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## Erasing Mexican Chicago: The Role of Community Based Organizations and Immigrant Networks in the Gentrifying Neighborhood of Pilsen

David Orta  
*Loyola University Chicago*

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ERASING MEXICAN CHICAGO: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY BASED  
ORGANIZATIONS AND IMMIGRANT NETWORKS IN THE GENTRIFYING  
NEIGHBORHOOD OF PILSEN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

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DAVID ORTA

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the effects of gentrification in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, a historic port of entry for Mexican immigrants and a basin for community organization and other resources. The research questions of this study first query the effects of gentrification on the informal immigrant networks that make Pilsen a site for community resources for new immigrants. Second, the study explores the effects of gentrification on community-based organizations in a rapidly changing environment. As the racial and economic demographics of the neighborhood shift, community based organizations must adapt. Finally, this study examines the relationship between neighborhood residents and community based organizations. This relationship is examined through a comparison of perceptions about neighborhood change.

This project finds that community based organizations in Pilsen frame their work in a “Latino community” context as opposed to a conventional neighborhood-level “community” based organization context. In essence, these organizations seek to expand the parameters of their operations to include the Latino neighborhoods throughout Chicago. In doing this, these community based organizations fail to fully address issues facing the neighborhoods they are based in. Neighborhood residents continue to utilize the services provided by their community based organization, even after they leave the neighborhood. This project also finds that present and former neighborhood residents

have different concerns with regard to the neighborhood than the community organization seeks to address.

## **Introduction**

The Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago is currently undergoing changes. Many residents are being forced out of the homes that many have made their lives in. For some time, a transnational Mexican community has provided tangible networks for new incoming family members, friends, and acquaintances. Through these networks and the social capital they provide, immigrant residents are provided places to settle, ways to find work, and familiar neighborhoods in a new country. Resources for immigrants, low-income families and ethnic minorities could be found in a consolidated, urban setting such as these ethnic enclaves. With the fairly recent onset of gentrification in Pilsen, these networks and their accompanying resources are in jeopardy. It is imperative then, to explore the implications and consequences of gentrification on what informants consider to be the stable community fabric of Pilsen. Community-based organizations are supposed to be, for the local residents of Pilsen, important resources for legal help, immigration services, day care, etc. However, as the neighborhood demographics are changing, the formal and informal support that these organizations provide for Mexican immigrant residents of Pilsen may be in jeopardy.

This project adds to the body of literature that examines urban social processes and advances intellectual debates on the subjects of gentrification, immigration, and community. This project reveals that there is a social consequence to groups often overlooked by community organizations and researchers alike and will also help

community organizations adapt their agendas within their work on local communities undergoing gentrification. For the groups that are overlooked by major social actors such as community based organizations, this project reveals, one social consequence is that this population is often among the first to be displaced when their neighborhood becomes gentrified. Moreover, this project analyzes the role that community based organizations take up throughout this process and how they respond to the displacement of members of their serving base. Upon relocation, this results in displaced residents bringing with them the same issues of urban poverty that they dealt with in their previous neighborhood such as crime and gang-related violence.

This study explores the effects of gentrification in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, a historic port of entry for Mexican immigrants and a basin for community organization and other resources. The neighborhood of Pilsen is known as the hub for Mexican and Mexican-American culture in Chicago (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas, 2003). The broad questions of this study first query the effects of gentrification on the informal immigrant networks that make Pilsen a site for community resources for new immigrants. Through these informal networks, new incomers can find work, housing, and other informal support. Second, the study explores the effects of gentrification on community-based organizations in a rapidly changing environment. As the racial and economical demographics of a neighborhood shift, community based organizations must adapt. Finally, this study examines the relationship between neighborhood residents and community based organizations. This relationship is examined through a comparison of perceptions about neighborhood change in the neighborhood.

It was initially my hypothesis that Pilsen has lost its place as an informal source of support, specifically for immigrants, due primarily to the displacement of its most vulnerable population – mexican immigrant residents. I further anticipated that community-based organizations have lost their local serving population and have been forced to expand the parameters of their operations to include the broader Chicago community and/or to incorporate the new residents of the local community. It is likely that organizations expand their serving population to cater broadly to the Latino population group in Chicago or that the the mission of the organization has been compromised in order to accommodate the shifting neighborhood demographic – white newcomers.

Data for this project were collected from 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with community based organization (CBO) representatives and former and current neighborhood residents. I also conducted participant observation of CBO committee meetings and events. The data collection portion of this project was conducted over the course of five months beginnning in January of 2010.

The data reveal that community based organizations do not explicitly address gentrification, and when they do attempt to address some of the effects of gentrification they do so with minimal efforts to address some aspects of its negative affects on some long-time residents of Pilsen. I also find that the reason for this narrow strategy is the neighborhoods CBOs interests in expansion and desire to remain a vital leader in a broad-scale nonprofit sector that caters to a population group which they identify to be their serving base: the Latino community of Chicago without specification of neighborhood.



We learn that for Mexican immigrants of Chicago, resources including their informal ties and social capital are spread throughout the city. The findings also indicate that long-time Pilsen residents are indeed being displaced, and to some degree, they are aware of this displacement. For them, however, the issues that take primacy are those of safety, crime, and to a lesser degree, housing and neighborhood ownership.

