Rican southern belle,” however, Ginny explains that,

I was in constant worry through my adolescence that I looked ‘too black’, that I would be confused for anything other than Latin American, or maybe just a dark-complexioned white person. I used to ask my friends in high school what race they would think I am, fearing that they would say black. I never had the luxury to live without thinking constantly about my race and how it played a part in how others saw me in the South. This consciousness manifested itself in a strong desire to not be seen as the other, to somehow develop into a light-skinned, European-featured woman, because that is desirable. If that could somehow happen, I would be acceptable, easy to befriend by the white people I was surrounded by.

A dramatic change, however, altered Ginny’s racial consciousness and her desire to assimilate and be accepted by the white race. This transformation followed the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Houses were destroyed and schools were closed for close to a month; but, when Ginny returned to school, “there was a lot of talk about the influx of Latin American workers entering the state to work on rebuilding homes and businesses. Many were roofers, and I remember kid talking about the ‘Mexicans’ who were rebuilding their homes and working on their roofs.” The presence of these “Mexican” laborers bothered “these white kids so much and [Ginny] would constantly hear them talk about how these people were weird or scary or dirty or stupid because they
spoke little or no English.” It was the one time in her life when she was confronted with blatant racism against a population that looked like her. Yet, Ginny escaped the racist, stereotypical responses in her own life, “I was safe and good to these white people because I assimilated; I spoke English, I ‘passed’ in appearance, and I had accepted mainstream interest that I never thought critically about.”

As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, the influx of Hispanics into the south has altered not only non-Hispanic white’s racial identities and categorizations, but also impacts the way Hispanics see themselves and their place within the nation. Ginny came to realize that her Americanized culture, English language skills, and class position helped her pass for white, but she was able to think about the implications of passing with a critical lens for the first time as Hispanic migration increased in the region: “I though, ‘I’ve been spending almost my entire life trying to fit in with people who would just as soon dehumanize and diminish me if I were more closely tied to a certain culture and language and economic situation.’” Ginny’s eye’s were opened, and she came to the realization that “there was never going to be any space made for my difference and the differences of people of color, racialized by skin color and language.” She would have to start accepting herself, and start making a space for herself in the South. But, she admits it is still a struggle:

There are so many seen and unseen forces in this society, this southern culture, in the United States, that makes it incredibly hard sometimes to care for myself and love myself and my roots the way they are meant to be loved by me. I’m not Puerto Rican enough, I’m not mainstream enough, I talk about race too much . . . I have been told countless times that ‘it’s not always about race’ and ‘you don’t need to question everything’ and ‘it’s not always like that.’ I’ve figured out that these phrases are one way people can feel comfortable about the world we live in. It’s an acceptance of the status quo, and it’s a strategy to keep you from ‘bitching’ about the conditions of oppression and marginalization.
Ginny’s commentary about the responses to talk about race and racism reflect the color blind ideologies and white privilege that I have tried to highlight throughout this ethnography.

Many of my non-Hispanic white informants did not have to think about their racial identity, and could deny the significance of race in their everyday lives. However, the Hispanic population entered their suburban communities and challenged ideas about what is normal, mainstream, and American. In many instances, the non-Hispanic whites I encountered had far less capital than some of the upwardly mobile Hispanics I worked with. These are poor and working class whites, and they are marginalized economically. So, they feel victimized when they can’t get a job because they don’t speak Spanish, or can’t order food because all of the employees are speaking Spanish. The difference is that Hispanics have been living with this for generations, but the feelings that result from being a minority or “the other” is new to this non-Hispanic white population. Their ideologies and belief systems tell them that they are the true Americans, that the US is becoming more foreign, and that these Hispanics are the newcomers as they consciously and unconsciously forget Florida’s Spanish past.

