



# Anthropology & Aging

Journal of the Association for Anthropology & Gerontology

## “Aging in Displacement: Urban Revitalization and Puerto Rican Elderhood in Chicago”

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### *Abstract*

Displacement has marked the individual and collective lives of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, especially those who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s. For these older persons, the arrival of the gentry and the yuppies of yesterday, the hipsters of today, and the disappearance of familiar faces in their current neighborhoods are not new phenomena, but rather parts of a profoundly familiar process. They came of age in displacement. Today some Puerto Rican older adults have achieved housing security and are able to age in place because they live in low-income senior housing. Yet a sense of displacement still looms large in their daily lives with the upscaling of and new-build gentrification in their current neighborhood. This work sheds light on the meaning of place for older adult Puerto Ricans who have experienced what psychiatrist and urban studies scholar Mindy T. Fullilove calls a history of “serial displacement.” Through life history narratives and ethnographic snapshots, this paper highlights the neglected reality of “aging in displacement,” or the experience of growing up and growing older in a context of repeated socio-spatial dislocation and how individual and collective life histories of community upheaval texture the spatial and social meanings of place.

**Keywords:** Older adults, Puerto Ricans, aging in place, displacement, urban restructuring

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Anthropology & Aging, Vol 38, No 1 (2017), pp. 44-59

ISSN 2374-2267 (online) DOI 10.5195/aa.2017.157



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## “Aging in Displacement: Urban Revitalization and Puerto Rican Elderhood in Chicago”

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### Introduction

*Often when my parents and other elders in our community preface their migration stories with the phrase, “Cuando nosotros vivíamos... [When we lived...],” what typically follows are accounts of the many inequities and injustices they and many others in the community experienced. Yet they also spoke of the courageous ways in which they forged and created home.*

– Marisa Alicea 2001, 169,

*“Cuando nosotros vivíamos...: Stories of Displacement and Settlement in Puerto Rican Chicago”*

Displacement, as the epigraph indicates, has marked the individual and collective lives of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, especially those who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, persistent upheaval and change due to economic restructuring on the island and urban renewal in U.S. cities structured the geography of aging of early arrivals (see Padilla 1987; Alicea 2001; Ramos Zayas 2003; Pérez 2004; Rúa 2012). Today a moderate share of these elders resides in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. For these older persons, the arrival of the gentry and the yuppies of yesterday, the hipsters of today, and the disappearance of familiar faces in their neighborhoods are not new phenomena, but rather parts of a profoundly familiar process. But distinct from their earlier history of physical displacement, in elderhood a sense of housing security has been achieved because they live in protected housing for low-income seniors. Yet, the transformation taking place in their neighborhoods – apartment buildings converted to luxury condominiums, bodegas with counter service restaurants turned into pricey coffee shops, and a band of bargain shops replaced by multi-use residential and commercial developments – impairs older adults’ ability to age in place. A sense of displacement still looms large in their daily lives. This paper sets out to address the following questions: What does “aging in place” signify to a population that has lived through a series of displacements? If, as this article suggests, displacement has characterized Chicago Puerto Ricans’ migration into elderhood, has this group remained attached and engaged in community life?

After a brief survey of the literature on aging in place and displacement and a discussion of methods, I offer a historical and political economic context for the study of Puerto Rican serial displacement and ground my analysis in the life history narratives of Puerto Rican migrants to Chicago. To illustrate the distinct pathway of urban minority elders, the next section offers the housing life course histories of two Puerto Rican female migrants to Chicago. I then present ethnographic snapshots to analyze the experiences and

perspectives of older Puerto Rican residents of a subsidized low-income senior housing complex in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. Life history narratives and ethnographic snapshots highlight the neglected reality of “aging in displacement,” or the experience of growing up and growing older in a context of repeated socio-spatial dislocation and how individual and collective life histories of community upheaval texture the spatial and social meanings of place.

## **Aging, Place, and Displacement**

Scholarship on place foregrounds the relationship between social and spatial geographies and human meaning and affective attachment (Rowles 1993; Massey 1994; Becker 2003). A growing recognition of the significance of place in the daily lives of older adults has emerged in aging studies research (Rowles 1993; Becker 2003; Wiles et al. 2012; Yen et al. 2012; Rowles and Bernard 2013), with the concept of “aging in place” as a central paradigm. It is a conceptual framework that takes seriously the meaning-making processes of older persons in decisions about their living arrangements and social relations. As a policy initiative, aging in place entails the establishment of support structures to help older adults remain in familiar environments, usually their own homes and communities, for as long as possible. Given the escalating cost and apprehension over quality of life in nursing homes, aging in place is viewed as a more humane and cost-effective approach to the present and future care of aging populations (Rowles 1993; Wiles et al. 2012; Vasunilashorn et al. 2012; Penney 2013; McCallion 2014). Yet, within the context of the United States, this growing scholarly and policy preoccupation with the relevance of place in later life has largely neglected the experiences and perspectives of minority older adults.

