

**CITY AND ISLAND:
DOMINICANS IN LAWRENCE**

transnational community formation
in a globalizing world

by

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Abstract

As an exploration of the Dominican immigrant community in Lawrence, Massachusetts, this thesis seeks to understand how the continuing motives for migration, as well as the barriers and opportunities facing Dominicans in Lawrence, depend on a complex intersection of political, economic, cultural, and social forces linking the Dominican Republic and the City. Historic economic and political ties create strong objective and cultural-ideological links between the Island and the United States and give rise to a set of transnational practices through which immigrants maintain ties to their homeland. The history of the City also intersects with a restructuring of the regional and global economy to shape the nature of immigrant incorporation into local labor markets and political and social structures. Dominicans in Lawrence negotiate through these structures by engaging in a broad variety of both transnational and creole practices—involving ties to the Island and cultural adaptations in the City—that in many ways represent a continuity with previous immigrant strategies. Political and economic advancement for Dominicans in the City is complicated by the interaction between objective difficulties, such as the language barrier and persistent racism, and more subjective frameworks such as the American Dream and the dream of returning to the Island. Community development efforts aimed at overcoming these complications should build on the family and social networks of the community and make use of the creative transnational ties that Dominicans in the City have forged.

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The numerous imperfections of this document are the sole responsibility of the author.

You may grow up in the country, move to the city to make your fortune and find a mate, then move back to the country... In doing so, you are no more unnatural than a salmon who swims upstream to spawn... Some would say that all this moving about keeps people from forming a deep attachment to any one place... Often, though, a place finds its staunchest champions and acutest students in people who come from—or end up—someplace else... No people on earth has sprung from the soil of its place... No culture is pure. All are products of history, of migration, of hybridization... in any practicable future the planet and its peoples will stay enmeshed in a net of cause and effect. We will have to find a way to feel responsible not only for the places we pass through, but for the places we never come near that are nonetheless touched by our actions... the flocks of refugees that flutter against our shores are often nothing more than our own political, economic, and ecological fecklessness coming home to roost... [what we need is] a love of particular places—not one but several—and at least a vague sense of how they figure among the many different places needed to make a functioning world. And this in turn is possible only for those who travel, migrate, move back and forth between city and country, or otherwise get around. (Eisenberg, 1998:394-5)

In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/ genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.
(Anderson, 1983:6)

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SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This thesis has grown (mushroomed, some might say) out of my myriad experiences working in Lawrence, Massachusetts—a city of some 70,000 inhabitants, located less than 30 miles north of Boston, straddling the banks of the Merrimack River. Lawrence exerts a peculiar fascination on students of urban planning. It was, after all, one of the most planned cities ever built in New England: a model mill town, carved out of the surrounding municipalities of Andover and Methuen in 1847 by Yankee entrepreneurs eager to build the world's next great industrial city. In fact, Lawrence was conceived of by its founders as an improvement over the pioneering mill city of Lowell—more compact, more efficient, more streamlined. In its heyday, some of the longest mills in the world lined the river banks, using the water power of the “mighty Merrimack” and the labor of generations of immigrants¹ to produce cotton and wool cloth for people around the globe. Enormous clock and bell towers, which still top many of the remaining mill buildings, called workers to the mills in the mornings and released them to company boardinghouses at night. The clattering, humming spinners and looms that turned raw fiber into thread and wove thread into cloth within the mills were a microcosm of Lawrence itself: the City as Machine.

I began to work in Lawrence—known as the Immigrant City—in February of 1998, undertaking an economic analysis of the City with five other students through an Economic Development Planning and Policy course. Subsequently, I held a summer internship in the City's Office of Economic Development, working to further some of the recommendations for economic development our group had made. This work continued into the fall of 1998, as I completed (with four other students) a small and minority business development study, concentrating on gaps in technical assistance services in the City. At the same time, I became involved in an ongoing community organizing and neighborhood planning effort in the North Common neighborhood of the City, working with a local community development corporation, a neighborhood association, and a community planning consultant. In the course of my work, I soon became vividly aware of Lawrence as a largely Latino city, indelibly marked by the vital Dominican and Puerto Rican communities that make up a substantial share of its population.²

This growing understanding of the City has helped me to realize the deep, multidimensional significance of the nickname “Immigrant City.” Although a small city, Lawrence is and has always been a focal point and destination for new arrivals to the United States. In fact, with the exception of the period from about 1920 to 1965 (a period of highly restrictive U.S. immigration laws), the City experienced an almost continuous influx of immigrants from various parts of the world, such that the foreign-born population usually constituted between 40% and 50% of inhabitants³. Thus, like many other cities, Lawrence is the often hotly contested site of a whole

¹ While many of the first mill workers were Yankee farm girls and boys recruited from all over New England, Lawrence attracted immigrants (specifically Irish fleeing the 1846 potato famine) from its inception—and segregation in housing “was practiced at the very beginning as the natives took the best parts of town.” (Cole, 1963, pp.24-6).

² The 1990 Census puts the Latino population (which includes Cubans, as well as Ecuadorians, Peruvians, and other South Americans) at 43% of the total. Subsequent MISER Population Projections have put the 1998 proportion as high as 70%. Current Population Survey data indicates a proportion of 50% (Dr. R. Hernandez, UMass Boston).

³ Cole 1963; Borges-Mendez, 1992. After 1960, the first new “immigrants” to the City were mainly Puerto Rican; thus it would be more accurate to characterize the City from 1960-1980 as having a growing “minority” population, as Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. Subsequent Latino immigration has increased the proportion of foreign-born.

set of questions and anxieties regarding both urban and American identity and culture—constructs which are rarely static (although often invoked as such), but continually evolving. Moreover, an awareness of Lawrence's role as both an immigrant city and an industrial city provides considerable insight into some of the intimate linkages that exist between immigration and industrial development—or deindustrialization, as the case may be. Inevitably, an exploration of these questions and linkages leads us both outside the arbitrary physical boundaries of the city, and back inside those not-so-arbitrary boundaries.