There is a fear of change, and if demographics are destiny, the “browning” of America that is underway will mean that we need to think our understandings of race, ethnicity, and what it means to be American. Ginny claims that she is “done with this socialization of neglect and internalized racism and misogyny that [she] learned in Mississippi, and which is constantly reinforced wherever [she goes].” As a result, she took to blogging. The South both frustrates and fascinates her. So, she found a virtual
space, which she calls “Mississippi Goddam,” where she could share her experiences in
the hope of creating a semblance of progress and justice:

I’m not done with Mississippi. I’m not done with Alabama. I’m not done with Florida. I grew up in these places, and my home for now is the Gulf Coast. My childhood was difficult in many ways because of the culture of the south, but I think that’s a culture that can change. Mississippi is not a lost cause. Alabama and Florida aren’t either.
Introduction

1 Gateway cities serve as a link between one country or region and another.
2 (Rodriguez 2007), (Mantero 2008), (Massey 2008), (Mahler 1996), and (Falcon 2004).
3 In 1976 the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 94-311, which required that federal government agencies categorize and collect data on Hispanics. Hispanics are the first and only ethnic group to be singled out. Government agencies collect data on whites, blacks, Asians, American Indian/Alaskan natives, and Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders; however, these terms are used to categorize racial groups. Hispanics, however, have linguistic and cultural similarities, but are not necessarily of the same race.
4 (Portes 1994), (Korrol 1994), and (Pedraza 1995).
5 (Weise 2012).
6 For example, Victor Zuniga and Ruben Hernandez-Leon (2001) present a case study that describes the process of migration and incorporation of Latino and Mexican immigrants into the labor market of Dalton, a small city in northwest Georgia. Dalton is known as the “Carpet Capital of the World,” and produces approximately 80 percent of all the wall-to-wall carpet manufactured in the United States. Latinos have decided to move to Dalton primarily because of employment opportunities. The carpet industry employs 86% of immigrant men and 40% of immigrant women (Zuniga 2006). See also (Murphy 2001), (Furuseth 2006), and (Millard 2004).
7 (Williams and Smith 2012: 222).
8 (Massey 2008), (Mantero 2008), (Millard and Chapa, 2004), (Murphy et al. 2001), (Zuniga 2006), and (Barcus 2007).
9 (Williams and Fortuny 2007). (Clark 2006), (Erwin 2003), and (Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2005).
10 (Fink 2009), and (Shefner and Ansley 2009).
11 For an exception see (Williams 2007) for a discussion about Mexican migration to Immokalee, Florida, located in the Southwest of the state. See also (Schmidt 2012) for a discussion of indigenous Mexicans migration to Clearwater, Florida.
13 (Archer and Bezdecny 2009:188).
16 In Buenaventura Lakes, my fieldsite, 49.9% of Hispanics identified themselves as White alone, while 2% identified as black or African American, and in the larger county 30.6% identified as white, and 2% as black (2010 US Census). Nationally, according to the Pew Hispanic Survey, when asked to state their race, 36% of Hispanics called themselves white, 26% said they are “some other race,” and another 25% claimed they are Hispanic or Latino, even though the government does not consider these labels to connote a racial group, but an ethnic group.

17 (Omi and Winant 1994:5).
18 (Omi and Winant 1994:3).
19 (Omi and Winant 1994).
20 According to the US Census Bureau, “People who identify with the terms ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Latino’ are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the decennial census questionnaire and various Census Bureau survey questionnaires – ‘Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano’ or ‘Puerto Rican’ or ‘Cuban’ – as well as those who indicate that they are ‘another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.’ Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race.”

21 (Ennis et al. 2010:1).
22 (Rumbaut 2009:23).
23 (Cobas et al. 2009).
24 (Rumbaut 2009:23).
25 (Rumbaut 2009:23).
26 Directive 15 came under criticism, and in 1993 congressional hearings began and the standards were later revised. The changes led to five racial categories (“American Indian or Alaska native,” “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,” “Asian,” “Black or African American,” and “White”), and reworded the two ethnic categories as “Hispanic or Latino” and “not Hispanic or Latino”). The directive pointed out that Hispanics or Latinos could be of any race, and that these classificatory categories were neither scientific nor anthropologic, but rather “social-political constructs” developed to provide a common language for federal organizations to collect and compare data on race and ethnicity.
27 (Rumbaut 2009:24).
28 (Rodriguez 2009:40).
29 (Rumbaut 2009).
30 (Rodriguez 2009:42).
31 (Marrow 2009:1038).
32 (Marrow 2009:1038).
33 The position of black is defined as people with African ancestry in the American context (Marrow 2009).
34 The “immigrant analogy,” predicting that Hispanics might follow the path of European immigrants and obtain whiteness or honorary whiteness has been critiqued (Grosfoguel et al. 2005).
35 According to Eduardo Bonilla-Sivla, the majority of Latinos were incorporated into the nation state “as ‘colonial subjects’ (Puerto Ricans), refugees from wars (Central Americas), or illegal migrant workers (Mexicans) has foreshadowed subsequent patterns of integration into the American racial order.” (Bonilla-Silva 2002: 9) However, a smaller minority was allowed “a more comfortable ride in America’s racial boat” through incorporation as “‘political refugees’ (Cubans, Chileans, and Argentineans) or as
'neutral’ immigrants trying to better their economic situation (Cost Rica, Colombia)” (Bonilla-Silva 2002:9). See also (Marrow 2009) and (Roth 2012).

