

The Rutgers Latino Studies Research Initiative

LSRI Symposium

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Recent Research by Rutgers Faculty and Graduate Students

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The Rutgers Latino Studies Research Initiative is a collaborative project started in the Spring of 2016 by Henry Rutgers Term Chair Lilia Fernandez and Professor Aldo Lauria Santiago. Its goal is to encourage and explore the study of Latinos and establish links to Latino communities. We hope to establish a permanent Latino Studies Institute at Rutgers within a few years. The Initiative is advised by twelve faculty members drawn from different disciplines, schools and campuses at Rutgers University. Please contact the Co-Coordinator to join our mailing list and stay informed of future events and programs:

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Latinas at the Super Bowl: Latinidad through the (Non-)Racialized Woman's Body and Media Discourse

This is and is not another paper about Jennifer Lopez as a site of negotiating Latinidad or of Latino identities' intersections with citizenship, assimilation, colorism, or crossing over. It is about Lopez because she has come forth (again) as a key figure of Latina representation in the United States (and beyond) when co-headlining the Super Bowl Halftime with Shakira in 2020. It is not about JLo because this paper is about how Latinx identity—like Latino and Hispanic before it—in the US has been codified and resists that codification. Overall, it is about Latinidad through the racialized and non-racialized woman's body and the ways in which media discourse is engaged and refused by Latinx and non-Latinx individuals in discussing what Latinidad signifies. This case study is but one within a larger project (my dissertation) that explores the implications of data and digital media content on the quality of life of the panethnic group Latinx by investigating the formations of Hispanic, Latino, and Latinx in the US.

As G. Christina Mora has revealed, Hispanics in the US were made and it was an united effort between government officials, activists, and media executives in the 1970s and 1980s (2014). Before the introduction of the Hispanic category on the US census, there was no identification of this group. The Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People (CCOSSP) under Nixon spent much of 1970s ascertaining the opinions of those this committee was supposed to represent. If issues with this population group were to be taken seriously it had to be documented by an official government report; however, nationally represented data was unavailable. The main data collection agencies, such as the Census Bureau and the Department of Labor, categorized Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans as white and Anglos, and most referred to themselves by nationality (Mora, 2014, p. 37). The CCOSSP lobbied the Census Bureau about this issue as early as 1969, eventually resulting in a Spanish-origin question on the 1970 census form. This allowed the first large reports of this group to be released by the CCOSSP in late 1970.

With creating this category, politicians and bureaucrats argued it was less about nationality and more about assimilation—they believed Hispanics would become white over time. The utilization of the term Spanish-origin and Spanish-speaking would refer to Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latin Americans, and their descendants who had not yet assimilated (p. 35).

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This notion that the Spanish-speaking sought upward mobility, moving towards whiteness, continues to burden these communities. It is no accident that the introduction of this category would also influence data collection and use of digital technology, like surveillance over those considered at first Spanish-speaking then Hispanic. This surveillance led to increases of detention, deportation, and death. This is something that Jennifer Lopez protests in her performance and which arouses debate. A mobilization by media executives of census data, marketing reports, purchasing power studies, that catered to the Miami and national stage made this show possible and set the stage for reaction by its audience.

Like most media representations of Latinxs, it makes possible to recognize something known as Latinidad. JLo doing the halftime show, its subtle attempts of protest, its location, music, and dance, is all part of a trajectory of how Latinidad is defined through data and the publicized Latina body. To understand this, it is necessary to recognize how the category Hispanic/Latino/Latinx functions to allow recognition and provide statistics for stakeholders. In doing so, information also becomes available for surveillance. Data becomes mobilized to police and control. The reality of this has become quite evident today. The current COVID-19 pandemic has ignited a massive expansion of government surveillance of the civil population on national and global levels at an unprecedented rate not even seen after 9/11. After the September 11th attacks, the US promoted an anti-terrorist campaign that made the public hand over their privacy, their freedoms, in panic. To protect against terrorism, the government sought to strengthen its borders. This effectively strengthened the policing of the US/Mexican border—where once it was thought people came to work, now they were potential terrorists. In 2020, the US population panics again and this time most are restricted to their home. It provides only a glimpse of what detention may be like for the thousands of immigrants, many from south of the border, who are currently locked up, away from their families, denied human rights and resources. Following the September 11th attacks, domestic and international mass surveillance capabilities increased immensely. Right now, in response to the pandemic, it is being used to make sure we are staying home, circulate critical information, provide case and death counts. Although this may seem unprecedented for the US American population, Hispanics have experienced this sort of surveillance since becoming a panethnic category. In order to maintain this category, it must continuously adapt to be functional. By utilizing targeted media content in both English-language and Spanish-language media, this major annual televised event known as the Super Bowl demonstrates how this functions today.