Like all cities, Lawrence is in a constant state of flux. It is constituted by a complicated series of flows and interconnections—of people, of goods, of information, of money, of ideas—with the larger world. The City is a primary destination for many of the new immigrants⁴, in particular a growing stream of people from the Dominican Republic. In the face of the severe economic reversal of fortune the City has experienced, at times hemorrhaging business and industry during the past thirty years, its continued attraction for these new residents presents a puzzle.

Like all cities, Lawrence is also particular and discrete—in its history, its architecture, its people, in what triggers the choices that diverse people make to get there or stay or leave. Both the particularity and the interconnectedness of the City are at the heart of the following questions:

- Why and how did the Dominican migration to the City start, particularly in the face of high unemployment and job loss in sectors that traditionally employ immigrants? If large-scale economic changes (often referred to as globalization) are sending all “our” jobs to developing nations, why are so many of “their” residents emigrating here?
- In this larger context of immigration and change, what is the character of Dominican and Dominican-American life in the City? A former employee of the City's Community Development Department once told me, “You can't understand Lawrence without understanding the connection between the City and the Dominican Republic.”⁵ What is the nature of this connection?

An exploration of the Dominican community in the City affords an excellent opportunity to examine some of the ways in which global economic restructuring (a fancy term that will hopefully be clarified later) and immigration flows intersect within a particular context. This in turn will help us draw out some of both the continuities and discontinuities in immigration patterns—motivations, demographics, settlement patterns, and modes of adaptation—that characterize the Dominican influx to Lawrence. While “immigration” is an almost universally recognized force in shaping the development of the United States, it remains a catch-all phrase that covers a wide variety of causes and effects, changing economic and social patterns, and ambivalent relationships between older and more recent urban inhabitants. Much recent research in this area has focused on the phenomenon of transnationalism (another term awaiting later clarification) in explaining the migration and adaptation patterns of “new” immigrants. Without a richer understanding of the motivating factors driving particular groups to particular places, of the culture, perspective, and characteristics of these groups, and of their unique experiences and ways of living in their receiving communities, I believe that planners will be ill-equipped to deal with the profound challenges and possibilities that immigrants bring to cities.

⁴ Refers to people migrating from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

⁵ Personal communication, Kim Stevenson, August 1998.

What I Did and How I Did It

Naturally, the questions I've outlined above represent a huge inquiry—one that several people suggested would be better suited to a dissertation than a master's thesis (and I absolve them of all responsibility for my folly). Inevitably, I am compelled to state at the beginning that my efforts are necessarily incomplete. I am plagued by this incompleteness—I go to sleep every night dreaming of the people and groups in Lawrence that I have not yet interviewed or contacted and the books I have not read and the data sets I have not analyzed. I am also haunted by the paltry thanks this incomplete work presents to the diverse members of the Dominican community who gave so generously of their time and insight to help me with this project. Their words form the best part of what lies within these pages.

This thesis has been informed by an intensive literature review that was focused on deepening my understanding of Dominican immigrant communities in the United States, the nature of the interaction between globalization and immigration, the history and culture of the Dominican Republic, the economic and political ties between the Dominican Republic and the United States, the history of Lawrence, and the phenomenon of transnationalism.

In addition to this literature review, I conducted 40 interviews, conversations, or discussions with people either living or working in Lawrence or knowledgeable about this subject. I use the term "interview" to connote a personal, in-depth interaction in which someone conveyed to me considerable elements of their personal history and experiences. A "conversation" was a briefer, more informal interaction (15-30 minutes, covering one or two topics). A discussion was an in-depth interaction without the personal element. A particularly rewarding part of my outreach into the community for interviewees was the two presentations I made on the local Spanish-language radio station, WHAV 1490 AM. These radio gigs took place on February 27 and March 6, 1999, from 8:30 to 9 am, on the show *Sabado Espectacular*, hosted by Rafael Jacobo. My 40 interactions included:

- 25 in-depth interviews with members of the City's Dominican community, varying in length from 45 minutes to four hours. I interviewed 14 men and 11 women, ranging in age from early 20s to late 60s. 13 interviews were conducted in Spanish and 12 in English. 12 interviews were taped in their entirety and professionally transcribed; during the others I took notes. Three of the 25 people I interviewed twice, and counted it as one extended interview. Interview candidates were selected in the following highly unscientific ways:
 - 8 were local business people or community leaders (these categories sometimes overlap), most of whom were known to me through my work in the City.
 - 2 people were family members of this first group.
 - 2 people were residents of the neighborhood in which I work.
 - 8 people were chosen from the callers to the radio show. They gave me their names and numbers (off air) and I later met them in the Lawrence Public Library for a full interview.
 - 2 people were members of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Dominican Revolutionary Party) whom I met at the party's headquarters in North Lawrence.
 - 2 were young adults working in two of the City's non-profit agencies.
 - 1 was a client of the Department of Transitional Assistance whom I met in their lobby.

- 3 discussions with academics or administrators at UMass Boston, Northern Essex Community College, and Wellesley College familiar with the City or the field.
- 3 conversations with staff or owners of local temporary agencies.
- 3 conversations with Dominican workers using one of these employment agencies.
- 3 conversations with an administrator and case workers at the Department of Transitional Assistance.
- 3 discussions with local non-profit staff working with the Dominican community.

It should be noted up front that the sample of my in-depth interviews is not representative of the entire Dominican community in the City. While my interviewees had spent anywhere from 10 months to 30 years in the City, most of them had been in the City (or the United States) for at least 10 years. However, I would say that the major shortcoming in my interview sample concerns the issue of class. The vast majority of my interviewees either had some college education or professional background in the Dominican Republic or the United States, had been members of the urban middle class in the Dominican Republic, or belonged to the more successful, established echelon of the Lawrence Dominican community. As a substantial number of Dominicans in the City come from rural areas of the Cibao valley in the north of the Republic, and as a rule have considerably less education than most of the members of my sample, this is a major gap in my research.