36 (Rumbaut 2009:29).
37 (Humes et al. 2011:4).
38 (Guarnaccia 2009:368).
39 (Rodriguez 2009: 46).
40 See (Guarnaccia 2009:369).
41 As a result, Peter Guarnaccia (2009) suggests that attention to ethnic groupings are actually a more effective way of classifying various social and cultural groups for the purposes of research, and we should therefore move beyond the census categories. He defines ethnic groups as “cultural groups interacting in a multicultural context,” and these individuals share “cultural features but also histories, migration, and political and economic processes, which define them both to themselves and to others.” (Guarnaccia 2009: 369)
42 (Marrow 2009:1043).
43 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2002) has also found that incorporation into the United States has meant becoming “non-white” for most Latinos, but for a few select groups migration has resulted in an “honorary white” status and “becoming almost white.”(Bonilla-Silva 2002:9).
44 (Aranda 2004:926).
45 (Aranda 2004:926).
46 (Lopez-Sanders 2012:147).
47 (Scott and Leonhardt 2005), (Newman 1999), (Shapiro 1998), (Bourdieu 1987), (Veblen 2006), and (Ortner 2003).
48 (Kumar 2004).
49 (Ortner 2003:12-14).
50 (Ortner 2003).
51 (Stoller 2002:x).
52 (Kumar 2004:17).
53 (Heider 2004:2).
54 (Blank-Libra 2004:39).
55 (Boellstorff 2008:61).
56 According to a Poll taken by Orlando Sentinel reporter Victor Manuel Ramos, Hispanosphere readers live primarily in Florida, although there is in fact readership in other states: 63% of readers were from Florida, 8% New York, 7% California, 4% Texas, 2% Arizona, 1% California, 1% Illinois, and 14% were from other states. (Hill 2008: 790).
57 (Oboler 1995).
58 In Central Florida, Osceola County had the highest foreclosure rate with the majority of foreclosed homes located in Buenaventura Lakes and Poinciana, two Puerto Rican concentrated subdivisions. Jeanette Rivera-Iyles, “Judge: Mediation Not Needed in Osceola Home Foreclosures,” Orlando Sentinel, March 14, 2009.
59 For an account of Florida’s economic history see (Stronge 2008).
60 (Firpo 2012).
61 (Firpo 2012).
Professional and technical personnel accounted for 48 percent of attendees, managers and administrators for 26 percent, craftsmen 4 percent, operatives 4 percent, sales 8 percent, service 2 percent, and laborers 2 percent. Blacks made up 3 percent of attendees, and Hispanics 2 percent (Wallace 1985).

Other private sector employers include Martin Marietta (Orange County) with 8000 employees by 2006, Orlando Regional Health Care System (Orange County) with 6,200 employees, AT&T (Orange County) with 5,800, Universal Studios (Orange County) with 4,250, Siemens Stromberg (Seminole County) with 1800 employees, Winter Park Hospital (Orange County) with 1,450 employees, AAA (Seminole County) with 1,130 employees and, Fish Memorial Hospital (West Volusia County) with 960 employees.

During the 1970s economic activity in Mexico fluctuated with spurts of rapid growth followed by depressions in 1976 and 1982. President Luis Echeverría Álvarez’s (1970-76) leftist rhetoric and actions—for instance his support of illegal land seizures by peasants—diminished the confidence of investors and alienated private sector developers. The economic crisis—falling oil prices, higher world interest rates, rising inflation, the overvaluation of the peso, and the deterioration of the balance of payment accounts (BOP)—continued into the 1980s, and resulted in massive capital flight. In August of
1982 President José López Portillo y Pacheco (1976-82) declared an involuntary moratorium on debt payments, and announced the nationalization of the private banking system a month later.