On February 3, 2020, the National Football League (NFL) held its 2019 league championship game known as Super Bowl LIV. Amidst years of controversy over the NFL's treatment of former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, several music artists—such as Rihanna, Pink, and Cardi B—have reportedly denied invitations to star in the renowned half time show in support of Kaepernick (Heyn, 2020). Officially known as the Pepsi Super Bowl LIV Halftime Show, the

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headliner acts included Jennifer Lopez and Shakira with surprise guests Bad Bunny and J Balvin. This was the first time two Latinas have headlined the event, the first Latina headline performer being Miami-based Cuban American popstar Gloria Estefan in 1992. Estefan would headline again in 1999 alongside Stevie Wonder in Miami. This year's Halftime show had many asking who is Latina? Who is Latinx? Behind these questions lies the ongoing construction and reconstruction of a category, and how this category is tied to a sense of identity. By historical and cultural analysis of three Super Bowl Halftime Shows with Latina headliners (1992, 1999, 2020), I demonstrate how the construction of Hispanic/Latino/Latinx is produced through digital media and popular culture. By examining the intersections of these halftime shows and their responses from social media, journalists, and scholars, I trace the embeddedness of media and digital technology in Latinx identity and its implications for subjecthood and social relations in the US.

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Labor, Housing, Im/migrant Rights, and Policing: The History of the Santa Ana Rent Strike

This paper examines the 1985 Rent Strike in Santa Ana, California where over 500 low-income Mexican/Mexican Americans refused to pay rent while bringing legal action against their landlords. This paper analyzes how local activist Maria Rosa Ibarra, one of the leaders of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, utilized access to housing as an entry point to dealing with larger instances of state neglect, labor rights, im/migrant rights, and police violence. The Santa Ana Rent strike demonstrated how Mexican Americans and undocumented residents organized together for this common cause. It also elucidated the transnational influence of labor organizing that im/migrants brought with them to their communities in Santa Ana. The Santa Ana rent strike encapsulated contestations over public space, labor rights, and housing rights, while Mexican/Mexican Americans struggled against the increased intrusions of policing into their lives.

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Latinx Comix: Graphic Memoirs and Comic Biographies as Counter History

My project uses a content analysis of four key graphic narratives by and about Latinx individuals to investigate the connections between subjection formation, memory, and trauma: *Who is Ana Mendieta?* (2011) by Christine Redfern and Caro Caron, *Ghetto Brother: Warrior to Peacemaker* (2015) by Julian Voloj and Claudia Ahlering, Cristy C. Road's *Spit and Passion* (2012) and Lila Quintero Weaver's *Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White* (2012). I intend to develop my research project into a monograph by interviewing authors and artists of the subjects of my analysis, and by extending my research in Latinx Studies and visual culture. The Comics Series editor at the University of Mississippi Press has expressed interest in my monograph, which would be the first book-length study of Latinx graphic life stories. Specifically, within graphic novel and comics publishing, I participate in the shift toward scholarship that engages in gender and sexuality studies and critical race theory. My project places Latinx identity and subjecthood formation within a cultural and literary context. I argue that a comparative examination of these graphic narratives contests dominant narratives that either erase U.S. Latinx communities from social movements or characterize them as passive participants of history. My plan to submit a full book proposal by spring 2021.