The idea of aging in place, anthropologist Katherine Newman (2003) argues, rests on the assumption of a universal baby boomer generation that experienced economic, social, and residential mobility and security. Aging in resource-rich and stable, usually suburban, communities might describe the reality of a large swath of middle class whites, but such a trajectory was much less likely for African American and Latina and Latino older adults who came of age in racially segregated, disinvested, and deteriorating neighborhoods (also see Freidenberg 2000; Becker 2003; Byrnes 2011; Torres-Gil and Hofland 2012). “Space and place have always been important pathways (and roadblocks) to opportunity,” civil rights scholar John A. Powell (2008) contends, “but they became even more important for the distribution of opportunity after World War II, when national policies began to shape the racial dimensions of housing and economic development. Today, we live with the legacies of a deliberately segregated past” (A21). Growing up and growing older as a person of color from the 1950s through the 1970s likely meant living in low-income and poor segregated urban neighborhoods disproportionately susceptible to the urban renewal bulldozer.

Urban renewal was a federal program intended to help cities thrive economically and to better house the poor by eradicating slums and blighted properties in areas adjacent to central business districts. But rather than create better housing options for the poor, slum clearance cleared and sold land at reduced prices for the development of more expensive residential units and non-housing projects. Indeed, the vast majority of the housing destroyed during the era of urban renewal was never replaced, with estimates of about one million people (75% persons of color) in 993 U.S. cities uprooted by 2,500 projects (Fullilove 2005). Between 1957 and 1961, African Americans and Puerto Ricans represented almost two-thirds of the total number of persons displaced by urban renewal projects nationwide (Anderson 1964, 65). Writing about the effects of urban renewal on health and social organization in U.S. communities, psychiatrist and public health scholar Mindy T. Fullilove (2014) examines what becomes of place attachment when people experience “serial forced displacement,” or the repeated coercive disruption of community that impairs social and spatial bonds to place (Fullilove and Wallace 2011, 381). Most who faced this kind of disruption were left to re-

establish place attachments in other under-resourced and underserved neighborhoods. Newman writes, “Inner-city adults develop a ‘different shade of gray’ from that of their suburban age mates because the pathway that has shaped their lives in inner-city neighborhoods has been dramatically different” (2003, 26).<sup>i</sup> In other words, they have lived with reduced access to spatially determined resources, such as education, employment, health care, and housing across the lifespan.

Today many of these neighborhoods have started to change course due in large part to gentrification. Middle-class city dwellers priced out of amenities-rich areas near city centers move to these “up-and-coming” neighborhoods as commutable alternatives. Newman suggests that for incumbent residents able bear the rising cost of housing the quality of life improves, and this is especially advantageous for older adults who have endured years of living in resource deprived neighborhoods.<sup>ii</sup> Gerontological scholars Graham Rowles and Miriam Bernard (2013) assert that “use and identification with public spaces is an essential component of an overall sense of being in place” (4). The available scholarship on older adults of color living in low-income and impoverished urban neighborhoods associates their use of public space with notions of safety (Freidenberg 2000; Becker 2003). In upscaling areas, in addition to changes in the race, class, and age demographics of the neighborhood, the social and built environment also transforms. Local services, stores, restaurants, and other social meeting places disappear and new establishments may not appeal to the interests, tastes, or budgets of incumbent residents. Since not all long term and low-income residents are physically dislocated by gentrification, some scholars of gentrification point to changes in neighbor amenities and resources as especially illuminating sites to analyze the sensation of loss of place (Davidson 2009; Shaw and Hagemans 2015). Therefore, although the streets may be perceived as safer in upscaling areas, these changes in neighborhood spaces deeply affect older community members’ participation and engagement in public life because they no longer feel included or welcomed. In other words, they experience a sense of displacement.

The gerontological literature characterizes the living situations of older persons as relatively stable except for involuntary moves to assisted living. Anthropologist Gay Becker (2003) countered this assumption, about the stability of place, by exploring how immigration in later life precipitates a renegotiation of place not adequately captured by aging in place proposals (also see Yen et al. 2012). She observed that one of the challenges to place-making for older immigrants was that they had experienced a lifetime of displacement, which continued with their pursuit of better living conditions via migration. This research elaborates and extends on Becker’s observation by analyzing how Puerto Ricans’ history of serial displacement – which includes socio-spatial dislocation due to migration, urban renewal, and gentrification – gives meaning to their sense of place.