All of the extended interviewee quotes that appear in the margins of many pages of this thesis were drawn from the 12 transcribed tapes. However, the thesis as a whole is informed by the voices of all those I spoke with, and where possible I have included shorter quotes from my notes of the other interviews. Moreover, the examples that are described in my own words in the body of the text are drawn from the entire sample. Where possible, I have provided several identifying characteristics to contextualize the interviewees' remarks. *All names have been changed to protect people's privacy.*

The interviews I conducted were extremely conversational and wide-ranging; I rarely followed a prescribed format or questionnaire. As a rule, I simply asked people to tell me their stories, and this usually included some combination of the following: where they were born; who their parents were; where they grew up; what they did for work in the DR; what precipitated the decision to immigrate; how that experience has been; why they came to Lawrence; did they come straight here from the DR—and if not, where first; who came with them; what they do for work now and how that experience is for them; what their economic situation is like; how often they've been back; what are their plans for the future; if they are learning or know English; what they think are major problems or challenges facing Dominicans and Latinos in general in the City; what they think of Lawrence; and whether they think of themselves as Dominican or American or both.

The Itinerary

This thesis (such as it is; it probably constitutes more of a love poem to the City, liberally peppered with outrage) is divided into three parts. The first part, The Places, consists of two chapters, the Island and the City. Chapter One provides some background on the Dominican

Republic: a bit of history, a sense of the Island's long-term, intimate, and problematic ties to the United States, and an awareness of the economic and political changes of the last 40 years. By grounding more abstract concepts such as "globalization" or "cultural creolization" in specific events and conditions in the Republic, this chapter aims to provide you, gentle reader, with a context for Dominican out-migration (where Dominican immigrants are coming from, as it were) as well as a sense of the way that events hundreds of miles apart are inextricably linked.

Chapter Two returns to Lawrence, and delves a little deeper into the City's history of immigration, class and ethnic strife, and labor unrest. It offers information about demographic and economic change in Lawrence over the past 30 years, and explores some of the theories and findings about the role of immigrant labor in restructuring and declining industries, as they pertain to the City. This chapter will also briefly place the City in the context of nation-wide demographic change and the "Latinization" of many U.S. cities.

Part Two, the People, also consists of two chapters (a certain symmetry is desirable, a meager attempt at imposing order on an unruly world), both reporting on the findings from my research, interviews and work in the City. Much of the literature on Dominican immigrant communities in the U.S. has focused on the issue of transnationalism, arguing that a defining characteristic of Dominican migrants is a "dual-place" identity, a sense of existing differently in two countries and two cultures at once—or alternatively, as not existing fully in either place but instead in some liminal, hybrid mental/ emotional/ cultural space, the creation of which is shaped and driven by the actual physical back and forth movement of many Dominican immigrants. Thus, a major concern of this section will be to examine some of the evidence for this claim (oh, the cloaked and interrogatory stance of the thesis writer... where is my microscope? Where is the rack? Now where is that evidence?). Both chapters in this section will draw on case studies and empirical findings from other research to compare and contextualize characteristics, changes, and trends observed in the City.

Chapter Three will first supply some basic demographic information (where available) regarding both recent Dominican migration more broadly and the Dominican community in Lawrence. Who are Dominicans in Lawrence? What do they do? I will focus on sketching some of the economic, cultural, social, and political **activities** in which Dominicans in the City engage, grounding the reader in the working life of the community and its networks.

Chapter Four will shift the focus to **attitudes** of community members. It will report on individual motivations for migrating, attitudes toward both Lawrence and the home country, expectations and hopes for the future, and the challenges community members face in their struggle to thrive, as well as the resources on which they draw in this struggle.

Part Three engages that age-old planning dilemma: what are the ties between people and place? Given the findings and issues raised above, Chapter Five speculates about possible implications for community development efforts in the City and the political empowerment of Dominican residents. What are some of the particular challenges of planning and organizing⁶ in the City, given both the transnational activities of a number of its residents and the City's position in a

⁶ The reader will note that I believe these two activities to be complementary, and this belief doubtless informs the main concerns of this thesis.

larger, changing economy—a position characterized by one local academic as “the sinkhole in the regional lawn, staying wet so other places can stay dry.”⁷ While this Chapter will be informed by the insights I have gained from my community organizing work in the City, it is more of an effort to clearly articulate the nature of some of the challenges facing the Dominican community, and to suggest broad approaches to overcoming these challenges, than an attempt to recommend specific programs or policies.

Chapter Six will comprise some concluding remarks and an excess of suggestions for further research to plug the myriad holes and shortcomings of this document. It is to be hoped that these suggestions for further research will lead to some of the recommendations avoided above.

The View From Essex Street

Throughout the thesis you will find the voices, opinions, and histories of Dominican people in the City. Rather than relying solely on isolated quotes to illustrate particular points, I have often included substantial sections of an interview, placed alongside my own words, to provide a more visceral sense of (or counterpoint to) the argument being developed, and to bring alive the viewpoints of Dominican Lawrentians. Although I am not Dominican myself, I have tried in this small and imperfect way to participate in what Itzigsohn *et al.* (1999) have characterized as the project of the CUNY Center for Dominican Studies in New York: an attempt “to articulate the voices of Dominicans in the diaspora, transforming them from the objects of others’ discourses into subjects with their own voice” (p.333). Many of the quotes in the margins appear in the original Spanish, in an attempt to preserve the integrity of people’s stories and emphasize the bilingual nature of life in the City and community that is my subject. As I realize that many readers will not be familiar with Spanish, I have provided a (somewhat rough) translation of these quotes in Appendix 1.

A final note before we begin: this thesis is informed by the desire not only to better understand the City of Lawrence but also to use that understanding in the service of future community development efforts there. However, the use can only proceed from the understanding, and I therefore beg the reader’s patience for “traveling” quite a bit in the course of this document.

⁷ Personal communication, Charlie Tontar, July 1998.