This thesis will first examine the literature on immigration patterns, gentrification, and community based organizations to explain how ethnic enclaves such as Pilsen work to provide resources for residents, to understand the process of gentrification, and to explore the structure of community based organizations. Then, the data will be presented, and finally, the conclusion section will revisit the initial hypothesis and restate the findings of the project.

### **Literature Review**

The research questions for this study emerge, in part, from the gentrification literature. Gentrification generally refers to “the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use” (Zukin 1987). This process has been extensively studied since the first cases were documented in the 1960s. Early discourse on the topic simply identified the process and traced the demographic and physical changes of urban locales in terms of “neighborhood change” (Zukin 1987). Innovations in the field then problematized the effects of the changes and linked it to a global process that resulted from a restructuring of the economy (Zukin 1987).

But gentrification also refers to a social and spatial restructuring of the city (Zukin 1987). The economic restructuring of the American city which has led to the

gentrification of urban neighborhoods is the result of the end of the post WWII economic prosperity that Americans enjoyed up until the 1960s. At this time, Fordist systems of large scale industry began to decline as government subsidization was reduced (Greenberg 2008). Companies looked for cheaper means of production and found it in newly industrialized nations. The deregulation of financial markets loosened the restrictions once prohibiting many corporations from expanding. Finally, communication technologies were more advanced than ever at this time, making capital more flexible and moveable than before (Greenberg 2008).

Essentially, this thrust the urban centers into a transition from an old and local industry-based economy to a new global creative economy. Whereas the “old” industry-based American economy of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries maintained manufacturing sites in close proximity to its labor force for the purposes of production, the new economy maintains its ties to the American urban core, but for very different reasons. The new economy is a service-based system referred to as the “creative” economy (Zukin 1987; Lloyd 2006; Greenberg 2008). The type of work that dominates this system revolves around fields such as consulting (business, advertisement, marketing, and technological), transportation, education, food service, hospitality as well as tourism and recreation. This service-based economy has risen from the ashes of the former industrial economy, due in part to the rise of the postindustrial global city (Grazian 2008). The city, then, becomes a post-industrial site of production; however, material goods are no longer the product. The new economy is concentrated in the production of ideas; which come

from the corporate headquarters and consulting firms located in major cities (Lloyd 2006; Sassen 1991).

The local economic landscape endured drastic changes as a result of neoliberal policies as well. For the working class, there no longer existed the secure and typically unionized jobs of manufacturing industries, factories, or mills that once canvassed the city. Now there were only service-oriented jobs such as restaurant servers, hotel doormen, cleaning services, for those working class urban dwellers with low educational attainment levels. Scholars are generally in agreement that with the rise of the service industry has been accompanied by a growth in economic inequality. Saskia Sassen notes that this transformation has essentially resulted in the polarization of classes (1990).

This army of idea-creators and innovators form a mutually dependent relationship with the small “neo-bohemian” and rather large working class of the city (Lloyd 2006). The innovators, travelers, students, and tourists become the lifeline of local businesses, and the artists work in the restaurants, hotels, lounges, bars ,etc. that the former populate. According to Richard Lloyd (2006), a young, energetic work force is necessary in order to cater to the needs of the affluent. This is partially why corporate centers maintain their connection to the city. They are in the hub of modern capitalism, alongside other corporate innovators and idea-creators of the time (Lloyd 2006; Grazian 2008). In Lloyds work, he also identifies the neo-bohemians as sometimes serving as the avant garde in the gentrification of neighborhoods. This is further discussed in detail to Lloyd’s study of Wicker Park in Chicago.

Sharon Zukin also identifies the paradoxical relationship of the producers of cultural goods and services and the economy (1987). The middle class search for affordable housing in near proximity to the central-city to ease their insertion into the urban economy. However, after some time, their contribution to the economy progresses the gentrification process and raises property value, taxes and rents, ultimately making it unaffordable for them to live there anymore either (Zukin 1987). In this way, gentrification serves to displace the residents who depend on the affordability of the neighborhood housing stock. In particular, the vulnerable immigrant population which seeks affordable housing and community becomes susceptible to gentrification, and as a consequence, residential displacement.

There exists ample research on gentrification. However, the particular case of the gentrifying neighborhood of Pilsen as the site of a Mexican immigrant port of entry makes it a unique situation where we are able to examine multiple simultaneous urban processes: both immigration and community resources in the context of a gentrifying neighborhood. While other scholars have addressed these issues separately, the research questions of this project seek to unite previously disparate topics to advance theory in the literature. The cases that most closely resemble that of Pilsen include work on Latino communities that become gentrified and thus no longer predominantly Latino or dominated by a single racial or ethnic minority group. For example, in his study of West Town in Chicago, John Betancur explores the process of opposing interests in a gentrifying community. In particular, Betancur examines the role of class, race and ethnicity and the social dynamics that disrupt community life in West Town. These

dynamics include political agendas of the city to actively reinvest and revitalize recently declining areas of the city. Betancur highlights several local policies that resulted in identifying areas where private investors would receive incentives to purchase and renovate property. Over the course of a few decades, the community demographics changed as gentrifiers occupied most of the properties in the area (Betancur 2002).

