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Industrial Change, Immigration, and Community Development

An Overview of Europeans and Latinos

Ramón F. Borges-Méndez, Ph.D.

The industrial forces and conditions of Massachusetts that awaited and attracted European immigrants were vastly different from those encountered by the more recent wave of Latino immigrants. This study seeks to compare and clarify what those forces and conditions were at three different times, especially in the small mill towns of Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke. The objective is to delineate a historical backdrop to allow an understanding of the present situation of Latinos in those cities and, to some extent, within the commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Using a common historical yardstick to measure the successful insertion — or lack thereof — of different immigrant groups into American economic life is a simplistic exercise that sustains false notions or stereotypes about the reasons why some immigrant groups have a harder time “making it.” Even in informed public policy and academic circles, it is common to hear the question, If previous immigrants made it, why are Latinos not making it? Needless to say, the answer to this charged question is elaborate, complex, and difficult, especially in a climate in which economic history is tinged by cultural xenophobia and the fear of strangers precludes an in-depth analysis of the conditions of entry and of the structural avenues of opportunity which different immigrant groups confront at different times.

Latinos are indeed having a hard time making it, yet few among those who pose this question can say anything of substance about the historical conditions that have led to this situation. Fewer still can compare the history and experience of Latino economic inclusion with that of previous immigrant groups. How can such a comparative analysis contribute to our understanding of the structural disadvantages Latinos have confronted to date?

The Massachusetts industrial forces and conditions that attracted and previously awaited mainly European immigrants were vastly different from those encountered by more recent Latino immigrants. This study seeks to compare and clarify what those forces and conditions were at three different times, especially in the three small mill towns of Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke.¹ Its objective is to provide a historical backdrop to allow an understanding of the present situation of Latinos in those cities and, to some extent, within the commonwealth.

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“The Massachusetts miracle of the 1980s failed to deliver a better labor market and socioeconomic standing for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in small and large cities and relative to other racial groups in the population. The 1980s poverty rates remained at the high levels of the 1970s; Massachusetts became the state with the largest Latino poverty rate in the nation.

— Ramón F. Borges-Méndez

The first section covers the period of early industrialization, 1830–1890, when Irish, British, German, and French-Canadian immigrants represented the main supply of labor for a growing manufacturing sector. The second section covers the period of monopolistic expansion and early deindustrialization, 1890–1950, when largely Southern and Eastern European immigrants comprised the labor force of mill towns. The final section considers the post–World War II period of drastic industrial restructuring, when Puerto Ricans and other Latino subgroups became an important segment of the labor force in the manufacturing and other sectors of mill towns like Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke.

Early Industrialization and Expansion

In the early nineteenth century, there were no manufacturing cities in the United States. The largest cities of the Northeast — Boston, Philadelphia, and New York — were largely merchant or government centers. Manufacturing was largely undertaken in households and small mills; production was local and neighborhood-oriented. In 1820, about two-thirds of the clothing worn in the United States was the product of household manufacture. New England, with no division of labor in its economy, reflected the national picture: farmers combined household manufacture with their agricultural occupations and mechanics usually combined farming with their trades. More than 90 percent of the population lived by agriculture.² This panorama changed rapidly as the region entered the second quarter of the century.

New England, the birthplace of the industrial revolution, was the first U.S. region to industrialize. Between 1810 and 1870, early industrialization transformed New England Yankee rural society, introducing new ideas and the factory system and causing rapid urbanization. In Massachusetts, new mills and factory towns rapidly opened throughout the state — textiles, woolen, and paper goods in Lowell, Lawrence, Fall River, New Bedford, Chicopee, Waltham, and Holyoke; shoes in Lynn, Brockton, Haverhill, and Randolph. Lowell, chartered in 1826, became the most important and largest antebellum manufacturing town, boasting the first “integrated” factory to produce cotton cloth.³ By 1840, Lowell, with a population of 20,796, was the second largest city in the commonwealth.⁴ Lawrence and Holyoke, planned and built between 1845 and 1850 by the same group of industrialists who founded Lowell, also became important manufacturing centers.