Two key principles support my scholarship. First, comics and graphic narratives are legitimate literary texts that engage with issues of remembering trauma, place-making, and social change. I have long used comics in both my teaching and research; they provide multimodal content for students that encourage different ways of reading a story. Second, Latinx graphic memoirs and biographies represent both individual and collective narratives of marginality and subjecthood. It is the in-between space of the comic page that I posit creates new and complex understandings of diverse Latinx identities. Drawing from Gloria Anzaldúa's theorizing of *los intersticios*, or the interstice, which conceives of the in-between space that provides sanctuary for people who inhabit multiple positionalities, I apply the interstice to my analysis of the comic form—the gutter and the margins on the page—to create new ways of reading aesthetic form and cultural histories.

Graphic narratives function as a counter history by portraying how dominant societies exercise control over who is exposed to death. I argue the graphic memoir form becomes a space to deconstruct racial contradictions and offer alternative imaginings of the Latin American

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immigrant and Latinx experience. *Latinx Comix* makes a crucial intervention in both Latinx Studies and Comics Studies. Specifically, it presents new ways of reading the graphic form and positions Latinx graphic auto/biography as central to understanding the complexity of U.S. Latinx experiences of immigration, sexuality formation, and artistic practice.

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Latinos and Policing in New Jersey: Measurement Challenges

Background

‘Race and Crime’ scholarship offers a robust understanding of policed, adjudicated, and incarcerated populations. Much of this work has highlighted the bifurcated nature of many criminal justice databases, which are often useful insofar as they separate “white” from “black” subjects along inconsistent and problematic criteria (Brunson and Miller 2006; Hagan et al. 2005; Rios 2011; Romero 2006; Vera Sanchez and Gau 2015).

As a result, surprisingly little research exists on how Latino/a/x subjectivities are represented or (re)formulated within the labor forces of these justice systems, especially in policing (Lantigua-Williams 2016; Lopez and Krogstad 2017; Martinez 2007; Weitzer 2014). For police administrators, there is a similar gap in research addressing the processes by which Latinidad is formed or experienced in recruitment and retention processes (see Gustafson 2013; Jordan et al. 2009; Urbina and Alvarez 2015).

Even in urban and metropolitan communities with a) significant Spanish-speaking populations and b) relatively diversified police forces – existing police data do not provide an in-depth account of the mechanisms by which Latino/a/x and other non-white officers are hired, retained, and promoted within their respective organizations.

Relative to the U.S. population, the bulk of the policework is practiced by a comparatively homogenous group (i.e. mostly white and male). According to the latest publicly available Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey, as of January 2014, 46.2% of nationally surveyed police organizations had zero Black or African American full-time sworn personnel, and 48.2% of surveyed police organizations had zero Hispanic or Latino full-time sworn personnel (LEMAS 2013).

Given the fragmented, decentralized nature of policing in the United States, there is significant demographic variation to be found across the roughly 18,000 accredited law enforcement agencies. Much of this variation is a function of human geography, but race remains a salient factor when considering the composition of a police force in relation to that of its corresponding jurisdiction. In short, “the race gap” in U.S. policing – or the difference between the demographics of a police force and that of its service areas – is highly variable across space and jurisdiction level

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(Ashkenas and Park 2015). For example, federal agencies such as Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) have comparatively higher levels of Latino/a/x representation among their personnel, with some estimates suggesting that half of the personnel working for the latter agency are Latino (Carroll 2016; Mejia 2018).

Methodology and Approach

I use LEMAS data for assessing correlative demographic measures of New Jersey-specific police agencies. Methods include cross-tabulations may include logistic regression and quantile regression to examine trends that can correlate with nominal and ordinal-level variables. A critical discourse analysis will also be systematically applied for evaluating secondary sources. This research is funded by the Latino Studies Research Initiative of Rutgers University and the Henry Rutgers Term Chair in Latino and Caribbean Studies.