89 (Macpherson and Sirmans 2001:83).
90 (Macpherson and Sirmans 2001:96).
91 (Snyder 2002).
92 The General Development Corporation was registered in Puerto Rico to sell property in Port St. Lucie, Port Malabar, Port La Belle, Port Charlotte, and Silver Spring Shores.

Chapter 2

105 (Rodriguez 2002), (Sundstrom 2008).
106 (Collazo and Ryan, et. al 2010).
107 (Rivera-Batiz and Santiago 1996).
109 (Whalen 2005).
110 (Rivera-Batiz and Santiago 1996:12), and (Perloff 1950).
111 (Morales 1986:35).
112 (Morales 1986:35).
113 http://www.americansall.com/resources/ethnic-and-
114 (Aranda 2009:112).
115 (Collazo, Ryan and Bauman 2010:7).
116 (Collazo, Ryan and Bauman 2010).
117 (Padilla 1958), (Sexton 1965), (Lewis 1966), (Chenault 1938), (Glazer and Moynihan 1968), (Handlin 1962), (Alers-Montalvo 1985), (Moore and Pinderhughes 1993), (Katz 1992) (Chenault 1938), (Wakefield 1959), (Rand 1958), and (Bourgois 1995).
118 Oscar Lewis’ now infamous and widely disputed “culture of poverty” thesis developed from his examination of Puerto Ricans in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and New York City. The term “underclass” was used by social scientists and policy makers to describe the group of able-bodied Americans—particularly young black males—who experienced long-term detachment from the formal labor market. What separated the “underclass” from other persistently poor people, was the lack of attachment to the labor force, welfare dependency, and the increasing rates of what William Julius Wilson (1987) termed “pathologies.” The rising poverty rates amongst Puerto Ricans, high rates of unemployment, increasing number of female-headed households, and previous “culture of poverty” depictions subjected Puerto Rican migrants to discursive productions that branded them as a perpetual “underclass.”
119 (Duany and Silver 2010), (Padilla 1958), (Chenault 1938), (Glazer and Moynihan 1968), (Vega 1984), and (Pattillo-McCoy 1999).
120 (Korrol 1994).
121 (Duany 2010).
122 (Duany 2010:3).
123 (Duany 2010:3). In 1980, Puerto Rican households had the lowest national homeownership rate (21%) compared to Cuban (44%), Mexican (50%), and other Hispanic households (46%) (Cortes et al. 2006). The national Puerto Rican homeownership rate increased to 25% in 1990 and 34.9% in 2000. The homeownership rate amongst Puerto Ricans in Florida (56%) is significantly higher than national averages.
124 (Firpo 2012), (Silver 2012), (Duany and Silver 2010), and (Cassanello and Shell-Weiss 2009).
125 The U.S. Census Bureau identified 18 Puerto Ricans in Tampa Bay (compared to 24 in all of Florida) in 1900. In 1910, 62 Puerto Ricans lived in Tampa Bay (compared to 78 in all of Florida). The number increased to 137 in 1920 (compared to 189 in all of Florida), and in 1930, 118 Puerto Ricans lived in Tampa Bay (Compared to 162 in all of Florida) (Duany and Silver 2010).
126 (Duany and Silver 2010).
127 (Duany and Silver 2010).
128 (Vazquez-Hernandez 2008), and (Duany and Silver 2010).
129 (Duany and Silver 2010).
130 (Duany and Matos-Rodriguez 2006).
131 (Silver 2012: 7).
132 (Duany and Silver 2010), and (El Mundo 1947:26).


King 1981:117.

Johnson 1981.

Moore 1980:207.

King 1981:127.

King 1981:127.


Johnson 1981.

Sheller 2003.

Redfield 2000), and (Darlington and Baviskar 2003).


(Cited in Aranda 2009:114).


Duany 2010:16.


Chapter 3

The 2010 US Census showed a great deal of change in America over the past 10 years. In many of the nation’s urban areas, for instance Chicago, Atlantic City, and Grand Rapids, Hispanics have grown to outnumber African Americans.

Drawing on Foucault, Arlene Davila (2001) conceptualizes “discursive formations” not simply as narrative or communicative acts, but as an “enunciative ensemble” that produces a subject within a regime of power and knowledge.