PART ONE: THE PLACES

Planners are intensely involved with the local. Our milieu is the neighborhood, the city, the region; we focus our energy and attention and understanding on the problems that confront us in particular places. However, many of the forces shaping these places are not local. In fact, many of our places are themselves not strictly local; they are intimately bound—by cultural, political, social, and economic ties—to other specific places. They could not survive otherwise. Indeed, in the words of one observer, our places have become “increasingly phantasmagoric: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them.”¹

A migration is one kind of flow that connects places, and it is often embedded in and productive of other ties. In beginning to understand both the Dominican immigration to Lawrence and some of the defining characteristics of Dominican life there, it is necessary to look first at the two places, the island and the City, and the web of larger ties that bind them. Pessar (1982) captures part of this when she notes that “international migration is an historical relationship of economic interdependence between ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ societies. It is more than the migrant stream that links the sending and receiving societies.” While Pessar focuses explicitly on “the unequal system of exchange of commodities, capital and labor” connecting core and periphery², Sassen (1988) provides a broader formulation: “[u]nderstanding why a migration began entails an examination of conditions promoting outmigration in countries of origin and the formation of objective and subjective linkages with receiving countries that make such migration feasible.”

Thus, in the following two chapters I will explore some of the political and economic changes affecting both the Dominican Republic and Lawrence. Partially, this involves understanding the position of both places in the context of a changing global economic system, in order to draw out how “[i]mmigrants and immigration levels are directly related to the globalization of the economy... people... migrate in search of economic opportunities.”³ Of course, as we shall see, there are a number of other equally important factors shaping the Dominican immigration flow, including the 1965 liberalization of immigration laws, which eliminated the use of national origin, race, or ancestry as a basis for admittance to the U.S., and facilitated reunification of families split by the immigration process—not to mention the political and military influence the United States has traditionally exercised over the island.

¹ Anthony Giddens, quoted in Hannerz (p.25).

² “Core” and “periphery” are, roughly speaking, more evocative terms for “developed” and “developing” nations.

³ Laws, 1998. I should note that it is not the purpose of this thesis to dip its dainty toes into the raging debate about globalization—does it exist, is it something new, etc. For our purposes, “globalization” may be said to refer to certain changes (occurring over roughly the last 35 years) in the pace, focus, and organization of worldwide economic activity, characterized by: the deregulation of capital markets and increasingly “free” flow of private investment capital into and out of various national economies; the geographic dispersal and fragmentation of production processes, such that regions are characterized more by the stage than the type of industry they support; the liberalization of trade laws, including the formation of several multilateral trade agreements (e.g., NAFTA), and the expansion of consumer markets; the rise of the transnational corporation as the dominant economic institution, accompanied by the growing role of foreign direct investment (FDI) in diverse national economies; and the central importance of advances in information, communications, and transportation technologies, which function as both facilitators of all these other forms of change and products themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CITY

Ironies

Taking into consideration the traditional rivalry between Lowell and Lawrence and my own fierce attachment to the latter City, I will nevertheless begin to talk about Lawrence by referring to Lowell, which one author has described as representing “in microcosm the intertwining of the industrialization process and immigration in the United States” (Kolack, 1983)¹. As I discussed both profit repatriation and remittances in Chapter One, it might be interesting to compare that dynamic with this observation of the immigrants working in the Lowell mills of the early 1900s: “these newcomers, first entirely Irish, later French Canadians from the Provinces, were treated precisely as if they were part of the machinery which ground out the millions being produced for the rich managers and millowners who spent the money not in Lowell but in New York, Boston, Paris, and London.”² As the same sort of “domestic profit repatriation” practices³ applied in Lawrence (where, for example, mill owner William Wood built beautiful homes for himself and his family, and a model village for his managers, in the neighboring upper-class town of North Andover), this observation can help us understand the role the City—at the intertwined levels of its infrastructure and residents—has always played within a capitalist system of production⁴. In this chapter I will begin to trace this intertwining through both industrialization and *de*industrialization in the City (and the region, known as the Merrimack Valley), as well as looking at the character of immigrant life in the City.

The Usual Statistics

As a City whose *raison d'être* was the textile industry, once-booming Lawrence has never fully recovered from the manufacturing flight that devastated many Northeastern

¹ These words, of course, just as easily could have been written about Lawrence.

² Cardinal O'Connell, quoted in Kolack, 1983.

³ Tempered by the occasional philanthropic project, like a public library.

⁴ Current native indignation at Dominican remittance levels in Lawrence ignores the dollars that have always flowed out of the City to the same mill owners for whom their parents and grandparents labored (not to mention the hefty remittances sent by those parents and grandparents to families in the Old Country, a point I will return to later).

American Dreams in the Immigrant City

*They [material things] are part of the American dream you are following... I would like to hope that you do not think that I have put these things in the first place but they are part of the dream you are following. Because when you come to this country you think that you will be living the way you have seen in the films, in the pictures, in the magazines, and everything. And what are these things? They are a car, an expensive place where to live, a new house with good modern inner systems, with air-conditioner, in the summer to have vacation. Isn't that the American way of living?*⁵

⁵ Interview, 2/11/99 (Man, 50s, teacher (trained as engineer), 12 years in the City).

industrial cities. Lawrence (as the oft-quoted statistics go) is the 23rd poorest city in the United States, with the lowest per capita income in Massachusetts and unemployment levels that consistently hover at twice the regional, Commonwealth, and national rates. Its high school recently lost accreditation, and resident education levels fall well below Commonwealth averages. Home-ownership rates are 35% citywide, and about 1/3 that in the mostly Latino north side, where vacant lots and boarded-up buildings bear mute testimony to the arson wave that flamed through the City in the early 1990s. The Lawrence population is also substantially younger than the Massachusetts average.