## Methods

The main data collected for this study are based on a year and half of qualitative research conducted between 2014 and 2015 of Latina and Latino older adults living in three different subsidized housing complexes on Chicago’s Near Northwest Side. Two of the buildings are designated “senior housing,” serving residents age 62 and older, and the other is classified as “near-senior,” for tenants age 55 and over. Research for the first phase of this project consisted of participant observation, the collection of life histories, and semi-structured interviews with 25 residents living in these housing sites. Although the collected ethnographic material samples a wider group of Latinas and Latinos, this paper is based on interviews and participant observations with some of the Puerto Rican residents at one of the housing facilities – The Reverend Daniel Alvarez Senior Apartments.<sup>iii</sup>

Reverend Alvarez (as the residents call it), a 41-unit, 1-bedroom and studio apartments building located in Logan Square, was once a four-story art deco window factory. Hispanic Housing, an organization dedicated to developing affordable housing, with particular attention to the needs of Chicago's Latino community, financed the purchase and rehabilitation of the property with HUD resources allocated for low-income seniors. At Reverend Alvarez, as with other Section 202 Program developments, low-income older adults, 62 years of age and older, with an annual income below 50% of the Area Medium Income (AMI), have the opportunity to live independently in an apartment building that provides support services, such as an on-site senior service coordinator.

The senior service coordinator introduced me to residents in an early-fall tenant meeting. Although residents suspected my Puerto Rican heritage from that first meeting because of my accent in Spanish, a good number were surprised to learn that I had grown up in the neighborhood. My biography was helpful in initiating small chat, but it was not enough to establish a meaningful rapport with them. Thus, the next few weeks residents found me in the main office ready to photocopy documents, fill out paperwork, and serve as an interpreter when needed. In addition, I helped organize residents for community meetings, both in the building and the neighborhood, and field trips to places like Millennium Park in downtown Chicago. I needed to demonstrate an investment in their daily lives before they would commit to interviews. In these interviews, primarily conducted in Spanish, we talked about early life in their place of birth; experiences in school and work, if applicable; why they migrated; their early memories of life in Chicago; and the changes that they have noticed as they have aged in the city. Interviews were closed with a series of questions about their daily lives and routines as older adults. I compiled extensive notes of these exchanges and activities. To complement my interviews and participant observations, I collected news articles, local blogs, community newsletters, flyers, and other ephemera. All names that appear in this study are pseudonyms either selected by participants or assigned to them by me.

In reviewing interview transcripts and field notes, I detected a pattern in how Puerto Rican residents discuss neighborhood change, which was noticeably distinct from their non-Puerto Rican Latina and Latino counterparts. Repeated stories of past involuntary moves – “rents going up,” being “pushed out,” or “it’s happening again” – entered many of their conversations about the current upscaling of the neighborhood. This was intriguing in light of the fact that they live in secure housing for low-income seniors. Yet a history of physical displacement clearly informs their experience and understanding of place. They also spoke of having few spaces to socialize, which was consistent with their Latina and Latino neighbors’ descriptions of socio-spatial displacement related to neighborhood change. These accounts of loss of place led me to questions the meaning of aging in place for a population that has come of age in displacement.



Figure 1: Reverend Alvarez Senior Apartments

## Puerto Rican migration and urban life in Chicago

In the post-World War II era, radical changes in the Puerto Rico's economy, such as the accelerated industrialization plan "Operation Bootstrap," set in motion migrations from rural to urban areas within the island, and from the island to the United States, with most destined for New York City (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños 1979). Although the Jones Act of 1917 conferred a collective naturalization on the citizens of Puerto Rico, Congress granted U.S. citizenship without the explicit condition of eventual statehood for the island (Caban 2001; Ayala and Bernabe 2007). In 1952, the island's status converted from unincorporated territorial possession to "Commonwealth" with self-governance over internal affairs but no elected representative or vote in Congress and no vote for president. U.S. citizenship allows islanders to travel to and from the United States without migration visas and to relocate permanently to any state of the Union.

In search of work and better opportunities approximately a third of the Puerto Rico's poor left between the late-1940s and early-1970s. Some welcomed the adventure of life in a new place; others believed they had little choice but to leave and experienced migration as a painful displacement from a homeland unable or unwilling to aid its poor. Puerto Rican migration to Chicago began modestly in the mid-1940s, reaching its peak in the 1960s. In between, the trope of a "Puerto Rican problem" became prominent in academic and public policy circles in the United States, as did controversial plans to address this sensationalized concern. In Chicago, for instance, during the post-Korean War recession, the commissioner of the Welfare Department tried to repatriate Puerto Ricans in need of unemployment or emergency financial relief. In a

contentious dispute about residency requirements, the citizenship rights – or rather the rights poor citizenship – of Puerto Ricans in Chicago was debated within the pages of the Chicago and Puerto Rican press. Although U.S. citizenship granted Puerto Ricans free movement to the United States, and protected them from deportation, some municipal leaders sought to counteract this right (Rúa 2012). Nonetheless, by the 1970s, the Puerto Rican population reached almost 80,000. As their numbers rose, however, employment opportunities declined, and the cityscape underwent a dramatic transformation (Betancur et al. 1993).