The immigrant enclave was originally conceptualized in the 1980s based on the experiences of Cuban exiles in Miami. An ethnic enclave debate developed between Portes and his colleagues, and Sanders and Nee (1987) with Portes emphasizing the significance of ethnically defined jobs as opposed to ethnic residential segregation.
In neighboring Orange County, once home to the largest Hispanic population in Central Florida, Hispanics make up 26.9% of the total population in comparison to non-Hispanic whites who comprised 46% of the total population in 2010.


The term Boricua is derived from the word “borinquen,” the name given to the island of Puerto Rico by the indigenous Taino population.


Fieldnotes 7/27/10)


In contrast, Blacks made up 7.8% of the student body in 1984, 10.3% in 1994, and projections reached 12% for 2000, whereas Asian Americans were at 2.7% in 1984, 5.2% in 1994, and projected to reach 7% in 2000.

National Center for Education Statistics, 
http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=Valencia+College&s=FL&id=138187#enrolmt, accessed 2/21/12

Buses provided by LYNX, Orlando’s public transportation system, run from 4:30am to 12:15am. Average frequency in urban areas is every 30 minutes, and outlying areas receive hourly service.

(Jackson 1985).

(Jackson 1985:6).

(Jackson 1985:4-5). Sociologist Mark Baldassare (1992) defines suburban communities broadly as “municipalities and places in metropolitan areas outside of the political boundaries of the large central cities” (Baldassare 1992:476). Each discipline defines and assigns suburban status differently. For economists it is assigned based on the functional relationship between the core and the surrounding region. For demographers it is based on residential density or community patterns. Architects assign suburban status based on building type, and sociologists on the bases of behavior or way of life (Jackson 1985).


(Aerreola 2004).

(Benedict and Kent 2004). For instance, fixed and semi-fixed feature elements—steel flags, Spanish-style faroles (light poles), plazas, Spanish colonial style building facades, and a Pedro Albizu Campos Statue—situated in specific urban locations of Chicago act as “cultural markers” (Ramos-Zayas 2003). These design elements emphasized Humboldt Park’s “Puerto-Ricanness” while bounding “Mexicanness to La Villita,” thereby marking Humboldt Park as a “Puerto Rican space (Ramos-Zayas 2003:212). In the Southwest, in another example, brilliantly painted houses combined with other feature elements created the Mexican American “housescape” (Arreola 1988). Lastly, in Puerto Rico a survey of building exteriors and interiors followed by interviews with occupants revealed the social messages communicated by the form, decorations, and furnishing of the houses with house color preference being an indicator of socioeconomic level (Jopling 1988).

See (Kent and Gandia-Ojeda 1999) for Puerto Rican yard complexes in Lorain, Ohio, (Curtis 1980) for yard shrines in Little Havana, and (Arreola 1981) for perimeter fencing in the Mexican Southwest.


(Rentre Unido436, April 20, 2011 9:08pm).

(luis Martinez, April 21, 2011 9:19pm).

(Lewis 2004).

(Yes_no_maybe, April 20, 2011 1:06pm).

(Noemi Figueroa, April 21, 2011 8:55am).

(Ernest Acosta, April 21, 8:55am).

(Dr Dolittle, April 21, 7:17am).

(keeping you honest, April 23, 2011 12:30pm).

(I Agree with Conspiracy Theory, April, 28, 2011 8:52pm).

(Azuarc, April 29, 2011 1:13pm).

(White American, April 25, 2011 8:24am).

(Curiouser, April 25, 2011 11:15am).

(Gay_Rights_Are_HUMAN_RIGHTS, April 27, 2011 10:37am).

(Medicijimfla, April 22, 2011 9:33pm).

(Kasinitz 2002: 39).


(Florida 6:05-cv-1053-Orl-31DAB)


(Jeannette Rivera-Iyles, “New Osceola County districts may boost Hispanic political clout,” Hispanosphere Blog, July 18, 2011.

(White American, July 18, 2011 3:30PM)

(Machete Rico, July 18, 2011 5:08PM)


Other megastates include California with 55 electoral votes, Texas with 38, and New York with 29.


Mike Clary and Deborah Ramírez, “Hispanic voters flex muscles - Record numbers shift from GOP,” *Sun Sentinel*, November 9, 2012.