In her book, The Near Northwest Side Story, Gina Perez (2004) explores a nearby neighborhood to that examined in John Betancur's article on West Town. More specifically, the author investigates the implications of gentrification on the mainly Puerto Rican neighborhood's transnational relationship; between Puerto Rico and their neighborhood in Chicago. The author focuses on the politics of identity and place in Chicago, arguing that the transnational network and migration patterns have provided avenues through which to cope with the economic consequences of gentrification. This neighborhood, having transnational ties to a sending nation and being predominantly working class Latina/o most closely resembles the neighborhood of interest in this study: Pilsen. Similar to Perez's argument, I examine the effects of gentrification on the transnational immigrant ties of the Mexican immigrant residents of Pilsen and I hypothesize that these ties are negatively affected through displacement. Just as the Puerto Rican ethnic enclave has provided social ties and a convenient set of resources for many Puerto Ricans, Pilsen provides this for its residents. However, whereas Perez identifies transnational network ties as operating through "Kin Work" survival strategies executed primarily by women both in Puerto Rico and in Chicago, it is important that we

understand the dynamics of Mexican immigration in Pilsen before assuming that this is the case for Pilsen.

Both of the projects above discuss gentrification Latino ethnic enclaves in Chicago. However, these projects do not address Mexican immigration processes and patterns in the context of neighborhood gentrification. Perez identifies the particular phenomenon that is the subject of the research questions for this project – delicate transnational networks that often result in important survival tactics. This project borrows from Perez’s investigation on the transnational ties and applies it to the Pilsen neighborhood for Mexican immigrants.

In his report on the gentrification of the Pilsen neighborhood, “Gentrification before Gentrification”, John Betancur (2005) examines the degree to which Pilsen has become gentrified and the verifiable effects of this process on the neighborhood. Betancur argues that because in Chicago gentrification has progressed to affect the neighborhood areas closely surrounding the downtown central business district, this creates the expectation that gentrification in one area has become enough of a catalyst to forecast gentrification in another nearby area. That is, a neighborhood could be perceived to become gentrified before it has actually becomes so, thus prompting the forces of gentrification to take action in the neighborhood to further development. Betancur queries the consequences of this process in his report. In short, the author attempts to gauge the actual pressures of gentrification and the extent to which Pilsen has become gentrified. The author provides a detailed examination of Pilsen and its stakeholders as it undergoes the process of gentrification.

In his work Betancur (2005) concludes that the neighborhood is indeed undergoing gentrification. In effect, the community has seen a decrease in both foreign-born and Latino populations “while realizing a substantial gain in median household incomes, owner-occupancy rates, and property values” (Betancur 2005). The author also finds that there is a likely push effect of gentrification on the residents. In other words, there is a westward movement from the eastern border of the community, which has experienced the most demographic changes. The western sub-area of Pilsen has experienced a great increase in population overall, which includes Latino and Foreign-born persons. These indicators lead us to conclude that gentrification is occurring in the Pilsen neighborhood. The author argues that Pilsen could be on the verge of a “self-fulfilling prophecy” because it has been identified as a gentrified area before it has been completely overtaken by newcomers. He predicts that this will provide incentive to outsiders for continued efforts to gentrify the neighborhood. Given the crucial importance of affordable housing, the rising costs of home and rental prices could lead to future increases in displacement. On the whole, because Pilsen has retained some of its character prior to gentrification, essentially absorbing the eastern displaced population in its westward frontier, Pilsen is found in a curious state, the author claims, and “the jury is out” (Betancur 2005).

In his findings, Betancur identifies three types of stakeholders in the neighborhood, openly anti-gentrification organizations and individuals, pro-gentrification individuals who have organized in favor of gentrification, and those who attempt to stay on neutral ground (Betancur 2005). These involve a combination (sometimes

overlapping) of residents, municipal government interests and officials, and private coalitions (bankers, developers, etc.). Betancur argues that many community organizations have taken a firm stance against gentrification. This project further analyzes this dynamic. Rather, some of the primary research questions in this project ask what the role community based organizations have in the process of gentrification in Pilsen and what effect gentrification is having on community based organizations in Pilsen. Betancur provides an overview of some actions taken by community organizations to curb the effects of gentrification. This work examines these organizations years after Betancur completed his study. This work queries the effects of gentrification on community organizations as well as the organizations responses to and interaction with the forces of gentrification. While Betancur identifies how some community based organizations utilize strategies around affordable housing to address gentrification, this work seeks to examine that strategy in the context of Pilsen as a port of entry for Mexican immigrants whose legal status in the U.S. is sometimes questionable.

This project expands on some of Betancur's key findings. Specifically, Betancur establishes the extent to which gentrification has occurred in Pilsen and some of the key players that exist within the neighborhood. While the neighborhood continues to gentrify as a result of competing and overlapping interests from within and outside of the neighborhood, it is important to analyze more in depth the role of community based organizations in this process in the context of neighborhood resources for the immigrant residents of Pilsen. This project provides a detailed examination of community based



organization efforts to in some ways resist and other ways facilitate gentrification in the neighborhood. How these community based organizations (also referred to as CBOs) address gentrification, how they adapt to a changing environment, and what role they will continue to play are among the research questions addressed in this project which will contribute to the existing literature on gentrification, and especially on that of Pilsen.