Project Relevance

Criminology and criminal justice scholarship provide a robust empirical knowledge base concerning the institutional and interpersonal manifestations of racism and racial stratification on a wide variety of issues concerning crime, criminality, and criminalization. However, much of the positivist literature relies on imperfect data sources, where the limitations and caveats of such data are not widely known to non-criminological audiences or policy-makers. Basic research on the relationship between state authority figures and the fluid, contested, and evolving notions of race and Latinidad are thus needed.

Findings from this study may be used by a variety of stakeholders, foremost of which are those who work in the criminal justice field. Across the United States, law enforcement organizations and their executives have taken various steps to diversify their police force, with particular emphasis on the ratio between a) white to non-white officers and b) male to female officers (see Coon 2016; Cordner and Cordner 2011; Hassell and Brandl 2009; Jordan et al. 2009). However, demographic diversity among top executive positions remains homogenous, despite the need for an increasingly diverse set of skills, orientations, and perspectives for addressing contemporary public safety challenges (Bolton 2003; Morabito and Shelley 2015; Raganella and White 2004; Weitzer 2015).

At a time when fundamental questions about policing are permeating the public discourse, this study can offer insights into very pragmatic questions and tensions, such as the utility and viability of Spanish language training, recruitment of native Spanish speakers, responding to service needs of localized populations, among others. While demographic diversity is no panacea for improving police service, this research aims to audit the full scale of merits and limitations of demographic data in New Jersey criminal justice systems.

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Criminal Queer or Ladies in Waiting?

I am a second-year PhD student in the History department at Rutgers-New Brunswick and a recipient of the LSRI research grant. My preliminary dissertation research has thus far explored Latinx and African American “trans” (short for transgender) history. Generally speaking, I am interested in how Latinx and African American trans communities developed in the post-WWII period. Tentatively, I suggest that persistent criminalization and increased police violence during the post-WWII period shaped a trans politics characterized by inter-racial coalitions, mutual aid, and collective experiences of incarceration/detention. My presentation would have discussed some of the archival sources I have gathered along with preliminary conclusions. I thank the LSRI committee for the financial assistance in conducting this research and hope you all enjoy my abstract. Please take care of yourselves during these trying times.

Criminal Queer or Ladies in Waiting?

In an oral history interview, Sylvia Rivera explained how prior to the 1969 Stonewall Riots, low-income trans people, many of whom were Latinx, were “ladies in waiting,” people with a built-up frustration with the status quo and long-standing experience in fighting racial, gender, and class oppression. My paper draws on oral histories, newspaper articles, and the papers of the National Latino Gay and Lesbian Organization (LLEGÓ) to give historical context to Rivera’s statement. Latinx trans people faced discrimination on the basis of their race, ethnicity, and gender variance. This made them particularly vulnerable to poverty and homelessness, criminalization by the police, and violence from straight people. One archival source I discuss, for example, involves the case of Lucia, a Colombian trans immigrant working in a Catskill, NY chicken farm, detained by immigration officials in 1972. She was the only immigrant to be confined to a private cell as well as the only “long term” detainee during that year. I explain how Lucia’s ethnoracial identity made her vulnerable to immigration authorities and her gender variance made her situation even worse. My presentation for the LSRI conference presents historical evidence like Lucia’s story to craft a picture of the historical conditions that informed the creation of trans Latinx communities in the late twentieth century. These historical conditions not only shaped communities but also, I argue, led to a form of politics based on mutual aid, inter-racial coalitions, and shared or even collective experiences of criminalization and incarceration with each other and other minoritized groups.

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I also use the papers of LLEGÓ to examine the transnational and transgender elements of Latinx LGBTQ political organizing. In the last decades of the twentieth century, US-based LLEGÓ advocated for Latinx trans people who faced violence in places like Connecticut and Ecuador. I explore how the experiences of trans people allowed the growing infrastructure of LGBTQ non-profits to maintain its connections to its grassroots origins, like that of Sylvia Rivera or even ordinary folks like Lucia. Ultimately, my research begins to piece together a social history of trans Latinx communities, something desperately needed in today's time of both anti-immigrant and anti-transphobic discourse and sorely missing from the historical record.