This transformation, however, demanded something more than innovative technologies and modern cities, namely, abundant and steady sources of labor. During the early years of textile production in cities like Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke, owners recruited farm girls from rural New England to work in their mills. The girls’ lives were regulated by a strict moral order of “decent living” and “high intellectual activity” under the paternalistic supervision of boardinghouses maintained by the mill owners.⁵ But the pace of urban and industrial growth and the girls’ resistance to deteriorating wages, excessive work, and speedups encouraged industrialists to seek additional labor elsewhere.

To remedy the labor shortages, Massachusetts and New England industrialists encouraged migration to the emerging industrial enclaves in the countryside.⁶ But encouraging immigration inspired social unease in the native population as it implied opening and exposing New England’s agrarian society to the influence of external “unruly elements.” The fear of proliferating “American Manchesters” with “masses” living in the “grim and immoral” shadow of industrial cities entered on a collision course

with the Jeffersonian utopia of “industrial pastoralism,” which had been the foundation upon which “rural industrial centers” such as Lowell and Lawrence had been built.⁷ In this ideological context, immigrants were welcomed by industrialists, but heavily ostracized by natives.

In Lowell, as in Lawrence, Holyoke, and other industrial towns, the Irish were the first immigrants recruited to work in the mills. Mostly Irish women gradually replaced the mill girls and were used to accelerate the breakdown and assimilation of resilient craft guilds and to apply mass-production techniques to the manufacturing of textiles.⁸ The first Irish in the new industrial towns were males recruited by gang bosses to build the mills and the water canals that powered them. Most had been in America for a few years, either in Boston or in tiny Irish colonies along the New England coastline.⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, social networks spread the word throughout the region that work opportunities were available in the construction gangs building the new industrial cities. Irish men from as far away as Canada and New York were attracted and recruited by gang bosses. Irish workers camped near the construction sites, where Irish communities eventually developed when some workers brought their families. These “paddy camps,” which became a permanent feature of many cities, gave rise to the first Irish communities.¹⁰ The building boom, however, was not large enough to generate migration directly from Ireland. Later, the potato famine would add large numbers of immigrants to the initial group of Irish, contributing to the internal differentiation of the community.¹¹

Large numbers of Irish “famine immigrants” began arriving in Lowell around 1846. When this migratory wave subsided, the Massachusetts state census of 1855 placed the foreign-born Irish at 27.6 percent of the general population of Lowell.¹² At the mills, the Irish held unskilled jobs. Famine immigration, the opening of the mills, and economic improvement on the part of the first Irish contributed to the formation of Irish working and middle classes. The Irish middle class and the Catholic church became the social and political mediators between the Yankee establishment and the Irish working class. By the late 1850s, Lowell had changed from a Yankee mill city to an immigrant city, and the Irish were the first to experience the full lash of the nascent nativism.¹³

The end of the Civil War and the triumph of the manufacturing North further accelerated industrial expansion, which in turn required more labor. During this period of early industrialization, three other groups joined the Irish: the British, the Germans, and the French-Canadians. The British and the Germans immigrants, directly recruited by mill owners to staff skilled craft jobs in the mills, were experienced textile operatives who had worked in the mills and textile districts of York, Lancashire, Cheshire, Saxony, Bavaria, and Silesia.¹⁴ Between 1865 and 1890, there were more English in Lawrence and Lowell than in Holyoke. The English contingent in Lawrence and Lowell was as large as the French-Canadian contingent until the 1890s, when the number of Canadians moved far ahead. In Holyoke, except for the Irish, the French-Canadians were always the largest group.