The role of CBOs in the neighborhood is an imperative component of the research questions outlined for this project. CBOs, as other researchers have identified, provide invaluable resources for their serving base. They often act as liaisons between government officials and local residents. In the context of gentrification, where political and economic actors often collaborate to “revive” neighborhoods, CBOs have the leadership capabilities in neighborhoods to be able to organize residents and take a stance on issues involving gentrification.

The most comprehensive contemporary research on CBOs in Latino neighborhoods is the sociological work of Nicole Marwell (2007). In her work, Bargaining for Brooklyn: Community Organizations in the Entrepreneurial City, Nicole Marwell (2007) examines the role of CBOs in the everyday lives of residents of Brooklyn, New York. In specific, the author focuses on the role that CBOs play in combating the plight of urban living for the urban poor and low-income Latinos of Brooklyn. This focus on an aspect of urban poverty is important because, as Marwell states, “CBOs are formal organizations tied to particular geographical places (like urban neighborhoods), which work to improve local residents’ quality of life and enhance their (or their children’s) chances of escaping poverty” (Marwell 2007). In essence, Marwell’s

work attempts to examine the “...elements of social structure that extend beyond interpersonal relationships contribute to poverty and its related social problems” (Marwell 2007). The author explores how formal community organizations’ courses of action and decisions collectively result in conditions that the urban poor face in their everyday lives (Marwell 2007).

Marwell argues that we can use the field level to examine macro-level processes. This is to be accomplished by examining the major community building mechanism at the field level – CBO’s. The author defines the “Field” as a “set of organizations linked together as competitors and collaborators within a social space devoted to a particular type of action – such as the pursuit of urban development” (Marwell, 2007). Under this theory, there are various fields in operation at the same time. One example would be the field of federal government, local municipal government, or the neighborhood levels. As Marwell explains, examining CBOs can also provide insight into the effects of macro level policies and practices on the ground level – the neighborhood.

In her other work, “Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors”, Marwell (2004) explains that CBOs generally operate as private, nonprofit organizations to provide direct services between government and third-party funding sources and the needy – in many cases the urban poor (Marwell 2004). In most cases, when these Nonprofit Organizations (CBOs) compete for and win a contract from the government to distribute services and resources they are able to decide to whom and how resources are distributed. “Since NPOs usually serve particular

geographic areas, the contracts they win mostly channel public dollars to residents of those areas rather than to equally needy people elsewhere..." (Marwell 2004).

It is important to note that not all nonprofit organizations are CBOs. As Marwell (2004) differentiates, in order to be classified as a CBO are "community-based" "in that they are organized around a particular geographic place (i.e., a "community," such as an urban neighborhood)" (Marwell 2004). That is, CBOs generally operate and execute services and resources into their local geographical areas which have designated boundaries, as opposed to nonprofit organizations which can have multiple sites and serving bases.

Marwell sets a new perspective from which to approach research on urban poverty and its related plights. Previous research, Marwell states, has largely focused on the urban poor and their behaviors, as opposed to the way in which macro-level structures manifest themselves on the ground. While Marwell examines the various services provided to the different residents of a neighborhood through the field of community organizations, she identifies that community organizations have a particular stake in the neighborhood in which they serve and are located. "The community" as defined by CBOs in their services is conventionally the local geographical neighborhood level where they are located. What Marwell identifies as operating *outside* of the community level is the broader structural mechanisms that affect the local neighborhood residents' everyday lives. According to the author, CBOs generally aim to serve as liaisons between the urban poor and sources of power and authority - those who have the power to allocate resources.

Marwell's scholarship lays a foundation upon which to build new research on urban social phenomena. In specific, the findings of this project depart from Marwell's findings and prompt the question: what occurs when a CBO's population of interest (the people they aim to serve) is not limited to one geographic space (i.e. a neighborhood)? A secondary question is also: what effect does this have when the CBO's neighborhood is undergoing gentrification? This leaves room for a number of outcomes. This project reveals that CBOs in Pilsen do not restrict their serving base to a limited geographic neighborhood. That is, CBOs in Pilsen extend their services to the Latino population of Chicago generally rather than serving, as conventionally expected, the Pilsen neighborhood. This is an important departure from Marwell's findings especially given the potential threat of gentrification in the neighborhood. This component of the project is fully developed in the data section of this paper.

### **Methods**

Also known as the lower west side community area of Chicago, Pilsen is conveniently located just a short five minute drive from downtown's central business district (the Loop). The neighborhood is located south of the University of Illinois Chicago Campus, west of Chicago's Chinatown, and just north of the river and Stevenson Expressway. Its centrality and easy access to multiple modes of transportation to and from downtown Chicago makes it a prime location for urban living.