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Let's agree to disagree: The role of age and context of acquisition in the development of subject-verb agreement in bilingual children

My interdisciplinary research combines second language acquisition inquiry with current issues in bilingual education in the U.S. In my dissertation, “Let’s agree to disagree: The role of age and context of acquisition in the development of subject-verb agreement in bilingual children”, I argue that language *use* is a more determinant factor than language *exposure*. I investigate the timeline of production and comprehension abilities for subject-verb agreement in sentences like “los niños comen la manzana” and “the child eats the apple” in heritage simultaneous bilingual children, aged 3 to 7 in dual language education (DLE) where the mainstream curriculum is imparted in both English and Spanish. I study how sociolinguistic factors such as age of acquisition (AoA) (from birth or starting at ages 3 or 5) and learning environment (home, school or both) impact this timeline; and what these tell us about the theories proposing there is a window of opportunity for language acquisition (critical period hypothesis). My main findings show that, in English, bilingual children in these programs develop at the same rate as monolingual peers. In Spanish, amount of language *output* and use seems to be a greater predictor of productive accuracy than amount of input. These data suggest that DLE does not delay English development and may boost acquisition of Spanish by providing greater opportunities for language use.

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A Chalk Line on Third Ave: Policing, Community and Puerto Rican Riots, 1960-1973-A Proposal for Funding

During the July 1967 rebellion by Puerto Rican youth in East Harlem a participant in the riot drew a chalk line across Third Avenue at 110th Street and wrote “Puerto Rican border. Do not cross, flatfoot.” This fragment gives a hint of the articulate vision of neighborhood politics towards the police and the ethno-nationalist expression of territoriality involved in this confrontation. The riot, a response to a plainclothes policeman killing a young Puerto Rican, was also conditioned by many other incidents. The general outline of this process was repeated in Puerto Rican communities during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet over decades scholars have failed to look at this and the dozens of riots and large-scale confrontations involving Puerto Rican youth and police. By 1970 first- and second-generation Puerto Ricans composed about 15% of the population of New York City—over one million people, with another 300,000 in New Jersey. These communities produced a complex class and racial panorama. Consisting mostly of working class people, parts of the community experienced upward mobility. However, thousands experienced poverty, unemployment and stagnation in impoverished neighborhoods and were subjected to various sorts of discriminatory practices. These conditions worsened during the late 1960s and early 1970s, as deindustrialization and disinvestment deepened.

During the 1960s and early 1970s these communities responded to police abuse with what are commonly designated as riots and other large-scale confrontations with the police. Nearly every city with a large Puerto Rican population experienced at least one riot during these years (see appendix). If we include large confrontations of groups of youth with each other and then with the police, the list of incidents grows. In New York alone a dozen large-scale confrontations with the police took place. Communities in New Jersey, Illinois, upstate New York and Connecticut had similar experiences. Police and policing were so central to the Puerto Rican community that mayor Lindsay named longtime director of the Puerto Rico Migration Division and civil rights leader Jose Monserrat to the Knapp Commission that investigated police corruption in 1970. Yet, despite the significant evidence of conflict and resistance, the idea that young Puerto Rican men were engaged in persistent and repeated battles with the police in the long hot summers of the 1960s and 1970s have remained excluded from academic knowledge about race and the urban crisis in the US cities.

Although I have researched and written portions of a book about these riots, I believe my work on these confrontations requires further research along two lines of inquiry. The first, for which I have considerable material, are the changing politics of ethnic/racial territoriality and the

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economics of stagnation for second generation Puerto Rican youth in neighborhoods like the Lower East Side and East Harlem. I show how a segment of Puerto Rican youth were resentful of the vanishing job opportunities and the worsening urban conditions. I also find that anti-poverty programs and anti-gang efforts actually raised the ability of the most marginalized youth to revolt against the police.