The English did not establish organizations or other major institutions because they encountered no linguistic or religious conflict with the natives, at least not until the late 1880s and early 1900s, when they became active in the labor struggles of many New England mill towns. The Germans, who were more numerous in Lawrence than in other cities, established gymnasiums, political and cultural discussion circles, glee clubs, schools, newspapers, and several churches.¹⁵ French-Canadians, in contrast to British and German immigrants, came from a rural background. They trickled down to New

England through the railroad lines of the Connecticut and Merrimack river valleys, pushed out by famine, poor crops, and overpopulation in the St. Lawrence River Valley, or directly recruited by labor agents working for mill owners. Some French-Canadians were contacted and transported from the rural areas of Quebec. Recruiting them directly became a standard practice to meet labor shortages, but also to eliminate “restless” English operatives whom mill owners found “insufficiently docile.”¹⁶

In the working-class districts of many New England mill towns, French-Canadians formed “Little Canada” to meet their social and institutional needs and to shield themselves against the general ostracism they were subjected to by the local population. For instance, there were about ten thousand French-Canadians in Lowell by 1880; they organized a French-Canadian parish, the first national parish in the history of the Boston archdiocese.¹⁷ By 1890 French-Canadians outnumbered the Irish, becoming the city’s largest ethnic group. In Lawrence, the number of French-Canadians grew more than that of any other group, except for the Irish, during 1860 to 1900: they comprised one-fifth of the immigrants living there in 1890.¹⁸ They moved quickly to build schools, parishes, religious-based mutual aid societies, and several newspapers.

In French-Canadian communities the ideology of *la survivance*, “ethnic survival,” dominated, regulated, and interconnected the spheres of community, family, and work. *La survivance* combined the principles of hard work, linguistic and group preservation, fervent Catholicism, and closely knit family life. This secluded enclave life served to maintain contact with Canada and other French-Canadian communities throughout Massachusetts and New England. This was especially important since many French-Canadians often traveled back and forth between Canada and New England as a strategy to survive seasonal fluctuations in the textile industry.¹⁹

The origin and development of the first immigrant communities in Massachusetts were linked to the early attempts of industrialists to create a steady and wage-dependent labor force for the expanding manufacturing industries in the new industrial cities. Immigrants created communities and organizations in these cities to shield themselves from social ostracism and the instability of the new industrial structure. Nativism often flared when economic “panics” threw manufacturing industries into long periods of idleness.²⁰

The labor of Irish, British, German, and French-Canadian workers facilitated the transition to an industrial order increasingly driven by the search for higher productivity through the progressive vertical integration of industry, the development of standardized machinery, and a stronger work discipline.²¹ Their job opportunities, however, were mainly framed by the extensive rather than the intensive development of industry.²² Thus, skilled immigrants, like most British and German workers, by preserving their crafts and exerting control over key aspects of production, were “assured” a good living and occupational stability. Also, many unskilled immigrant workers, like the Irish, had the ability to move up the occupational ladder, or into other sectors, because the economy was expanding and the intensive development of manufacturing had not “frozen” vertical mobility and skill development.

In textiles, the first mass-production industry, the deskilling of workers and decomposition of crafts through aggressive routinization and mechanization were far more advanced than in other industries. In many smaller and independent workshops, in contrast, occupational differentiation and mobility was rather lax and fluid because standardized machinery and continuous-process technology had not fully assumed, routinized, and replaced the skills of many craft workers; in addition, the functions of com-

mand and control in the workplace were not clearly demarcated by separating workers from managers and managers from owners.²³

As the monopolistic era approached, immigrants had access to a growing pool of jobs which, albeit poorly paid, at least offered a minimal degree of opportunity. Also, sectoral diversification and urban growth offered other opportunities in government, domestic work, and construction. For example, the British and the Germans in Lowell and Lawrence experienced occupational diversification and mobility by the 1880s, although in the mid-nineteenth century they had entered as skilled workers.²⁴ The Irish also experienced upward mobility. From 1840 to 1880, they were mainly construction workers, domestics, and factory workers, but by 1900 they were much better off as one in six was employed professionally or in a trade. While only two occupations were required to employ two-thirds of the Irish in 1880, nine occupations were necessary to account for two-thirds of them in 1900.²⁵ The French-Canadians, however, showed a different pattern. While their range of occupations had diversified by 1900, most of them continued as mill laborers.²⁶