While historically an immigrant community, having been home to Czech, Polish, and German immigrants in the late 1800s to early 1900s, it has recently become subject to several changes (Betancur 2005). It was in the 1950's that the first Mexican population

found its way to Pilsen (Betancur 2005). This was only the beginning of a new era. In his work, Gerald Ropka (1980) tracks the increase in density of the Mexican and other Latino population groups from 1960-1970. He finds that both Pilsen in particular and in Chicago generally, the Latino population had experienced exponential growth (Ropka 1980). Ropka identifies Pilsen's immigrant history as providing the ideal place for the immigration of newer immigrants – namely Mexicans. Thus, Pilsen multiplied its Mexican population between 1960-1970, making it the first Latino-majority neighborhood in the city as of 1970 (Ropka 1980; Betancur 2005).

The earliest documented wave of Mexican immigrants to settle in Chicago did so in the early 1900's, during the First World War and in greater numbers subsequently after the war (Arredondo 2008). Mexicans were Chicago's first Spanish speaking group and lived interspersed among European ethnics in the early part of the 1900s (Padilla 1985). In 1916, 1,000 newcomers settled in Chicago, this number would surpass 20,000 by 1930 (Padilla 1985).

Initially, Mexican migration to the U.S. began with the deliberate recruitment of Mexican workers by U.S. Growers and Railroad companies (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). However, after the first wave of immigrants arrived, social networks took on the role of recruitment and facilitated further migration. Immigrants have always migrated through their social networks, which are usually comprised of kin and friends (Pedraza and Rumbaut 1996). Immigrant networks prove to be decisive in the receiving city location because family and kin networks can provide shelter and assistance (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Early Mexican immigrant trajectories to Chicago included a stop in California or

Texas; most had some experience in the U.S. before moving to Chicago (Padilla 1985). Mexicans came to Chicago in search of job opportunities. In 1910, there were about 1,000 Mexicans in the Chicago area, approximately 25,000 in 1930 (Casuso and Camacho 1995). The majority, however, were recruited by employers, usually meat packing houses or the railroads (Padilla 1985). Chicago's Mexican community shrunk by approximately 36 percent in the 1930s as a result of repatriation programs, only to grow again during WWII as more Mexicans were recruited to compensate for labor shortages (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003). The population of Mexican Chicago multiplied over the next few decades. In the year 2000, Chicago was declared the second largest concentrated Mexican settlement in the U.S. with one point one million residing in the greater metropolitan area (De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2003).

Early on Mexican immigrants generally settled in three community areas in Chicago, usually nearest to their place of employment – The Near West Side, Back of the Yards, and South Chicago (Padilla 1985). Back of the Yards neighborhood was located in close proximity to the meat packing houses and South Chicago amidst the steel plants which employed a large number of Mexican immigrants. However, The Near West Side, which was located in close proximity to the rail yards, was later displaced due to urban renewal efforts. The expansion of expressways and the University of Illinois Chicago's campus in the 1950s and 60s caused much of the Mexican population to move to neighboring community areas southwest of the Near West Side community, which included the Pilsen neighborhood and South Lawndale. By 1980 these neighborhoods would reach a high of 83,000 Mexican residents. Pilsen would remain an anchor for what

was long considered the most important port of entry for new Mexican immigrants (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Casuso and Camacho 1995).

Work concentration gave way to residential concentration, which results in ethnic enclaves such as Pilsen. These enclaves yield ethnic institutions in neighborhoods such as bars, grocery stores, restaurants, churches, community organizations, and others, which in turn reinforced ethnic solidarity among the immigrant population (Pedraza and Rumbaut 1996). An ethnic neighborhood is comprised of a group of people who share common cultures, problems, and concerns (Seller 1977). Ethnic neighborhoods develop informal institutions where newcomers can obtain information about their new home away from home (Seller 1977).

These immigrant enclaves often resulted in the development of collective organizations that provided services to immigrants in a time of racial injustice. These types of organizations could be traced back all the way to the early 1900s (Padilla 1985). One early example of this is the Sociedad Benito Juarez established in 1918 to dispense sick benefits for immigrant laborers (Padilla 1985). The Catholic Church has also played a major role in assisting these immigrant populations by providing alternative social services (Padilla 1985). This was usually only after the community members make an effort to push the Church to provide a Spanish-speaking priest in order to best serve its congregation (Padilla 1985). Spatial concentrations where an ethnic group's numbers are strong also yield increased economic opportunities and can give the group a political and economic voice, even if just locally. Moreover, spatial concentration can help to maintain ties to a native culture and regulate the pace of acculturation as well as help maintain

direct ties to community networks that provide economic and moral support (Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

The importance of the ethnic neighborhood has for long been an important component of immigrant life. As Logan, Alba, and Zhang (2002) argue in their work, immigrant communities serve multiple purposes and provide an important function for new arrivals. Most importantly, the authors here argue that there continues to be "... wide agreement that neighborhoods continue to have an important function for new arrivals. This is particularly evident for people whose customs or languages set them apart from the majority population" (Logan, Alba, and Zhang 2002). In particular, these communities serve to meet the needs of the population. Their needs often include "affordable housing, family ties, a familiar culture, and help in finding work" (Logan, Alba, and Zhang 2002). For these newcomers, the importance of these neighborhoods cannot be over emphasized.