From the 1950s to the 1970s, these new Caribbean arrivals, along with their African American counterparts, inhabited U.S. urban centers depleted of resources and opportunity by federal programs and practices that promoted segregation. The interstate highway program and the mortgage subsidy for returning veterans, for example, precipitated the growth of suburbs as thousands of white striving middle class with Federal Housing Administration backed home loans escaped cities (Hirsch 1983; Jackson 1985; Powell 2008; Avila and Rose 2009). Between 1960 and 1980, Chicago lost more than 30 percent of its middle-class residents. With the white middle-class out-migration, commercial establishments, industry, politicians, and the business and civic elite recognized that the industrial disinvestment that followed left the central city in a state of economic crisis. In response, city leaders conceived various growth plans said to benefit all urban residents but concentrated on the economic resuscitation of the downtown area. *The Chicago 21: A Plan for the Central Community Area* (1973), as a case in point, proposed the physical expansion of downtown into adjacent working-class residential and light manufacturing areas for the development of upscale living near a revitalized commercial, cultural, and tourist center (Squires et al. 1987; Betancur 1996). As the city's overall economy stabilized with the revival of commerce and a returning middle class tax-base, the argument went, jobs and housing would trickle down to the poor. Far from a trickledown effect, however, stable working-class communities, especially those in the direct path of new development projects, were destroyed.

Because communities of color were the disproportionate casualties of efforts to save central cities, urban renewal was infamously known as “Negro removal” and “Puerto Rican removal” in places like Chicago (also see Whalen 2001; Thomas 2010). Reporters contributing to a special series on “The Latins” for the *Chicago Sun-Times* in September 1971 registered a series neighborhoods and communities from which Puerto Ricans and other Latinas and Latinos were uprooted:

In the mid-1950s... [Puerto Ricans] settled along La Salle St., on the Near North Side. But urban renewal and the construction of the Carl Sandburg Village proved the community's undoing.

....

Puerto Ricans gradually have begun to appear in a number of Lakefront communities, too. A Latin community in Lincoln Park, centering on Armitage and Halsted, has been reduced by urban renewal and a northward movement of blacks.

....

In the 1960s, urban renewal scattered a sizable Latin community, including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and some South Americans, from the Near North Side (Wheeler III and Watson 1971).

In 1954, a substantial sum in urban renewal funds was allocated for redevelopment in Lincoln Park, three miles north of the central business district and near the lakefront. The resultant high-end housing priced out many low-income residents, especially Puerto Ricans, of their community despite efforts to stymie displacement. Urban renewal, ostensibly intended to improve housing of the poor and working class,

intensified the concentration of poverty even more through the displacement of residents, and the new highway systems served as physical barriers between sections of the city where the poor lived. From 1954 to the 1970s, the prime of urban renewal, Latinos, turned out of their apartments and houses in Lincoln Park, the Near North Side, and the Near West Side, were, according to a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter, further crowded “into remaining Latin barrios” and sent “westward in expanding waves to create new Spanish ghettos” (Wheeler III and Watson 1971). A new distinct geographic Puerto Rican community took form on the Near North West Side (West Town, Humboldt Park, and Logan Square) with Humboldt Park popularly imagined as the heart of Puerto Rican Chicago (Alicea 2001; Ramos Zayas 2003; Pérez 2004; Rúa 2012).

### **Aging through displacement**

I met Evelyn Santos, a proud lighter-hued Afro-Puerto Rican, one spring afternoon in 2015 as she laboriously ambled with a cane down the hallway from the laundry room to the elevator in Reverend Alvarez. She lives with severe rheumatoid arthritis and has bad circulation in her legs. Born in Guayama, Puerto Rico, Evelyn was at 64 years of age one of the first residents of the Reverend Alvarez Apartments when it opened in 1999. But, before then, between 1952 and 1976, she lived in seven different apartments throughout the Near West and West Sides of Chicago prior to securing an apartment in the Julia C. Lathrop Homes, a Chicago Public Housing Project on the Near Northwest Side of the city, where she lived for twenty-three years. In 1952, sixteen-year-old Evelyn joined her two older sisters on the Near West Side of Chicago. She attended Saint Mary’s High School while her sisters worked. Before she married in 1957, Evelyn lived in another apartment on the West Side with one of her sisters and her sister’s new family. With her own growing family – husband and three children – Evelyn moved about the Near West, West, and Near Northwest Sides as housing conditions deteriorated or rents became prohibitively expensive.

After surviving years of domestic violence, Evelyn left her husband once she qualified for public housing, moving to the Lathrop Homes. Logan Square, on the Near Northwest Side, has been Evelyn’s community for more than five decades. She has lived in a number of its neighborhoods and lived through the area’s changeover from a predominantly working-class Latina and Latino community to the “hipster mecca of the Midwest” (Levitt 2013; *The Chicago Advocate* 2014). She does not appear fazed by this transformation. Evelyn has, after all, lived through the massive urban renewal projects that radically altered the City’s Near West Side landscape, creating some of the conditions that prompted Puerto Ricans to move to the Near Northwest Side in the first place.