According to a poll conducted by Miami’s Bendixen & Amandi International, Obama received 79 percent of the South American vote, including 80 percent of Colombians, 82 percent of Peruvians, 79 percent of Ecuadorians, 76 percent of Venezuelans, 75 percent of Argentineans, and 92 percent of Brazilians. “Among Central Americans, including those from Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador, 74 percent voted for Obama . . . The percentage of Mexicans in Florida who favored Obama was 66, Dominicans, 81.” Mike Clary and Deborah Ramírez, “Hispanic voters flex muscles - Record numbers shift from GOP,” *Sun Sentinel*, November 9, 2012.
Chapter 4

309 (annerk November 4, 2009).
310 (Don macauley, November 20, 2009).
311 (ComSense, November 21, 2009).
312 (lifelongMOgal November 28, 2009).
313 (Rumsey 1990:346). Judith Irvine defines languages ideologies as “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989:255), whereas “Michael Silverstein conceptualizes linguistic ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979:193).
314 (Woolard 1998). Metropolitan Orlando, also referred to as the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area, is composed of Orange, Osceola, Seminole, and Lake Counties.
316 (Zentella 1997).
318 (Marrow 2009:1038).
319 (Rodriguez 2012), and (Lippard and Gallagher 2010).
320 (Marrow 2009:1044).
321 (Marrow 2009: (1044).
322 (Roth 2012:276).
323 (Roth 2012:278).
324 (Ramos-Zayas 2003), (Ramos 2001), (Perea 2001), (Statham 2001), and (Neuman 2001).
325 (Urciuoli 1996).
326 For a discussion of white public space, see (Page 1994) and (Hill 1999).
327 (Bush 2011:3).
328 (Ignatiev 2008), and (Brodkin 1998).
329 (Grosfoguel 2005).
330 (Brown et al. 2005).
332 (Hill 2006). The term racialization signifies the extension of racial meanings to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice, or group. For a discussion of racialization in the United States, see (Omi and Winant 1986).
Victor Manuel Ramos, “Workforce Central Florida had an English-only policy,” Hispanosphere, October 5, 2011 6:02pm (Santa Ana 2002), (Zentella 2003), (Woolard 1989), (Kroskrity 2000), and (Schieffelin et al. 1998).


For a discussion of white public space, see (Page 1994) and (Hill 1999). 

Nativism is a political position that advocates for a favored status for established inhabitants, in this case an established language, as opposed to the claims and rights (ex. freedom of speech) of immigrants or migrants. (Lewis 2004:628).

Ana Celia Zentella (2009) highlights the many dialects of English that diversified the California region, including the English spoken by African American
ex-slaves, gold seekers, and the “Oakes” who escaped the dust bowl. (Zentella 2009:13).
(Silverstein 1996:295).
(Silverstein 1996:285).
(Urciuoli 2003:176).

Chapter 5

The Brookings Institute counted Puerto Ricans as part of the native-born population.
(Suro et al. 2011:1).
(Suro et al. 2011:1).
(Alba et al. 1999), (Clark 2006), (Fischer 2008), (Farrell 2008), (Frey 2001), and
(Lichter et al. 2010).
(Lichter et al. 2010).
(Carpio et al. 2011:189).
(Indiana-to-Florida, June 10, 2007, 4:41pm).
(Indiana-to-Florida, June 11, 2007, 4:08pm).
(cmj_fla, June 11, 2007, 5:07pm).
(Jfunk, June 11, 2007, 6:18pm).
(stugots32837, June 20, 2007, 11:05pm).
(NoodLes, June 21, 2007, 8:17am).
(Meinbvl, June 22, 2007, 2:32pm).
(NoodLes, July 9, 2007, 7:02pm).
According to Jessica Cattelino (2004) there are moral and performative dimensions of citizenship, and not everyone is perceived as a good citizen. The notion of active participatory citizenship characterizes efforts as “civic duty” or “civic responsibility.” This conceptualization views citizenship as a status that not only confers rights upon individuals, but requires obligations, responsibilities, and duties to the state, which can be contrasted with “passive citizenship”, a view of citizenship that entails a discourse of rights.

(Walter Pacheco, “Deputies explore trio’s ties to burglaries,” Orlando Sentinel, July 11, 2009.)

(Rene Stutzman, “Man stabbed doors away from house party,” Orlando Sentinel, October 11, 2009.)

(“It’s time to clean up this neighborhood,” Orlando Sentinel, May 16, 2009.)

(Jeannette Rivera-Iyles, “Osceola unveils BVL rescue plan,” Orlando Sentinel, April 2, 2009.)