These enclaves are established over time through transnational networks. As Manuel Barajas argues in his book, The Xaripu Community Across Borders: Labor Migration, Community, and Family (2009), a transnational perspective "brings the analysis of migration closer to the subjects of migrants and their communities by focusing on their social ties (networks) across borders" (Barajas 2009). The author outlines how immigration is initiated. First, pioneers come to the receiving nation and establish a strong infrastructure that facilitates mass migration (Barajas 2009). It is ultimately the social networks in the form of social capital that provides many of the resources facilitating further migration (Barajas 2009). Once established through these



networks, ethnic enclaves serve as magnets to new immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). New immigrants tend to move to places where ethnic enclaves have already become established, and subsequent generations do not move too far from their new home (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). This rich history of Pilsen as an immigrant enclave provides us with a particular case that has not been fully explored: what are the effects of gentrification on an immigrant enclave? What are the effects of gentrification on community resources, specifically, community based organizations? How are immigrant residents affected throughout the process? As a site of entry for newcomers from Mexico, Pilsen has historically hosted the infrastructure for immigration (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Casuso and Camacho 1995). Thus, what occurs when the residents (social capital) are in jeopardy of being displaced? Focusing on community based organizations provides us with a window into the dynamic processes that occur at the neighborhood level. Because organizations are formal manifestations of neighborhood resources, they are more easily accessible and will provide an essential perspective to incorporate into this study of Pilsen and its residents.

This project employs qualitative methods to address the research questions. The broad questions of this study first query the effects of gentrification on the informal immigrant networks in Pilsen that provide resources for new immigrants. Through these informal networks, new incomers can find work, housing, and other informal support. What are the effects of gentrification on the resources of immigrants in this historic port of entry? Second, the study explores the effects of gentrification on community based organizations in a rapidly changing environment. As the demographics of a neighborhood

shift, racially and economically, community based organizations must adapt. What role do CBOs serve in the community in the context of gentrification? Through a combination of semi-structured, in-depth, open ended interviews as well as participant observation with community organizations, CBO representatives, and community residents, I investigate the role of community organizations and community networks in the context of gentrification. This project aimed to examine what responses to gentrification the CBOs have had and how gentrification has affected their serving base. Then, the project aimed to examine how residents' networks and resources are affected through gentrification.

I conducted interviews over the course of five months and sought opportunities to conduct participant observation through the entire time. After each interview or observation, I would transcribe all data, analyze it, and identify themes and patterns. These themes would then be applied to new interviews. The final interviews were conducted in May, and all data was processed and analyzed in May and June of 2010. A total of thirteen interviews were conducted; seven interviews with CBO representatives and five with residents and former residents of Pilsen are included in this project. Interviews provide the richest data that allow for an understanding of residents personal experiences and histories. Interviews also give the richest first hand data on CBO projects and strategies as well as general opinions and concerns of both residents and CBO representatives. Participant observation served to supplement interview data. One interview has been excluded from the data section of this paper for the sake of presentation but the data collected from that interview correlate to the findings presented

in this paper. Many of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, were translated after transcription. Interviews lasted an average of one hour and fifteen minutes and were conducted in the homes of residents or in the offices of the community based organization. Residents were asked questions regarding their immigration experiences, residential choices, experiences living in the neighborhood, and their interaction with CBOs and CBO representatives. CBO interviewees included employees and leadership from two locally-based community organizations. Included in the interviewees were CEOs, Community Organizers, Program Directors, and Program coordinators. Staff members were asked questions about the direction of the initiatives, the mission of the organization, their serving base, their interaction with the community residents, and the role of their organizations in the process of gentrification. The names of both organizations and interviewees have been changed in this project to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

Two organizations selected for this study were chosen based on their prominence in the neighborhood. These organizations were the first to be contacted for initial interviews and participant observation. Based on access to their staff and permission to conduct participant observation, the final decision was made to select the two CBOs included in this study. Once these organizations representatives provided me with access to their staff and program participants, I utilized a snowball sampling system to request referrals from the first interviewees. Resident interviewees were approached through the programs offered at CBOs. Most interviewees participate in programs at either of the CBOs included in this study. This allowed for a stable systematically chosen pool of

participants for interviews. CBO representatives were chosen based on access; those who were willing to participate in an interview. Recruitment efforts include referrals but also mass-emails to CBO employees from different departments of the organizations.

Community residents and former residents were recruited from adult education and technical training courses offered through the Latino Power Institute (also referred to as LPI), one of the Community Organizations studied in this project. I presented the project in front of each class and asked for volunteers. Those that initially volunteered were asked to refer two other people who might be interested in participating in an interview and met the criteria: present or former resident of Pilsen or employees of one of the two CBOs included in this study.

The interviews conducted with community organization representatives provide detailed data on the strategies and directions of CBOs as well as their missions and long-term initiatives. In addition to speaking with representatives at all levels of the organization, including top leadership, each CBO employee is by and large charged with taking leadership within whatever the project they are involved with, providing us with first hand representative data into those initiatives and insight on how they relate to broader community dynamics. The interviews with CBO employees provide a great deal of detailed insight, including hopes and aspirations for each program, and in-depth self-analysis on the part of interviewees. Similarly, interviews with current and former neighborhood residents allow for the residents to express their views, opinions, issues, hopes, and aspirations with some depth. They voiced their true concerns with the neighborhood, their lives, and the CBOs they participate in. Nevertheless, because so few

interviews were conducted with residents, I am unable to say with sufficient empirical backing that the broad research questions initially proposed in this project are sufficiently addressed. However, I can say with confidence that the findings presented in this paper, which are the collective views and opinions of the participants interviewed in this project, suggest possible directions and a window into possible trends that are worthy of further exploration. Because only two organizations were selected for this study, the findings of this project represent only those CBOs investigated in this study.