Table 2.1 Income and Poverty, Lawrence and MA

	Lawrence	Massachusetts
Median Household Income	\$21,085	\$30,932
Per Capita Income	\$ 9,686	\$17,224
Latino Per Capita Income	\$ 5,425	
Poverty Rate	27.5%	8.9%
Latino Poverty Rate	45%	36.7%
Latinos as % of Total Poor	70%	

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

Lawrence has been bleeding manufacturing jobs since textile and shoe producers began moving to the non-union South in the 1920s (interestingly, this trend coincided with the beginning of major U.S. restrictions on immigration). The process intensified in the late 1960s, as more manufacturers moved offshore—to countries like the Dominican Republic—again seeking lower-wage labor. Lawrence was not alone in this experience; as Muller (1993) notes, “by the 1960s, with factories relocating first to other parts of the country and then overseas, most cities experienced a sharp decline in their manufacturing fortunes. Hardest hit were apparel, textile, shoes, furniture, and electronics” (p.120). Between 1969 and 1988 the City lost nearly half of its manufacturing jobs (from nearly 18,000 down to 9,000) (Borges-Mendez, 1993, p.149). The City was also hard hit by the recession of the early 1990s, again losing over 5,000 jobs, or 20% of its employment base; about 2,000 of these jobs were in the manufacturing sector (Andors *et al.*, 1998)⁶.

As much of the U.S. moves into a “post-industrial” economy, Lawrence's economy is still an amazing 35% manufacturing-

⁶ I love citing myself.

Table 2.2 Unemployment Rates, 1993 to 1997: Lawrence vs. MA

Year	Lawrence	MA
1993	13.4%	6.9%
1994	12.4%	6.0%
1995	10.1%	5.4%
1996	9.3%	4.3%
1997	8.8%	4.0%

Source: Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training

Una de las cosas es que el dominicano ha inmigrado más a Lawrence que fue la tranquilidad... tú sabes que Lawrence es pequeño y está fuera de las grandes urbes. Se parece más a nuestros barrios, a nuestro pueblo, los muchachos pueden jugar en las calles, pueden estar fuera de su casa hasta tarde, sobre todo en el verano, eso no puede suceder en otras ciudades. Entonces la tranquilidad es lo que siempre atrae para que nosotros vengamos a vivir para acá.⁷

⁷ Interview, 3/5/99 (Woman, early 40s, teacher, here several years).

based, and has remained so for the past ten years, through recession and (mild) recovery. Less than half of these jobs are now in the textile industry; a substantial portion are concentrated in paper and plastic production, metal fabrication, and warehousing/ distribution—a common re-use for mill space that does not meet the single-tier space needs of modern manufacturing. While the City has also lost jobs in FIRE⁸ and trade, growing sectors include health services (anchored by a well-regarded regional hospital) and low-end business services such as janitorial and security (Andors *et al.*, 1998). As we shall see later, the City is also home to a fairly vital small business sector featuring a sizable number of Dominican entrepreneurs. Dominicans in Lawrence own a plethora of restaurants, travel agencies, clothing stores, hair salons, *bodegas* (corner stores) and multi-service centers⁹.

There is some evidence that Lawrence residents are filling regional manufacturing jobs as well. In 1990, according to the Census, only 40% of Lawrence residents worked in the City; another 36% worked in the region. Conversations with three local temporary employment agencies of varying sizes—most of whom work with a majority Latino population—indicate that a number of Lawrence's residents are serving the temporary and seasonal laborforce needs of manufacturers in North Andover, Haverhill, Wilmington, and other neighboring towns and cities. This is a phenomenon which I will return to later.

Table 2.3 1996 Industry Mix: Lawrence vs. Massachusetts

Industry	1996 % of Total Employment (Private Profit/ Nonprofit)	
	Lawrence	Mass.
Agriculture	0.14%	0.75%
Construction	2%	3.5%
Manufacturing	36%	17%
Transportation and Public Utilities	3%	5%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	16%	27%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	2%	8%
Services	41%	39%

Source: MA Division of Employment and Training, ES-202 Series

⁸ Finance, insurance, and real estate.

⁹ Multi-service centers are businesses that provide a variety of financial and accounting services, including facilities for phoning and sending money abroad. Their ubiquitous presence on the north side of the City is one indication of the volume of remittances emanating from Lawrence.

Es duro cuando tú vienes sin saber un idioma. Empecé a trabajar en una factoría donde fabrican zapatos. Esa fue mi primer experiencia de trabajo aquí... después de eso me fui a otro trabajo que era de un laundry... Estuve ahí un promedio de seis años... Empecé ahí a trabajar en esa cosiendo, reparando las ropas y ahí mismo comencé a vender ropa entre mis compañeras de trabajo. Hice una clientela grande. I went to New York y después decidí instalarme aquí... hay personas que tienen mucho más tiempo que yo y no se han podido independizar. Trabajan todavía en factoría... Cualquiera que sea, es muy diferente cuando tú estás en una factoría. Trabajando en línea. Hay muchas personas que han venido aquí y han podido progresar pero la gran mayoría no es tan fácil.¹⁰

¹⁰ Interview, 2/17/99 (Woman, 40s, business owner, 16 years in Lawrence).

Within the City, there is often tension between the older Anglo residents (who dominate city government and politics) and the newer Latino residents, over issues as diverse as bilingual education, residency requirements for municipal jobs, and political participation. For example, the U.S. Justice Department has been called in several times to monitor elections and prevent discrimination against Latino voters, and is currently suing the City for unfair election practices. I think it is safe to say that this tension and the ensuing political struggles have at least some of their roots in the economic situation engendered by a confluence of factors. As Sassen (1988) points out, "the 1965 liberalization of U.S. immigration policy [was] but one instance of a whole series of policies... that had the effect of internationalizing the country's economy." The sudden influx of new immigrants after four decades of relative isolation (during which immigration became a colorful part of the City's past), combined with a drastic reduction in, and degradation of, local manufacturing jobs, did not breed native tolerance and understanding. Even if many of the remaining jobs were ones that native workers would not want—numerous authors have emphatically refuted the myth that immigrants "steal" jobs from natives (Bonilla, 1993; Borjas, 1990; Moore, 1994; Muller, 1993; Piore, 1979; Portes, 1981; Sassen, 1995)—it still was not easy to see them go to newcomers¹¹.