Monopolistic Expansion and Early Deindustrialization, 1890–1950: Southern and Eastern European Immigrants

Between 1880 and 1920, many of the small, independent factories that characterized the period of early industrialization gave way to much larger corporate entities which, as a result of the 1893 depression, were reconsolidated into large, multiunit, multiplant, powerful trusts.²⁷ An abundant supply of unskilled jobs was created by the vertical integration of monopolistic entities, the fragmentation of skills and deskilling brought about by technological standardization, and the centralization of command and control functions in the hands of managers.²⁸

By 1910 in Lawrence, for example, the American Woolen Company, the first textile trust in the United States and the city's largest employer, had 12,000 largely unskilled operatives; by 1919 the company operated fifty mills all over New England.²⁹ The city was the world's largest producer of worsted wool and the site of the three largest textile mills in the United States: Pacific Mills, Arlington Mills, and American Woolen Company. In Holyoke, the American Writing Paper Company of New Jersey reconsolidated sixteen independent paper producers under one major holding, which included nine other paper mills in the Northeast.³⁰

This growth and restructuring created a large demand for labor, which industrialists remedied by encouraging immigration. Immigrants were recruited en masse from the capitalist periphery of Southern and Eastern Europe.³¹ Massachusetts's mill towns, already major centers of immigrant concentration by the mid-nineteenth century, extended their domination into the 1920s. In 1920, four of the eight U.S. cities with the largest proportion of foreign born were in Massachusetts: Fall River first, with 47.7 percent; Lawrence third, with 45.7 percent; Lowell sixth, with 43 percent; and Holyoke eighth, with 41.4 percent.³² Southern Europeans (Italians, Greeks, and Portuguese) and Eastern Europeans (Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, Russians, and Ukrainians) added 15,000 people, or an extra 25 percent, to Lawrence's population between 1905 and 1910.³³

The recruitment and employment of newer immigrants produced various patterns of occupational segmentation and concentration, which generally favored older, Western European male immigrants. In Lowell's textile industry, for instance, Irish women were squeezed out of unskilled jobs by newer immigrants hired at lower wages and forced

into personal, domestic, and household work. Irish men, in contrast, moved into more skilled positions in the mills or into the government and service sectors.³⁴

The worst jobs usually went to the newcomers, who also experienced poor living conditions because cities were not prepared to receive such large inflows of people. For instance, Lawrence's housing stock could not absorb the massive entrance of new immigrants. Conditions in the crowded tenements deteriorated; disease, infant mortality, malnutrition, violence, and fires all increased. In 1910, Lawrence, in the top 10 percent of American cities in persons per household, had the highest mortality rate in the state and the sixth highest in the nation.³⁵ During this period, immigrants confronted reduced opportunities for occupational mobility because the jobs being created were mainly unskilled. They derived economic progress from the abundance of jobs, the rise of industrial unionism and organized labor, and governmental intervention through the regulation of some aspects of the employment relationship: child labor laws, unemployment insurance, accident compensation, health codes, and regulation of working hours.³⁶ In Lawrence, for example, the new immigrants organized two major strikes that commanded national and international attention: the Bread and Roses Strike of 1912 and the strike of 1919, which resulted in the creation of the Amalgamated Textile Workers of America. These two strikes were landmarks in the development of the American labor movement because they showed the organizational capability and political potential of immigrant workers and influenced a broad range of public policies, including immigration procedures.³⁷

In both these strikes, as in many others around the nation, ethnic-based committees and communities served as the backbone for organizing labor activity. Many ethnic groups brought from their countries of origin experiences that were key to their adaptation and survival in the United States, and to the labor struggles they waged. For example, most of the Italians who settled in Lawrence were from provinces south of Rome and from Sicily. Largely a peasant population, they had struggled with landed bosses against coerced agricultural work; in their new home, they organized their social life along strong village lines which were key in the creation of mutual aid societies that sponsored labor activities.³⁸ Similarly, Lithuanians, much like Jews, came to many industrial towns having endured severe exploitation and persecution under Polish landowners and czarist soldiers, which forced them to organize secret schools and support resistance institutions. This experience proved to be extremely important in organizing against large and often brutal employers.³⁹