Interviews provided insight into the lives of residents on questions of community and community identity, their immigrant history, personal networks, community involvement, as well as their opinions and experiences with neighborhood change and neighborhood problems. Interviews were key in this project because they allowed the researcher to guide the line of questioning and the topics of conversations (Creswell 2009). CBO representatives were asked questions about decision-making processes, relationship to the neighborhood, the people they serve, their programs and initiatives, neighborhood change, organizational change and growth, and funding operations. These questions sought to understand the process of the relationship of the organization to its constituency, the community itself, and its mission and goals. Interviews provided most of the insight into the broad-level organizational directives.

Interviews and participant observation took place over the course of five months, beginning in January of 2010 and ending in May of the same year. I attended two Pilsen Development Board meetings, and various programs and workshops, and toured offices and neighborhoods. In specific, I attended three meetings, two orientations, one technical

training workshop, and one literacy class. I also toured the various offices of the CBOs and attended the neighborhood tour that they provide for outsiders. Attending two meetings allowed for the researcher to observe differences between the two meetings and the direction that the group takes in both their long and short term initiatives. Participant observation allowed for the researcher to gain insight into the internal operations of community organizations and allowed me to obtain accurate data on the current goals and projects of community organizations in Pilsen. This enabled me to observe the orientation of the organization with regard to its mission and its projects. I was able to observe how multiple community based organizations and other nonprofits cooperated in their initiatives to address issues in the neighborhood. Limited access to meetings of the Pilsen Development Board was gained through organizational representatives who were also interviewed. The Pilsen Development Board meetings were moderated by one of the organizations who were one of two cases utilized in this study. Upon any collection of data at observation sites, I composed “initial” memos documenting the themes or concepts I had encountered that day (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). When reviewing my data I used a “focused coding” system to identify themes related to the research questions (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Attendance in these meetings yielded insight into the prominent initiatives that are the current focus of each individual organization.

These methods were selected based on what would provide thorough, detailed data of the community processes involved in gentrification, neighborhood representation, and resources. Based on the desired data, it was decided that qualitative methods would provide the richest information and details necessary to answer the research questions.

This project employs the “researcher as a key instrument” method, where the researcher is a tool for data collection (Creswell 2009). Through interview guides developed by the researcher, data is collected, compared, coded, and analyzed to discover themes and patterns that are representative of the data.

**Building Community: Community Based Organizations, Residents,  
and the Neighborhood**

This study addresses some broad questions about community processes.

Generally, I sought to examine how gentrification is addressed, if at all, by neighborhood residents and leaders (in the form of CBOs). This question involved two primary inquiries. First, I sought to attend to the effect of gentrification on neighborhood residents’ networks. The neighborhood in this study has for long been a port of entry for Mexican immigrant. As immigrants, as the literature indicates, their residential and settlement patterns reflect and help create their social networks. With displacement being a common consequence of neighborhood gentrification, the question becomes what affect gentrification has on the networks and residential patterns of the largely Mexican population of Pilsen. Second, I sought to investigate the potential effects of gentrification on Community Based Organizations. The hypothesis here was that CBOs are forced to respond to the changing demographics of their neighborhood. This could manifest itself in the form of new services, new initiatives, or quite contrary; the organization could seek to change its location to follow their residents or to continue to serve its historical serving base – the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant population of Pilsen – from its

present location. Implicit in these questions is the community's general interaction with the forces of gentrification.

Whether gentrification has changed Community Based Organizations is difficult to discern. As recent research on Pilsen has indicated, the process of gentrification is apparent, but it has not taken an overwhelming hold on the neighborhood as it has in other cases (Betancur, 2005). This has also been confirmed through this project's interviews and observations. Many residents have moved due to the effects of gentrification, but the impact of newcomers has not yet reached a critical level where the entire neighborhood population has shifted. The gentrification process has been slowed by two major forces. The crash of the housing market has left many developers with properties that they wish to sell but cannot, or if they do, they do so for a very low price. Private home owners also suffer the housing market crash, seeing the property value of the homes fall in value, also keep them from selling their homes. Another force is the fact that there is an active collection of organizations in the neighborhood that seek to play a role in the further development of property. Community based organizations are complex institutions with multiple layers and a number of differing views. Nevertheless, their employees generally come together around a vision, mission, and goals and execute initiatives based on them.