The initial objective of urban renewal was to clear slums and blighted areas to develop new housing projects to relocate the poor. The Housing Act of 1954 made federal monies available to local governments for the acquisition and clearance of land, but the initial commitment to low-income housing development was later waived to make hospitals and universities key beneficiaries (Gans 1965; Avila and Rose 2009; Fullilove and Wallace 2011). Today, a parking lot for Illinois Medical District/Rush University Medical Center stands in the place of Evelyn’s first Chicago apartment. In lieu of her other former dwellings are the University of Illinois Chicago campus, the United Center (home of the Chicago Bulls and Chicago Blackhawks), and upscale housing. Only two of the buildings in which she once lived remain erect, although the Chicago Housing Authority’s plan for transformation for the Lathrop Homes will eventually result in another place casualty for Evelyn (Dukmasova 2014; Corley 2015; Biasco 2016a and 2016b; Spielman 2016).

Evelyn’s housing life course is not unique. The history of Puerto Rican migration to and residence in Chicago is a collective story of serial displacement. In 2002, I interviewed Ana La Luz, a fair skin-toned petite, no-nonsense grandmother. Ana also migrated in 1952 from Puerto Rico to Chicago. She came to help



her recently engaged sister. Two years later she married and relocated to East Chicago, Indiana, just outside Chicago, where her husband Jacobo worked for Inland Steel. Unlike the Santos family, by 1960 the La Luzes achieved homeownership with the purchase of a three-flat residential building in Lincoln Park. But their entry into the propertied class did not ensure housing stability. In the 1960s, as the city implemented its renewal plan, Lincoln Park began its transformation from a low-income community of color to a high-end, predominantly white, residential area. Municipal administrators sacrificed Puerto Ricans and African Americans to carry out this turnaround. These communities were displaced by the loss of affordable rental apartments or priced out of the homeownership market. The La Luz family, without the resources to comply with the upscale property demands or to fit in with the racial and class makeover of the area, sold their building without having secured new living quarters. “We gave it away,” Ana said, and proceeded to recount her family’s desperate search for shelter. Potential landlords scoffed in disbelief when Ana “would tell them, not that we were seven [but] four or five.... and [say] no. And the banks, in everything they rejected us.” Left with little recourse, the La Luz family purchased a small, beat-up single-family house in Logan Square, a neighborhood on the decline with high gang activity and little support from law enforcement.

In the early 1980s, gangs subjected neighbors, especially young men, to almost daily harassment as a recruitment strategy and to protect their prized economic venture—the distribution and sale of drugs. Over a number of difficult years, residents acted persistently, as individuals and a collective, to better the quality of life in the community. They confronted gang members, they came out of their homes to bear witness to altercations, they called for *and* vigilantly observed law enforcement responses, and they attended court dates as a critical mass. According to Ana, a constellation of small acts resulted in “a grand improvement” in the neighborhood. But improvement came at a potential cost. Although she exhibited much pride in this community achievement, Ana expressed a great frustration with its unintended outcome: the constant inquiries about her house from persons she suspects would never before have considered buying in her neighborhood. “They are constantly sending me letters and calling to see if I want to sell the house, and I am not interested,” she said. “They did the same thing to us in [Lincoln Park]; they pushed us out.” These tactics along with the physical changes in the built environment prompted feelings of loss and dispossession, what Fullilove (2005) has referred to as “root shock” – “the traumatic stress reaction to the loss of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem” (11).

The “three ugly condos” across the street from Ana’s home, for example, replaced not only what she considered a perfectly livable, modest home, but, more important, a Puerto Rican family. The condos became a distressing and hurtful reminder of Puerto Ricans’ diminishing ability to hang on to a sense of place. “When the machine came to knock down the little house,” Ana remembered, “it knocked it down in less than ten minutes. I cried.” Although there was not a strong neighborly bond between them, Ana had “counted on [the family] as Puerto Ricans,” and with their exit there was “one less family that we now have.” The neighbors’ departure came as a stark reminder to Ana of her own family’s displacement from Lincoln Park almost three decades earlier. “What I see is more or less the same thing that happened before because rents are going up too high for the poor to pay and taxes have gone up so much that those who own homes find it difficult to pay the mortgage and pay the tax.” The active investment of long-term residents, like Ana, that resulted in community stability, is today experienced as loss. Few would deny that the economic, social, and cultural capital of more recent middle class residents has brought needed investment in neighborhood infrastructure and services (Freeman and Braconi 2004). This admission, however, often renders invisible the tireless struggles waged by incumbent residents, with few residential options, to improve the quality of life of low-income neighborhoods, which, in turn, made these areas attractive to higher income new arrivals.