The second line of inquiry calls for an examination of everyday policing and street-level relations with the police. These relations formed a critical part of the experience of all Puerto Ricans living in areas of concentrated poverty. These spaces, identified by police and others as “ghettos,” and which were associated with high rates of petty crime and street drug trade, were policed in specific ways. Younger Puerto Ricans, including youth involved in gangs, petty theft and drug trade came to perceive the police as a permanently hostile and abusive presence in their communities. When notable instances of abuse triggered larger confrontations with the police (sometimes following fights with groups of white or black youth in the summer months) these young men played out their anger and their need for revenge, autonomy and respect through challenges to the police presence. The escalation of the police presence through the arrival of tactical units usually triggered a heightened response and typically allowed community activists to begin negotiations with authorities.

My proposed project is framed by a series of broader questions: How did young, poor Puerto Ricans experience color and class in the context of neighborhood policing in the 1960s and 1970s? How did these day to day experiences produce (or not) different forms of revolt against the police? How did these police-youth conflicts shape everyday life and sociability in Puerto Rican neighborhoods? I consider these police/youth confrontations as part of a continuum that links these events with day to day policing. At the Schomburg I would like to research more carefully how New York’s poor black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods were policed during the 1960s and early 1970s even when riots were *not* part of the narrative. This will require a review of daily life that triangulates the police presence with the work of anti-poverty staff and the experiences of the youth themselves. What was the frequency and nature of youth harassment? How was petty crime handled? How did persistent police corruption and racket protection intersect with these other questions?

There are larger contexts and implications for this study. What connected the riots to the emergence of a militant nationalist identity during these same years. Hundreds of young Puerto Ricans were attracted to the Young Lords or turned their gang activities “social” as they took a nationalist and radical turn. How did Puerto Rican youth perceive the Black power movements, their own community’s struggles for rights and the war on poverty? How did realities and perceptions of color and race matter in the social experience and neighborhood landscape of Puerto Ricans? Race and color within the Puerto Rican community have been a long-standing concern of both scholars and activists, but few researchers have engaged deeply with the role of

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color (both blackness and whiteness) within the Puerto Rican community. While we have some knowledge of how organized political response to color and racial issues (both internal and external to the community) drove the mobilization and ideology of the Young Lords and other groups, we do not know how race/color, political responses, and neighborhood policing intersected. I view violence, policing and involvement in social programs as a critical framework through which to study these questions.

This research is in dialog with the recent studies of race and criminalization (Suddler; Muhammad) and of policing (Johnson; Hayes). But I am weary of frameworks that assume that Puerto Ricans experienced the urban crisis in the same way as African Americans. Nonetheless, the struggles of Blacks and Puerto Ricans are deeply connected (Fernandez; Thomas & Lauria-Santiago; Song Ha-Lee). But historical studies of Puerto Ricans in their urban contexts are thoroughly lacking. A few recent monographs have added nuance to familiar themes of anti-poverty and radical mobilization, but much remains to be done (Thomas; Ha Lee).

My work has focused on Puerto Rican migration and communities. I recently co-authored a book on Puerto Rican rights movements in the US since the 1950s (Thomas & Lauria-Santiago). I am currently finishing two books on Puerto Rican workers and their connections to New York's left and labor movements (1920s-1970s). While researching these books I gathered materials on the riots and relations with police. Now that these manuscripts are completed, I am developing a framework for understanding riots and other violent confrontations. The work is based on extensive research in the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, NYC Municipal Archive and other archives. The section drafts I have written examine the immediate narrative of the riots in New York and New Jersey. However, the limitations of these archives and newspapers do not allow me to follow day-to-day life in the City's poor neighborhoods. The Puerto Rican community did not have the institutional presence that the African American community had and thus its archive is incomplete.

A Schomburg fellowship will allow me to spend four months (January-April 2021) working with materials at the Schomburg, and three months (May-July) working on the book. This research would produce two new chapters plus additions to existing sections. I will be documenting four neighborhoods where Puerto Ricans shared space with African Americans and participated in battles with the police: Melrose, East Harlem, Bedford/Stuyvesant/Brownsville and the Lower East Side.