The massive growth of manufacturing in Massachusetts, however, started faltering during the mid-1920s, when textile and other basic manufacturers, seeking a better "business climate," left for the South and other U.S. locations.⁴⁰ After a brief boom during World War I, the textile and paper industries showed the first signs of decline. During the early 1920s, Massachusetts led the nation in total value of manufactured cotton goods, the number of spindles in place, and the number of employees in the cotton industry. In 1919, 28 percent of the total value of cotton goods produced in the United States was manufactured in Massachusetts; by 1921, its share declined to 24.6 percent. Massachusetts lost its first place in cotton manufacturing to North Carolina in 1926 and yielded second place to South Carolina by 1929. In 1935, Massachusetts cotton production accounted for only 10.7 percent of the country's total product. Between 1920 and the outbreak of World War II, Massachusetts lost nearly 45 percent of its textile production jobs.⁴¹ In Lowell in 1919, there were 12,000 workers in cotton manufacture; by 1936, only 3,000, a decline of 75 percent.⁴² In Holyoke, the decline in the paper industry

was not much different. The major producer, American Writing Paper Company, was originally a thirty-three-plant trust with sixteen mills in Holyoke. During the second decade of this century the “corporate monster” became increasingly difficult to manage. Competition, failure to integrate sources of raw materials, and obsolete machinery led to its demise; the gradual liquidation of its operations culminated in bankruptcy in 1923.⁴³ Industrial decline destroyed the ability of the immigrant working family to reproduce economically. Family connections at the mills were central in ensuring the employment of future generations. Decline and elimination of jobs interrupted the linkages between families and employment; without those connections newer generations found it increasingly difficult to find employment. The family labor system and the bonds of ethnic life began to dissolve with industrial decline.⁴⁴

The Great Depression dealt a heavy blow to basic manufacturing in Massachusetts. Subsequently, World War II briefly revived the textile and shoe industries of many mill towns, and in some cases the new war-based industries diversified their economic base. The short-term prosperity brought about by the war, however, did not imply long-term prosperity for mill towns, which returned during the 1950s to their depressed status.⁴⁵ More plants and mills closed and more jobs left the area. During the 1950s, a second phase of deindustrialization began, but it was not solely confined to low-wage industries like textiles. For instance, in western Massachusetts, American Bosch, a Springfield-based electrical goods producer, sent 500 jobs to Mississippi, and Westinghouse-Springfield threatened to make the same move.⁴⁶

Some technological developments — standardization, energy production, ventilation, and transportation — dislodged basic manufacturing industries from their natural location advantages, but state regulation and labor militancy also placed limits on capital’s ability to operate freely. This motivated many industrialists to disinvest and move away. The restrictionist policies of the 1920s also reduced immigration and thus the ability of the sector to restructure by employing new sources of labor. Not until the late 1960s was Massachusetts basic manufacturing able to tap into new sources of immigrant labor from Latin America, although this time it rode its decline and made possible its limited survival throughout a period of drastic restructuring.

European and French-Canadian immigrants in Massachusetts entered manufacturing during its stages of growth, although an early stage of deindustrialization severely curtailed the job prospects of many who arrived during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The wages and living standards experienced by many of these immigrants were not high; they faced poverty, exploitation, and poor working conditions. Generally, however, the growth of industry and the expansion of the economy, combined with institutional gains, offered them a basic “economic floor” from which to push their children into better opportunities. Also, they were allowed to preserve their physical communities unthreatened by urban renewal or by speculation in real estate markets, with which more recent Latin American and Southeast Asian immigrants would have to contend.