## Aging and place in a gentrifying neighborhood

A 2007 report by the Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning documented the transformation of Chicago's residential building stock from 1989 to 2004. The study identified Logan Square, along with West Town and the Near West Side, as the community areas with the most striking condominium growth and simultaneous apartment decline (Davis and Merriman 2007). With the bursting of the housing bubble in late 2007, and the onslaught of the Great Recession, the bulk of new development projects in Logan Square came to a halt. The Chicago real estate market reversed from home and condominium ownership to rentership. In the post-recession era, a much more aggressive and accelerated new-build real estate and commercial development boom is underway in Logan Square (Steeple 2015). *Curbed Chicago*, a real estate blog, reported that within a one-week period in October 2015, "Logan Square had over \$37 million worth of projects receive new construction permits" (LaTrace 2015b). Current development projects include more than 1,000 luxury units and mid-rise buildings, with monthly rents starting in the \$1,250-1,500 range. The monster development, however, is the Logan's Crossing Project, which is slated to replace the Discount MegaMall across the street from the Reverend Alvarez Senior Apartments. The six-story development with 240 residential units, extensive retail space, including a grocery store, a fitness center, and rooftop pool, will take up an entire city block (Biasco 2015a and 2015b).

Despite recent reports of the graying of cities and calls for planners and policymakers to embrace age-friendly approaches in their designs and proposals, when urban neighborhoods undergo revitalization, new amenities and services generally have been designed with a culture of youth in mind (Pletz 2011; Basulto 2016; also see Buffel and Phillipson 2015). A case in point is the developer of one transit-oriented housing proposal in which tenants pay \$2,700 a month for a two-bedroom apartment. The developer insists that in targeting "18-to-35-year-olds" he is "developing communities that are going to be attractive to the future of the city of Chicago" (Mitchell 2014). The soon-to-be, presumably young and white, residents of these new development projects will be within walking distance of public transportation, hip cocktail bars, upscale and Michelin-starred restaurants, and trendy coffee shops featured in local and national magazines and newspapers (see *New York Times* 2011; Reddick 2013; *Chicago Magazine* 2014; Moon 2014; LaTrace 2015a). These establishments hardly reflect the profile, taste, or budgets of Reverend Alvarez residents or their neighbors like Ana La Luz.

For Ana, whose mortgage is paid and property taxes frozen, and for Evelyn, as a resident in low-income subsidized housing for seniors, there is less anxiety about their own physical displacement in the storm of development happening in Logan Square. But fear of socio-spatial displacement looms large, such as the disorientation older residents feel as the built environments that have marked their way-finding strategies and practices vanish. As the city transforms around them, with little imprint left of their former dwellings or social spaces, it is obvious that city life, politics, and policies have not been kind or concerned with the needs and desires of an aging population. Puerto Rican and other Latina and Latino older adults in subsidized housing may have some of the most secure housing in a gentrifying neighborhood, but they nonetheless feel insecure about their ability to make use of the local amenities that have been created to exclusively attract a younger, more able-bodied, racial, and class demographic. Still, while some Puerto Rican older adults express doubt and displeasure about the future of the neighborhood, none are anathema to change, especially if it stymies the physical deterioration of the built environment and enriches the amenities and resources in the community.

“Ay sí, me encantan los cambios que están haciendo. Me fascina. Pasar por allí, decir, ay que bello pusieron este sitio.” [“Oh yes, I love the changes that they’re making. I’m fascinated. To walk over there [and] say, ‘oh how beautiful they’ve made this place.’”] So spoke Cuca Ruiz, another Reverend Alvarez resident, when asked about her neighborhood. Similar to many of her Reverend Alvarez neighbors, Cuca has lived in a series of under-resourced and underserved neighborhoods with few amenities. For this reason, signs of investment in the community and the convenient services proposed as part of new development projects are valued and appreciated by some of these Puerto Rican older adults, even though they themselves may not frequent these establishments due to comfort or cost. “For those kinds of places, I’m very shy” Cuca confessed. “I like more humble spots.” One such “humble spot” was the Discount MegaMall.

Once a bustling indoor flea market, the MegaMall was where many of the Reverend Alvarez residents spent their afternoons bargain shopping, eating, and socializing. “There was a time [you could say] that I almost lived there,” Cuca said. She would go to the MegaMall after work with friends or take her grandchildren to eat and walk around to browse the toys and other merchandise. Visits were less frequent after the fire that reduced the vending space to less than a third of its original size, and she noticed fewer and fewer customers and “window-shoppers.” Troubled by the state of disrepair and neglect, she joined the ranks of former MegaMall frequenters. Despite numerous building code violations, a yearlong shutdown, an attempted eminent domain seizure by the city, and the fire, the MegaMall had been a fixture in Logan Square for more than twenty years. In the recent past, there had been talk of converting the site into an upscale commercial center, a grocery store, a year-round farmers market, or a cultural center, but none of these proposals gained traction. With a new development project already approved the building was demolished in 2017.