An International City

In 1912 the Merrimack Valley had the highest proportion of foreign-born residents in the United States (Kolack, 1983). A good number of those immigrants resided in Lawrence, which since its inception has been populated by successive waves of immigrants come to work in the mills and factories¹². The Irish were the first, followed by French Canadians, Englishmen, and Germans in the late 1800s, Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Syrians around the turn of the century and early 1900s, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in the mid-late 1900s, and most recently Vietnamese and Cambodians. The City is now predominantly Latino.

¹¹ In fact, Muller points out that immigration often tends to have both an employment multiplier and a job redistribution effect, as new arrivals take lower wage, lower skill jobs, and shift natives upward.

¹² In addition to fleeing conditions of poverty or environmental hardship in their native lands, some of these workers were lured to Lawrence by mill company posters and advertisements in their native lands (Cole, 1964). Indeed, Piore (1979) argues that many labor migrations begin because of recruitment on the part of employers.

**Table 2.4 Lawrence
Foreign Born Population,
1910 (Selected Groups)**

Country of Birth	Population in 1910
Total Pop.	85,892
<i>Ireland</i>	5,943
<i>England</i>	5,659
<i>Scotland</i>	1,336
<i>Canada</i>	9,498
<i>Germany</i>	2,301
<i>Russia</i>	4,366
<i>France</i>	788
<i>Italy</i>	6,693
<i>Turkey</i>	2,077
<i>Foreign-Born</i>	41,319
<i>% Foreign</i>	48%

Source: Cole, 1964 p.209

**Table 2.5
Lawrence: Ancestry of
Selected Groups, 1990**

Ancestry	1990
Total Pop.	70,027
<i>Arabic</i>	1,525
<i>Dominican</i>	10,870
<i>English</i>	2,397
<i>French</i>	5,105
<i>Fr. Canadian</i>	4,251
<i>German</i>	1,601
<i>Irish</i>	6,193
<i>Italian</i>	6,645
<i>Puerto Rican</i>	14,661
<i>Foreign-Born</i>	14,673
<i>% Foreign</i>	21%

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

From its inception, Lawrence was in many ways highly integrated into an international economy, powered by immigrant labor to produce textiles for both the American and European market. The City's motto was, "We weave the world's worsteds," and it was at one time considered "the leading worsted center in America," (Cole 1964) home to the enormous Arlington, Wood, Atlantic, Pacific, Pemberton, Washington, and Ayer Mills. In 1878, two-thirds of the total factory workforce was foreign-born. In 1912 Lawrence was the site of a famous labor uprising known as the Bread and Roses Strike, an event that was partially organized by the International Workers of the World and owed a substantial debt to the influence of Italian anarchists (Cole, 1964).

Continuities: The City Repeats Itself

A look back at the City's first seventy-five years of existence is a fascinating lesson not only in "the more things change, the more they stay the same" worldview, but also some of its nuances—the realization that as Hannerz (1996) puts it, "in large part, change is made up of other people's continuities, quite suddenly coming up close to us as well, without necessarily being fully understood, or fully accepted" (p.25). As Cole (1964) assiduously documents, the increasing diversity of the Immigrant City paved the way for repeated cycles of ethnic and religious conflict as each previous group, fearful of its own still-tentative position in the City's political and economic structure (and often forgetful of its own experience at the bottom of the pile), turned upon the next.¹³ Thus, the one-time "noisy rabble" (p.40) of "shanty Irish" complained of French-Canadian behavior that would "shame a community of savages," (p.58) and the French-Canadians in their turn condemned the "drink-frenzied foreigners" and lingering "old country habits" (p.90) among the Italian.

The City demonstrates other continuities as well. The same high rates of illiteracy, combined with a lack of fluency in English, that trouble school teachers and nonprofit agency staff in Lawrence today plagued the City at the turn of the century. Substandard housing, arson, malnutrition, and overcrowding (especially in North Lawrence) were common, along with unstable employment—the mills often halted or reduced production, depending the vagaries of the market—

¹³ With this melodramatic characterization I do not mean to imply that these attitudes were uniform throughout the City; indeed Cole cites a number of examples of different groups speaking out on the need for tolerance.

A lot of people had to go to work whatever kind of job they can get. It's hard... Not everybody has the opportunity to pick and choose what they deserve... I went to college, it was not easy, it was a lot of input from my family. I sacrificed a lot of my time with my kids and my husband because I needed to go to school and study. I think I need to get what I deserve to get... I heard people saying the Italian were here and they made it through. The Irish people were here and they made it through. Now the Hispanic people are here and they get welfare. They get welfare, some people, but most people are working... They're paying taxes, they're raising a family.¹⁴

¹⁴ Interview, 4/8/99 (Woman, 40s, teacher, community leader).

and low wages. In 1875, "the average Lawrence wage of \$400 a year was far below the state average of \$476" (Cole, 1964) (in 1875 dollars).

Longing for Home: The Other Side of the American Dream

Tú añoras lo que no tienes—cuando lo tienes, no es como pensabas. (You yearn for what you do not have—when you have it, it is not what you were thinking.)¹⁵

In 1884 the Cunard Line charged only \$15 for steerage passage to Ireland from Boston. The Irish, not content with individual trips, formed an excursion club to raise money for a group voyage. Italians often went home for the winter to participate in festivals and to avoid the cold as well as to see their families. And Canadians, not facing the dangers of an ocean voyage, were frequent visitors...by 1912... [h]alf of the French-Canadians, a quarter of the English, and a sixth of the Germans and Irish had visited their old homes. (Cole, 1964:100)

Yearning for the old country is nothing new in Lawrence. While it is popular among many older residents in the City to speak of "the Spanish" as a transient population, apt to return home at a moment's notice, the increasing—and increasingly rooted—Dominican population of the City belies that assumption. The transiency stereotype ignores the complexity of ways that the Dominicans, in startlingly similarity to the Irish, French-Canadians, Syrians, and Italians before them, have chosen to maintain connections to their homelands (as we shall see in part two). Relief funds for those at home suffering destitution or disaster, financial contributions, advocacy, and volunteer work in support of political movements (e.g. Irish home rule, Armenian independence from Turkey) and parties, and remittances were all part of life in the City; indeed, in 1910, "money orders issued in Lawrence for sending money abroad amounted to \$150,000 a year" (Cole, 1964) (figure is in 1910 dollars).