Industrial Restructuring, 1960–1990: Puerto Rican and Latino Immigrants

New England and Massachusetts experienced their first phase of deindustrialization long before World War II, when basic manufacturing — textiles, shoes, metal machinery — moved to the South and other regions of the United States. After a brief revival during the war, the region’s manufacturing continued to decline. Between 1955 and 1975, business closings through actual failure were greater in New England than in most industrial

states; the manufacturing firms that remained in the area cut employment substantially. For instance, between 1967 and 1972, Massachusetts lost more than 112,000 jobs in basic manufacturing, a pattern of decline that was not reversed until 1978.⁴⁷

Between the late 1950s and mid-1970s, parallel with the decline in basic manufacturing, high-tech manufacturing developed in the region. Initially, war industries established and owned by the government were transferred to private hands, while existing firms and corporations — General Electric, Western Electric, Pratt and Whitney, Textron — restructured and diversified as a result of the immediate post-World War II bonanza. The early and mid-1960s saw the development of another wave of high-tech firms; these were largely dependent on the university-government-military complex, which funneled federal research grants into the region. In suburbs surrounding Boston and cities and towns north of Boston along Route 128, high-tech corporations such as Raytheon, Data General, Digital Equipment Corporation, Prime Computer, and Wang, started or greatly expanded operations. By the late 1960s, high technology had taken firm root in Massachusetts, accounting for nearly 10 percent of total employment.⁴⁸

As the Vietnam War wound down, New England's share of federal military contract awards decreased, setting the region up for another phase of deindustrialization affecting employment in high-tech industries.⁴⁹ After the oil shocks of the early 1970s, defense funding again increased, and the high-tech sector, producing more for the civilian market, began to relinquish its dependency on defense contracts; the service sectors led by business services expanded.⁵⁰ By the end of the 1970s, the new industrial structure of Massachusetts and New England consisted of five sectors: (1) declining labor-intensive, mill-based industries employing tractable labor and old technologies; (2) surviving mill-based industries producing mainly consumption goods through a combination of product specialization, substantial mechanization, computerization, and the use of relatively cheap sources of labor; (3) subcontracting manufacturing firms making capital goods for domestic and foreign producers; (4) high-tech firms making computers and peripherals and a wide variety of military, scientific, and medical equipment; and (5) expanding service sectors.⁵¹

Except for the 1982 recession, economic expansion continued until the late 1980s, earning Massachusetts its reputation as an economic miracle. Between 1979 and the first quarter of 1988, more than 400,000 net new jobs were created, the value of new construction doubled, and the growth in high-tech industries was dramatic.⁵² The unemployment rate between 1984 and 1988 was below 4 percent; the state was heralded as a successful case of reindustrialization.⁵³

From the 1920s to the 1960s, Massachusetts cities and towns saw very little immigration. But during this period of decline and restructuring the Puerto Rican and Latino populations started to grow rapidly. In 1960, the U.S. census reported a total of 5,217 Puerto Ricans living in Massachusetts. During the 1950s and 1960s, mostly Puerto Ricans were recruited as seasonal agricultural workers for the tobacco farms of western Massachusetts and the Connecticut River Valley, in the cranberry bogs of southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and in the apple orchards and vegetable fields of the Merrimack River Valley in northeastern Massachusetts along the New Hampshire border.⁵⁴ Throughout this period, some of them dropped out of the seasonal stream and established sizable communities in large cities such as Boston, Springfield, and Worcester and in smaller colonias of fewer than a hundred people in smaller cities such as Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, and Chelsea.⁵⁵

Puerto Ricans tended to concentrate in manufacturing, but in western Massachusetts

many continued in seasonal agricultural work or complemented it with unskilled manufacturing employment during the winter. Not all Puerto Ricans and Latinos were enlisted as agricultural workers. Some were directly recruited in Puerto Rico and Latin America, particularly Colombia, by Massachusetts manufacturers to work in textile and other labor-intensive manufacturing industries. Others, attracted by “opportunities” available in Massachusetts’s basic manufacturing, simply came from other New England locations.⁵⁶ In 1970, the number of Latinos in Massachusetts increased to 64,680. They became firmly rooted in secondary, declining, and labor-intensive manufacturing firms, mainly occupying unskilled and low-skill jobs.⁵⁷ About 40 percent of the Latinos were Puerto Rican or of Puerto Rican descent.⁵⁸

Primarily a working-class population, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos became involved during the late 1960s in numerous community struggles in cities such as Boston and Springfield, and in smaller cities such as Lawrence and Holyoke.⁵⁹ In large and small cities alike, the general social turmoil of the period framed the collective action of Latinos, who mobilized to defend their rights and communities against racial discrimination, urban renewal, and the lack of access to social and economic resources: housing, employment and training, and bilingual education.