(Ktownbound, July 8, 2007, 5:49pm.)

(Mahler 1995.)

Embodied cultural capital is the cultural capital that lives in us and is expressed through the body, and manifested as tastes (Bourdieu 1987).

(Harbord 2001.)

(Fieldnotes 7/24/10.)

(Low 2009.)

(Jeannette Rivera-Iyles, “Osceola unveils BVL rescue plan,” Orlando Sentinel, April 2, 2009.)

Chapter 6


(Boehm and Schlottmann 2004), and (Pollakowski et al. 1991).

(Cortes et al. 2006).

It is important to recognize that Florida is a “cultural patchwork,” the panhandle has more in common with the neighboring states of Alabama and Georgia than Fort...
Lauderdale or Miami (Semple 2008). Therefore, the housing units, urban design, and real estate market differs throughout the region.

(Rudolf 2009).

(Sullivan 2009)

(Christie 2009).

(Jackson 2009).

(Rivera-Iyles 2009).

Mary Shanklin. “Every Time I open the door and see the boxes there, I know my times is coming,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 6, 2009.

(Cortes et al. 2006).

In 1990, the Census expanded the number of response codes to include numerous nationalities, which revealed an even lower homeownership rate (13%) amongst Dominican households. In 2000, the national homeownership rate amongst Dominicans (20%) was lower than the rate amongst Puerto Rican households. Despite modest gains, gaps in homeownership rates persist, and numerous incidents of housing based discrimination have been noted. Most studies have identified homeownership rate gaps between Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites in the range of 20 to 40 percent (Masnick 2006). In 2005, 76% of non-Hispanic Whites were homeowners compared to 50% of Hispanics (Cortes et al. 2006).


(Neuman 2008).


(NCRC 2009).

(NCRC 2009:5).

(Calem et al. 2002), (Calem et al. 2004), (Avery et al. 2006), and (NCRC 2009).

(NCRC 2009:9).

(NCRC 2009:6).


For example, in 2007 middle and upper income Hispanic females were more than twice as likely to receive high-cost loans than middle and upper income white females in almost 62 percent of the metropolitan areas examined by NCRC. In that same year, low and moderate income Hispanic females were 1.5 times more likely than low and moderate income white females to receive high cost loans in 32 percent of the metropolitan areas examined.


(Kathy, February 17, 2010 4:17pm).

(rugaul, February 17, 2010, 5:54pm).
Chapter 7


“Don’t Blame Puerto Rico For Heroin,” Orlando Sentinel, August 1, 1996.


Dennis Freytes, “Unite To Do More,” Orlando Sentinel, October 20, 1996.

Dr. Jose Marcano, “Read Between Lines,” Orlando Sentinel, October 21, 1996.

The significance of honor and respect is highlighted in Ruth Horowitz’ (2001) Honor and the American Dream and Philippe Bourgois’ (1995) In Search of Respect. According to Horowitz, individual’s actions are publicly evaluated and judged. Their actions are a reflection of the self and are constantly challenged, therefore individuals must be ready to constantly assert and reassert their claims to honor. Attempts to “demean an individual” or “deny due respect” may be seen as “an incursion, intrusion, encroachment, presumption, defilement, besmearing, contamination—in short a violation” (Goffman 1971:44 In Horowitz 2001:23). In Bourgois’ ethnography disrespect, humiliation, and insecurity came about when the Puerto Rican men attempt to “penetrate the foreign, hostile world of high-rise office corridors” (Bourgois 1995:143).

(Bourdieu 1987: 6).

See (Veblen 1899).

(Bourdieu 1987).


(Sabogal 2005:125).

(Lopez-Sanders 2012:147).

(US Census 2010)

Myriam Marquez, “Pride, Potential Swell As Hispanic Chamber Showcases Solidarity,” Orlando Sentinel, February 17, 1995.


(Weise 2012:49).

(Weise 2012).

(Weise 2012).

(Weise 2012:50).

(Weise 2012:51).

(Weise 2012:51).

(Weise 2012:51).

(Marrow 2009:1040).

(Sabogal 2005:125).

(Sabogal 2005:126).

(Sabogal 2005: 126).


Victor Manuel Ramos, “Despite their Differences they have 3 things in common: They are-Latinas, successful and want to golf,” Orlando Sentinel, April 20, 2007.