Of course, many Dominicans do return to the Island, even after years in the City. The Irish, French-Canadian, Italians, and other earlier immigrants all made permanent returns as well, often when work in the mills was scarce (Cole, 1964).

¹⁵ Interview 4/28/99 (Woman, 40s, business owner, here 30 years).

*If you think that for immigrants is hard, I let you know that to come back will be harder... when you go back to your country you find out that it is a sad situation. Time is not waiting for you to come back and has changed your place, has changed your neighborhood, moved the people you used to meet... When you have to come back you have to go to the same social and economic level which is harder now because things have changed, life costs more... you go with the idea that you will find all of your friends waiting for you in the same place where you used to meet them and you'll not find anybody... they are in another way of living, they are in a different environment... sometimes you feel isolated, no? You feel a kind of loneliness in your heart.*¹⁶

¹⁶ Interview, 2/11/99 (Man, 50s, teacher (trained as engineer), 12 years in the City).

But the difference between what one *expects* in terms of duration of stay in the receiving country and what actually winds up happening cannot be emphasized enough, as my informants mentioned over and over. As Piore (1979) points out, a defining characteristic of many temporary migrations is that they tend to turn into permanent settlements as a community becomes established in the host country, and strong social networks ensure a continuing stream of new members. Moreover, as we shall see in part two, those who return often come back again, realizing that changes both in themselves and back home often made the yearned-for Island a dream indeed.

Workers of the World?

In spite of its legendary status among labor organizers as the site of the Bread and Roses strike, Lawrence has historically had a fairly weak union presence. Cole notes that, "unions in Lawrence had never been able to organize more than a tenth of the city's workers at any one time before 1912. The very absence of unionism was one of the reasons why William Wood, President of the American Woolen Company, built the Wood Mill in Lawrence in 1905" (p.177), and it is still one of the reasons companies have come to the City during the last thirty years¹⁷. Organizing efforts have no doubt been complicated by the difficulties of communicating across culture and language among fragmented ethnic groups (interestingly, Cole documents how the successful Bread and Roses organizers coordinated their efforts along ethnic lines, organizing within groups before bringing all together). Ambivalent relationships between older and newer residents also confound this process. On one hand, more settled groups may be more likely to take a conservative stance and disapprove of labor militancy among newer groups; on the other, newer groups are often used to sabotage the advocacy and security of more settled groups¹⁸.

Immigrant Labor Today

Between 1970 and 1990, the net population increase in the United States due to immigration is estimated at 10 to 12

¹⁷ Interview, Chet Sidell, President/ Owner of KGR Industries, February 1998.

¹⁸ One interviewee recounted how one manager in a factory in which she had worked wanted her to report any talk of unionizing among other workers to him.

*El rico no quiere que el
pobre aprenda, porque ya
eso le trae problemas a él.
Cuando un pobre logra abrir
los ojos, cuando logra ir a la
escuela y aprender y dice, ah,
pero tú estabas abusando de
mí... a ellos no les conviene
que el progrese... Mientras el
pueblo sea más ignorante y
mantenerlo en la ignorancia lo
podrán explotar siempre,
toda su vida... Pero, si eso no
ocurriría, por ejemplo con
los programas de Acción
Afirmativa, es un programa
que ha ayudado a muchos
latinos... Si esos programas
desaparecen, eso es como
decírles, dejame mantenerte
en la oscuridad para que tú
no aprendas y yo puedo
seguir abusando de tí. Eso es
todo lo que los políticos están
haciendo... mantente oscura,
que yo seré tu luz. Pero yo
seré tu luz, pero no te a
llegar mucha luz tampoco
[laughter]... te va a llegar un
reflejito de luz para que tú
digas, oiga, así es la luz...¹⁹*

¹⁹ Interview, 3/5/99 (Man, 40s, union member, Malden Mills).

million people (including undocumented immigration); this represents over 25% of the overall population gain in the U.S. Over 4/5 of these immigrants settle in metropolitan areas, and most locate in central cities. Moreover, "of the nation's largest cities, only two, San Diego and Phoenix, retained a solid [?], non-Hispanic white majority in 1990... in all but Detroit and Philadelphia, Hispanics comprise a fifth or more of the population" (Muller, 1993). Thus, the demographic shift in Lawrence (see Table 2.6) mirrors the "Latinization" of cities nationwide. The inclusion of raw numbers in the table also allows us to notice the white flight from the City that accompanied Latino immigration.

Table 2.6: Demographic Change in Lawrence, 1970-1990

Population	1970		1980		1990	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	65,930	99%	51,371	81%	38,401	55%
Black	682	1%	865	1%	1,195	2%
Asian/NA/Other			643	1%	1,374	2%
Latino	2,327	3%	10,296	16%	29,237	42%
Puerto Rican	1,019	2%	5,726	9%	14,661	21%
Dominican					10,870	15%
Other					3,706	5%
Total	66,915		63,175		70,207	
Total Latinos 5+ yrs. Old	1,890		7,667		25,423	
Resided Abroad 5 Yrs. Ago	793	42%	1,321	17%	6,023	24%
Outside Region (SMSA)	150	8%	1,332	17%	3,450	14%

Source: Borges-Mendez, 1992; U.S. Census 1990

In this section I will look at how these newcomers fit into the Lawrence economy, drawing first on Borges-Mendez (1993) to note that, not surprisingly, "Latino immigrants in Massachusetts manufacturing have been a main source of tractable labor in secondary²⁰, unskilled, low-paying jobs at the bottom of the occupational ladder" (p.104). To put this phenomenon in context, Borges-Mendez argues that there have been changes in the structure, labor processes, and human-resources management practices of both large and small firms in the Commonwealth. Some of these trends include:

- The decline of traditional manufacturing industries such as textile and shoe production;
- The expansion of the service sector [at both the high end (e.g., financial and legal services) and the low end (e.g., domestic workers, janitorial services)];
- The high-tech *re*-industrialization of the state's economy [especially in sectors connected to the "information society," like electronics and instruments production];
- The modernization of technologies and processes of production, accompanied by the diversification of products, services, and markets;

²⁰ The secondary labor market usually refers to jobs that are low wage, less stable and secure, and lack employment contracts, health and vacation benefits, union membership, or the means for advancement.