Their struggles yielded some of the first Latino organizations in these cities and, for that matter, in Massachusetts. For instance, Boston Puerto Ricans and Latinos organized to fight the urban renewal and redevelopment plans that the Boston Redevelopment Authority had drawn for Parcel 19.⁶⁰ This battle gave rise to the Emergency Tenants Council and eventually to *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción* (IBA), nationally one of the most important community-based development efforts that came out of the period.⁶¹ In Springfield, a coalition of agricultural workers, recently arrived Vietnam veterans, and union and political activists formed the New England Farm Workers Council (NEFWC) to defend the rights of the region’s Latino agricultural workers. Today, both IBA and NEFWC are relatively large human and social service organizations with multimillion-dollar operating budgets.

Massachusetts’s Latino population more than doubled between 1970 and 1980, growing from 64,680 to 141,043. During the same period, the number of Puerto Ricans more than tripled, from 24,561 to 76,450, representing about 54 percent of the state’s total Latino population. In 1970 there were six Massachusetts cities where Latinos represented between 2 and 5.9 percent of the total population. By 1980 this number expanded to twenty cities. Moreover, Latinos in the cities of Chelsea and Holyoke grew to represent between 6 and 9.9 percent of the total population; in Lawrence, Latinos comprised more than 15 percent of the total population.⁶²

The growth of the Puerto Rican and Latino population was accompanied by a deterioration of their socioeconomic status. Between 1970 and 1980, poverty rates for Latinos increased to levels above the 35 percent mark in all major centers of concentration such as Boston, Springfield, Worcester, New Bedford, Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke.⁶³ Latinos also had the highest poverty rate relative to other racial groups. This deterioration was the result not only of the convergence of such factors as rapid population growth, geographic concentration, age distribution, and household composition of the Latino population, but most important, of drastic changes in the industrial structure of the state, which slowly built obstacles to the successful incorporation of Latinos into the labor market.⁶⁴

Perhaps the relative concentration of Latinos in manufacturing during 1970 to 1980, especially in certain regions of the state, may have contributed to the overall deteriora-

tion of their socioeconomic welfare. This is particularly important because the sector at large was undergoing dramatic change and decline. In 1970, 29 percent of the whites and 26 percent of the blacks in Massachusetts were employed in manufacturing, and 38 percent of the employed Latinos were in that sector. By 1980, the percentage of whites and blacks in manufacturing as a share of each group's total employment had decreased to 26 percent and 23 percent, respectively; for Latinos, the share had increased to 42 percent. Boston aside, the concentration of Latinos in manufacturing in selected standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSAs) was even higher. For instance, in 1980 in the Lawrence-Haverhill SMSA, 37 percent of the whites and 58 percent of the blacks employed had manufacturing jobs; of the total number of Latinos employed, 72 percent were employed in manufacturing.⁶⁵

The decline of manufacturing dominated the employment picture of Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke from 1967 to 1988. During the same period, service jobs in the three cities expanded continually, albeit at a slower pace than in larger cities such as Boston, Springfield, and Worcester. Decline was relatively more severe in Lawrence and Holyoke than in Lowell. Lowell's local economy was more stable owing to the presence of high-tech firms with substantial job opportunities in manufacturing. However, once those jobs were accounted for, the employment picture in manufacturing was no different from that of the other two cities.⁶⁶