Victor Manuel Ramos, “Despite their Differences they have 3 things in common: They are-Latinas, successful and want to golf,” Orlando Sentinel, April 20, 2007.

Victor Manuel Ramos, “Despite their Differences they have 3 things in common: They are-Latinas, successful and want to golf,” Orlando Sentinel, April 20, 2007.


(Lisa, April 22, 2010, 2:16pm).

(Josua, April 22 2010, 8:55pm).

(Cubanaso, April 23, 2010, 1:16pm).


(Sabogal 2005: 119).

(Sabogal 2005:120).

(Ramos-Zayas 2003), (Zentella 2003), and (Grosfoguel 2003).

(Duany 2010:31).
These conclusions are drawn from a sample of 121 return migrants or “nuyoricans,” and 121 non-migrant students. The students were asked to evaluate adolescents described as “raised on the mainland.”

This study was conducted between 1997-1998 and is based on ethnographic research with 41 island residents and 65 Puerto Ricans in South California.

(Verin-Shapiro 2000:17).
(Grosfoguel 2003:142).
(Ramos-Zayas 2003).
(Ramos-Zayas 2003:141).
(Ramos-Zayas 2003).
(Grosfoguel 2003).
(Duany 2010:31).
(Duany 2010:32).
(Fieldnotes 7/14/07).

Conclusion


In comparison, 41% of Hispanics lived in the West, 14% in the Northeast, and 9% in the Midwest. The Northeast census region includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Midwest census region includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The South census region includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The West census region includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

“An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury.”

“More Than 300 Counties Now ‘Majority-Minority.’”


Matthew Yglesia, “The Myth of Majority-Minority America”


Ive lived in BVL since 93 and I have seen in go steadily down hill. Its still fairly quiet, but the drugs and gangs are getting worst. Now don’t get me wrong, I moved here from Miami and yes it is better here than some place like Miami, Detroit, NY, etc, but its sad to see what was once a nice suburb start turning bad. We are looking to move out ASAP to a more ‘normal’ conservative, area Northern Rockies or the mid west. Just so you know I am ½ Cuban and my wife is from out of country (USA) its time to move and find a place that we feel safe and like we belong. The plus side of living here (low taxes, low cost of living compared to wages, and for the most part the government is not too oppressive here. (banzaim4, Junior Member, 02-22-2008, 6:59AM)

I have lived in lakeside since 1995 and i have friends who live on BVL and I don’t see nothing of what has been said I leave my door wide open and nothing ever happened I walk all over BVL and never had a problem. No I come from the south Bronx ny. Now that is crazy the crime in bvl is nothing if you come from a big city I mean back home iv’e seen things that would curl your toes. True once in a blue moon something happens the gangs comeon thease gangs are a bunch of posers some I would not even call a gang just a bunch of kids doing the same things we did as kids except now adays the old fogees forget what its like to be a kid. There is nothing bad about bvl or lakeside. As far as the otherside of the airport are you kidding if you eat at denny’s you risk getting mugged or you car being broken into that does not happen on Bvl or lakeside. I suggest if your buying a home lakeside estates the homes are beautiful and right now the homes are a bargain. And the its mixed white black hispanics Puerto Rican Indian middle eastern chinese philipino and everyone gets along and looks out for each other. (Urнемесис, Junior Member, 05-03-2008, 2:10AM)

My family and I lived in BVL for over 20 years and recently sold 2 homes in the subdivision. BVL is not a horrible place to live. I have never felt like I was ‘in danger’ while living there. There are some streets that are traveled more often and have more traffic then others. The fact that there is no HOA is why you have the ‘Run down’ feeling. It has gotten busier with traffic as the area surrounding BVL has grown. There is nothing wrong with the community other then it is an older community with no HOA. I now live in Hunter’s Creek. The HOA is expensive, there is a $500 transfer fee that is added to your cost when first purchasing a home or condo in Hunters Creek. They do enforce the HOA> This will keep the integrity of the community as time goes on. . . . (kpavlick, Junior Member, 5-4-2008, 9:59PM)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2002. “We are all Americans!: the Latin Americanization of racial stratification in the USA.” *Race & Society* Vol. 5: 3-16.


Clark, R. Georgians’ Attitudes and Opinions about Immigration. Peach State Poll Athens, Greece: Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia.