- The use of out-sourcing and vertical disintegration²¹;
- The segmentation of labor strategies, including the use of “employment at will” for both the low-skilled and seasonal elements of production.²²

Unfortunately, the best of these tendencies (which all have ambivalent results in terms of both jobs and wages), such as technological innovation and high-tech development, have not been followed by Lawrence firms. Instead, the disturbing evidence from the City indicates that for dying traditional industries, Latinos provide “the necessary cheap labor to ride the decline... permitt[ing] firms to continue operating without any major investments in technology, job training, and development” (p.114). Even in those industries insulated from or competitive in the larger economy, job opportunities are limited: “Latinos are heavily used in labor-intensive, small- and mid-size manufacturing firms to staff unskilled and semi-skilled jobs that pay low wages and offer little prospect for wage increases, training, advancement, and job development” (p.107). Furthermore, in light of the aforementioned role of temporary agencies in the Lawrence labor market—some of whom work with hundreds of employees weekly and anywhere from five to over 50 firms in the region—it appears plausible that many of the City’s Latinos are staffing the uncertain end of firm needs in other towns as well. My conversations with temporary agency staff and workers, as well as other interviewees, would support this²³.

As Borges-Mendez points out, the trends mentioned above (which are part of a larger global economic restructuring) affect not only the relationships between “core” and “periphery” nations (or regions) but also the relationships

²¹ This refers to a firm’s process of separating out the different elements of their total production process—from research and development to manufacture to assembly—often locating different stages in different physical locations (e.g. R&D near an urban/ university center and assembly in a branch plant in a rural area), or subcontracting entire phases (with other, smaller firms or individuals—e.g. homework in the garment industry).

²² As Piore (1979) notes, what manufacturers essentially do is divide the demand for both their product and the labor used to produce it into stable and unstable portions; capital investments and skilled workers are then worth the risk for the stable part, while the unstable part remains a labor-intensive process.

²³ Conversations, Merrimack Minority Employment, 4/5/99; Tandem, 4/26/99; Staffing Group, 4/26/99.

*El Dominicano es muy trabajador... donde pueda ganarse el dinero va. Nosotros decimos allá tú sabes que el peso de nosotros, el valor de un peso es un Duarte que es nuestro principal héroe nacional. Entonces nosotros decimos: “Donde Duarte esté nosotros lo buscamos.” Aquí tendríamos que decir: “Donde esté Washington nosotros lo buscamos”. Entonces podemos trabajar en cualquier parte. La mayoría trabaja en factoría, otros trabajan en restaurantes como cocineros, como lavadores de platos, otros limpiando en las escuelas, en compañías de limpieza... Entonces tú no podrías decirle a uno del campo que está haciendo el mismo trabajo que tú que aunque no tenga la misma preparación tú eres recogedor de basura. Entonces tú tienes que unirte y tienes que mirarlo parejo.*²⁴

²⁴ Interview, 3/5/99 (Woman, early 40s, teacher, here several years).

between firms within the core itself; this in turn affects the employment and opportunity structures that immigrants enter into the the receiving country.²⁵ For example, as declining basic manufacturers bank on cheap immigrant labor, they need a reliable supply. A very common method of ensuring this is doing recruitment through current employees, often offering a "headhunter's fee"²⁶ (as one interviewee put it) to those who refer friends and family members to the company. Several informants mentioned this as a common practice thirty years ago, and other evidence indicates that this practice still exists²⁷. As Borges-Mendez points out, while this can lead to quick employment for the newcomer, it often traps him/her in a dead-end situation that delays or reduces access to other opportunities.

It is important to note that low-wage, low-skill jobs are also a function of growth sectors in an economy, not just declining ones. High-tech and specialized service sectors generate low-wage jobs both directly, through their occupational structure (e.g., services to buildings accompany high-end office development), and indirectly, through the ancillary sectors (restaurants, cleaning services) and consumption patterns of high-end workers (Sassen, 1988). Thus, low-wage, low-skill workers from the City (where service sector employment has grown steadily since the late 1960s) service the underbelly of the booming high-tech Merrimack Valley and Route 128 region. Through the many ramifications of its history as an industrial city and a mill town—including, for example, by far the highest regional concentration of affordable rental housing (Stevenson, 1992)—Lawrence has effectively become a ghetto of low-wage, low-skill jobs and workers indispensable to the regional and global economy.

Segueways...

This, however, is not all the City is—not by a long shot. As we continue into Part Two of our story, I hope to complicate the picture just painted by turning your attention, now firmly grounded in these two places, to the people moving between them.

²⁵ In fact, one executive in a multinational corporation with substantial holdings in the Dominican Republic called it (with no prompting on my part) the "internationalization or globalization of both the supply and demand for labor" (Email Communication, Mike Tagney of Colgate, 3/15/99).

²⁶ Interview, 1/28/99.

²⁷ Personal communication, Tamar Kotelchuck, 4/26/99.

I worked at ITT for about five-and-a-half years and I held some other part-time jobs as I was working there... I progressed to different levels, made more money as I went along. I was taking computer classes and to pay that I was working for a temporary company, Office Specialists. They used to send me to different places, and they sent me to this... one place and when I got there the supervisor called me and said-- he gave me some explanation, but he said, "What I want you to do is clean the bathroom." I looked at him, I thought for a second, and then I said this is not for me, I didn't come here to clean bathrooms, but after a couple of minutes I said I came here to work. So I went to the bathroom and I started singing merengues and dancing by myself and cleaning the bathroom and he was so amazed and surprised...²⁸

²⁸ Interview, 2/12/99 (Man, 40s, here 20+ years, professional).