The Puerto Rican and Latino populations in Massachusetts doubled in size between 1980 and 1990,⁶⁷ producing an expansion of colonias and older barrios in large cities like Boston and Springfield, as well as in smaller cities like Lowell, Lawrence, Holyoke, and Chelsea.⁶⁸ Newer colonias formed in small cities like Leominster and Somerville. Between 1980 and 1990, the total number of cities in the commonwealth where Latinos represented between 2 and 5.9 percent of the total population remained steady at around twenty. Five cities climbed into the next category of concentration, where Latinos represented between 6 and 9.9 percent of the population, bringing the total number of these cities to eight. The number of cities where Latinos represented 15 percent or more of the total population increased from one (Lawrence) in 1980 to four (Lawrence, Holyoke, Chelsea, and Springfield) in 1990.⁶⁹

This growth may have increased Latino poverty, but only by complementing a longstanding situation of structural turmoil in the local economy of small manufacturing cities for which Puerto Ricans and Latinos became a "good labor match" between tractable labor and a patchwork of modernizing, declining, or downsizing manufacturing.⁷⁰ During the 1970s and 1980s, Puerto Ricans and Latinos were either recruited or hired in manufacturing when the sector was modernizing and restructuring in order to downsize or liquidate operations. More specifically, Puerto Ricans and Latinos found little entry into the high-tech firms of the region, but they became a preferred source of labor to ride the decline or to extend the life of struggling labor-intensive manufacturing, especially in small cities like Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke.⁷¹ This situation largely affected their labor-market outcomes negatively.

The Massachusetts miracle of the 1980s failed to deliver a better labor market and socioeconomic standing for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in small and large cities and relative to other racial groups in the population.⁷² The 1980s poverty rates remained at the high levels of the 1970s; Massachusetts became the state with the largest Latino poverty rate in the nation.⁷³ In spite of their poverty, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos continued to make institutional advances in state and local government and communal and political organization.⁷⁴ For example, in 1989 the first Latino, Puerto Rican Nelson

Merced, was elected to represent the 5th Suffolk District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. In recent years, other Latinos have been elected to public office in Holyoke, Chelsea, Amherst, and Lawrence.

Like previous immigrants, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos became part of the social and economic fabric of Massachusetts during a period of structural economic turmoil. Also like previous immigrants, they have struggled socially and politically to defend their communities and to “build community.” However, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, unlike previous immigrants, have contended with secular trends of irreversible decline in key manufacturing sectors, customarily a main entry point for immigrants into the labor market. The service jobs available to them tend to pay relatively low wages and offer little opportunity for mobility or progress. Under such circumstances of structural change, the avenues for Latino economic progress and mobility have largely become dead-end streets that have led to growing poverty and a disadvantaged labor market standing.⁷⁵

The long-term implications may be that Latinos, unlike previous immigrants, will not have the same opportunities to transfer economic mobility to future generations. The overall framework within which policymakers “evaluate” the relative “economic performance” of Latinos needs to take into account the current economic environment of rapid economic restructuring, which apparently closes more doors than it opens.⁷⁶

Notes

1. Since this article is limited to the experience of immigrants throughout the industrial development of these three cities, the African-American and Asian experiences lie beyond its scope. The latter have been especially important in the recent history of Lowell, although not immediately related to the industrial history of the city.
2. T. Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975); A. Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and C. Siracusa, *A Mechanical People: Perceptions of the Industrial Order in Massachusetts, 1815–1880* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1979).
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53. See *ibid.* The sharp declines in unemployment during the late 1970s and 1980s seem to have been at least as much the result of lower-than-average labor-force growth, including net outmigration from the state, as of unusually rapid job creation *per se*.
54. R. F. Borges-Méndez, "Migration, Social Networks, Poverty and the Regionalization of Puerto Rican Settlements: Barrio Formation in Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke, Massachusetts," *Latino Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (May 1993): 321; R. F. Borges-Méndez, "Urban and Regional Restructuring and Barrio Formation in Massachusetts: The Cases of Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke," Ph.D. diss., MIT, 1994.
55. Following V. Sanchez-Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), I use the Spanish word "colonia" to identify the original concentration of Puerto Ricans in any particular city. More often than not it consists of a relatively small number of Puerto Ricans concentrated in a few city blocks. The formation of a colonia precedes the formation of a barrio.

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