Figure 2: MegaMall



Figure 3: MegaMall demolition

The future of the MegaMall site was a regular topic of conversation at Reverend Alvarez when I conducted fieldwork. Residents sat in the community room or on the benches of the main entrance, with partial view of the MegaMall through large glass windows, discussing rumors of what would replace it, as well as what they would like to see as part of the new development. Cuca is in favor of a *frutera* (a basic grocery store that carries Puerto Rican/Caribbean and Mexican fruits, vegetables, and other imported food items) and a beauty salon. Others made their opinions known during the February election season when a candidate for the local ward seat held a meet and greet in the community room. About a dozen Reverend Alvarez residents attended the meeting. After outlining her platform through an interpreter, the candidate asked residents about their ward needs and concerns. Two or three of the Puerto Rican residents present inquired about the redevelopment of the Discount MegaMall site: Was it true that a grocery store would replace the MegaMall? Will a medical facility part of the new development, as some had heard? All in the community room approved of such developments. The candidate seemed puzzled and unprepared to address questions about new development and neighborhood amenities that would take into account aging residents. She explained that even though the MegaMall is across the street from their building, it is outside of the ward for which she was campaigning. Unsatisfied with the response, residents respectfully told the candidate that she should tell whomever is making those decisions that they want a grocery store and a doctor's office.

The arrival of bright green flyers announcing a PUBLIC MEETING about a proposal to redevelop the MegaMall site a few weeks later prompted a conversation about displacement. The Logan Square Neighborhood Association created and distributed the bilingual notice to inform residents of an upcoming community meeting organized by the ward alderman to discuss a zoning change requested by the new owners of the MegaMall site. The proposal for the Logan's Crossing development project included more than 200 apartments and ground floor retail. Clearly irritated, Septimo Quiñones, an Afro-Puerto Rican known to freely offer up his opinions, complained, "the neighborhood is changing, becoming too expensive"; "the rents are going up, all the new people are white." In agreement with her neighbor's objections, Pura Santiago, a tiny, fair-complexioned Puerto Rican with a gruff voice, who most mornings joined Septimo on the main entryway bench to people-watch, added, "Puerto Ricans are tired of being pushed out and pushed around." "Los blancos se están quedando con todo esto" [The whites are staying with all of this].

Recent news reports of the declining Latina and Latino population in Logan Square lent credence to Septimo's and Pura's respective observations. A May 2016 *DNAinfo Chicago* news story citing U.S. Census data reported, "In the last 15 years, Logan Square has lost more Hispanic residents than of any of the city's

77 community areas." In 2000, the total population of the community area numbered more than 82,700 with Latinas and Latinos representing about 65 percent. By 2014 there were almost 8,700 less residents, and the Latina and Latino population dropped to 47 percent. During this same period, as the white population grew to approximately 48 percent (about 10,300 residents), more than 19,000 Latinas and Latinos no longer live in Logan Square, a decrease of almost 36 percent. Moreover, there are 8.3 percent fewer black neighbors, a loss of about 3,900 (Biasco 2016c). The news story did not explore the changing age demographics of the area, although persons age 60 and older make up the largest number of Puerto Rican residents in Logan Square.

The following evening, eight residents from Reverend Alvarez – five women, three men, all Puerto Rican – joined about 250 of their neighbors for the first public meeting on the Logan's Crossing development proposal. Their presence seemed noteworthy. Many of those in attendance made special efforts to welcome the Spanish-speaking older adults, from members of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association setting them up with headsets so that they could hear a translation of the presentations to white neighbors greeting them in Spanish and helping them find seats. Before the meeting started, a local Spanish-language news reporter approached the modest yet eye-catching bloc of Latina and Latino older adults to find out their reasons for attending the meeting. Pura readily agreed to an on-camera interview. (She spoke of the escalating rental costs: "\$2000 and more. They [Latinas and Latinos, perhaps also older adults] can't afford to pay that kind of money.") But engagement with Reverend Alvarez residents as community members with vested interests in neighborhood development issues was limited to these occurrences.

As the architect presented the development plan, I overheard Reverend Alvarez residents murmuring among themselves that they approved of the grocery store and wondered if they would be able to use the proposed gym. They were also curious about how many of the apartments would be set aside as affordable, and if any would be designated for seniors. As the presentation progressed, however, the realization set in that they absolutely were not an imagined demographic of this new development. Evidently, Pura had heard enough. After the architect's presentation, she announced to her Reverend Alvarez neighbors (and those seated around them) that she was leaving and walked out with another resident. The remaining residents and I stayed for the Q&A session. We heard neighborhood organizations, activists, and residents raise questions about affordable housing and the inclusion of additional low-cost housing beyond the 10 percent Affordable Requirements Ordinance; about the percentage of commercial space set asides for low-income and first-time business owners; about traffic patterns; and about the proposed scale, size, and design of the development, which strikingly departed from the existing structures in the area (Holliday 2015). None, however, inquired about how this project might positively or negatively affect older adults in the community. Reverend Alvarez residents did not speak up during the Q&A perhaps because they found the meeting format and language of discussion (English) intimidating. It is worth remembering, nonetheless, that just weeks before these older residents did articulate their interests to the candidate campaigning for the local ward seat and that very evening Pura had spoken to the press. If asked directly, they showed little hesitancy in expressing their concerns and desires for the future of the neighborhood, as well as their place in it as members of the larger community.

A local celebrity the next morning, Pura's neighbors spoke approvingly of her comments to the media. "Muy bien hecho," she was told over and over. Pura herself missed the telecast of the interview; she seemed preoccupied with something else to bask in her neighbors' praise. "It gave me such sorrow and pain to know that none of that is for us," Pura told me. "I had to get out of there." "Puerto Ricans" she reminded "are always pushed out." Unlike Pura, Evelyn Santos had harbored no illusions that the new development would be for people like them. "It's for the yuppies," she said a few days later when the redevelopment of the MegaMall came up once again. Although her mobility is limited due to severe rheumatoid arthritis,

which prevented her from attending the meeting, Evelyn keeps herself up to date on local debates and considers herself an engaged community member. She was adamant that she would “not set foot” in the proposed grocery store. “I have my store,” she snapped. “It’s a general store open to everybody.” Accordingly, Evelyn is committed to shopping in a place where she feels comfortable, where “la gente” [the common people] buy their food.

In attending the meeting at the MegaMall, Reverend Alvarez residents re-entered a place that they once considered a welcoming and vibrant social space, a sense of place lost because of neglect and disinvestment. Conversely, reinvestment and redevelopment will likely ensure that they will not experience it as a renewed space of social engagement. As a result, older Puerto Ricans, such Pura, express feelings of dispossession precipitated by a lived history of serial displacement. Others, like Cuca, appreciate the investment in the neighborhood built environment, even though she does not feel that new investments are developed for her or her neighbors use. Though the proposed Logan Crossings project, as a new-build development, will not directly displace low-income and long term residents, Reverend Alvarez residents, by and large, feel that they have become as expendable as the aged structures they once inhabited and frequented.

## Conclusion

This article has examined how older adult Puerto Ricans made urban lives and urban communities while navigating social and structural inequalities; that is, how they have experienced and negotiated responses to aging in displacement. Scholarship that takes into account the lives of urban minority elders and their sense of place tends to focus on their tenure in deteriorating neighborhoods, emphasizing the ways in which they are left heavily burdened and vulnerable to environmental and social health risks. We know less than we should, however, about how they are made vulnerable and isolated in rapidly upscaling neighborhoods with a growing wealth of amenities. The Puerto Rican elders who animate these pages are not averse to change; their lives have been defined by great change, though most of it, they admit, not of their own making. They are, however, averse to neglect and exclusion. They are averse to this new form of displacement. Nonetheless, some Puerto Rican elders remain cautiously optimistic that there is a place for them in a changing neighborhood. For this reason, they stay abreast of community debates and attend community meetings, even though they continue to be disappointed.

Bringing to light how Puerto Ricans are aging in displacement challenges the idea that as persons age they naturally isolate themselves from the outside world. Rather, what is shown is that new development projects promote their segregation, isolation, and displacement by not designing places that could foster age-friendly social exchanges in the neighborhood. “Place,” with in the concept of “aging in *place*,” therefore, ought to be more than a private dwelling space, equally important, it needs to be understood as a site of human activity and meaningful engagement. Thus, the geography of aging in place must be stretched to give greater attention to not only affordable housing but also the amenities that are created for areas in which the housing is located, such as affordable access to health services, food security, recreation, transportation, and social interactions beyond one’s own age cohort.

Puerto Rican older adults prioritize projects that cover their most basic needs and enable them to feel invited and welcomed—that is, fruterías and medical offices, along with restaurants and coffee shops that accommodate their tastes and pocketbooks. These kinds of amenities serve many beyond Puerto Rican elders’ own ethnoracial, class, and age communities. Yet, we often plan and build urban communities almost exclusively with a culture of youth in mind. Imaginings of present and future urban environments need to integrate the needs and desires of a more diverse and wider age constituency. “Para ser mundo hay

todas clases de personas" [To be a world, there are all kinds of people], Cuca told me once. More community developers, policy makers, and activists should heed Cuca Ruiz's wisdom. Otherwise we risk the displacement of our own elder selves from urban life.

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## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> There is a small body of urban ethnographic research that details the daily lives of older adults in cities, but it is primarily focused on white elders. While this scholarship reports significant patterns of social isolation and disengagement from the wider community, it also observes that these older persons continue to construct community and negotiate identities, as they assert their independence, albeit under certain constraints (Hochschild 1973; Stephens 1976; Myerhoff 1978; Smithers 1985).

<sup>ii</sup> The few studies that address how gentrification affects older adults emphasize the negative consequences of displacement, particularly its debilitating effects on mental health, activity levels, and social networks (Henig 1981, Petrovic, 2008, McCallion 2014).

<sup>iii</sup> I also interviewed and spent time with Mexican, Guatemalan, Cuban, and other Latin American and Spanish-Speaking Caribbean older adults living in senior and near senior subsidized housing. In addition to the 25 interviews with senior and near senior housing residents, I also interviewed 20 older Latinas and Latinos who do not live in senior-designated housing.