Community based organizations in Pilsen identify the people they serve differently than one would conventionally expect a CBO to do (see Marwell 2004). That is, the "community" that organizations in Pilsen serve is not bound by geography or by the boundaries of the neighborhood. Organizations provide services to an already large



number of people outside of the neighborhood and even seek ways that they could expand to new sites or locations. Alex, a long-time community organization employee that works in community resource development for a prominent CBO known as The Hope Initiative (THI) explains that as time passes and organizations grow, so does their capacity to serve more people:

We opened services over in [a suburb of Chicago]... I guess that's something new. We were seeing this wave of foreclosures. People coming in for help to save their homes. And it's not just a metropolitan problem. The suburbs were hit very hard. And we were realizing that a lot of people were traveling to get our services and that we needed to increase our capacity. We found a good partner in Mount St. Caramel. They were able to let us have some space in their building; we were able to open there and to help the people in that area.

In one of their affordable housing projects, Alex explains, The Hope Initiative (THI) sought people through television advertisements and press conferences to publicize openings for apartments. Thus, there are a variety of people “all around Chicago, and even northern Indiana ... Some tenants came from other buildings. Some tenants were living in the community ... since we were a grassroots organization, the people we cater to [are] the community. But now ... we've been around for twenty years and our scope is wider. For that alone we have to reach out to more people. Perhaps that ever growing scope that I'm referring to is what paddles looking for more capacity... and that's why that satellite opened”.

According to Alex, a structural change can adjust or maintain the capacity and scope of the organization and the services they provide. It was the massive numbers of home foreclosures that precipitated the expansion of services from his CBO. When asked what prompted the change of the services offered by the organization, he replied:

...the foreclosures ... we had a “save your homes” fair and there we saw that ... crisis that brought a lot of people to our door. Our peer organizations that were unable to provide those services teamed up with us... The fairs we had throughout the year were enough for us to see that there is a need... The community development work that we do is separate from that... Foreclosure counseling is important for us because it is neighborhood stabilization. It is important for us to save neighborhood investment. Community development is growing the community. It is providing the community with affordable, safe housing. In order to have a healthy community, you have to have a whole spectrum – decent and safe housing and homeowners.

For Alex, community development and the new financial services work in tandem to develop a “healthy community”. With regard to the question of how the CBO has changed over time he adds, “[The mission] has always been the same. If you go back in history, to before THI was founded, the community was not exactly focused on affordable housing or on a safe place to live, they had other problems. Although, they were aware of the need of affordable housing, they had other problems ... 1976 is the year when people started paying attention to housing, but did not develop housing.” Due to a fire in the neighborhood in which a family was lost, Alex explained, awareness of community needs arose. Originally, the organizers were working out of the basement of St. Albert’s Church (a local Catholic parish). After some time, they saw the need for some professional community organization. The money was pooled between a few of the local churches and someone was hired. In 1990, the agenda was to build a healthy community. Alex says, “The mission has remained the same. But the organization has grown to meet the needs of the time. To adjust to what we have been going through with the economy. We have been able to expand our scope and expand services to the suburbs, so we grew, but our mission remains very vital to our existence.”

Other organizations demonstrate a similar trajectory of grassroots organizing crystallizing in an institution on a level of its own. The Latino Power Institute (LPI), one of the oldest organizations in the neighborhood, provides services to people from all across the city and suburbs. Selina, a relatively new employee at LPI has been the head of their youth development program for approximately three years. When asked who the programs target and who do they serve, she explains: “Back of the Yards. Back of the Yards, Little Village, and 18<sup>th</sup> Street... we serve students that come from anywhere. But what I’ve actually found more interesting is that the need is being taken from Pilsen and Little Village ... not to say that the need isn’t there, I think that there are enough organizations and people willing to help... *were* doing better than we are in the back of the Yards, where there isn’t anybody. Because it’s been a community that’s been severely overlooked by everybody.” So, at LPI the services they provide are not meant to target a particular neighborhood. When probed about what she thought the relationship was with the local neighborhood in light of the fact that they serve more than just the neighborhood:

...this is the thing, although we work with certain segments of the population, since we’re a larger institution, were bigger than other organizations. So, when we talk about having a program or starting a program, were talking about a program that’s maybe open to the south or southwest side of Chicago. It’s not just you know, just working with Pilsen. I think we’re kind of past the terms of just thinking – neighborhood... *and kind of thinking city-wide* [emphasis added]. IPL is known throughout the city of Chicago, it’s actually known throughout the U.S. Um, but I think the time to think about certain neighborhoods and certain streets has passed, I think maybe that was in the 70’s and the 80’s but I think that with the new millennium and with the surge in population I think we can’t think like that anymore. And we’re looking at the city; *the Latinos of Chicago is who we’re serving...*

In this case, she emphasizes that the organization recognizes that the “Latino community” extends beyond the parameters of the local neighborhoods and as such, the organization follows their needs wherever they may be located. This is further touched upon by another employee who directs an adult education program in the CBO.

Luisana, has been at LPI for just over 8 years. Her experience is largely based on the programs in adult education and it is something she is very passionate and opinionated about. For Luisana, education is an important stepping stone for a better quality of life for immigrants. In specific, Luisana directs the adult literacy program (one of only a few in the entire city) and she says that learning to read in their own language is important for immigrants in order for them to be able to learn to communicate in English. In concise words she explained, “We do what is possible to get organizations from the area and from outside of the neighborhood to do what is possible to help our people – *Nuestra Gente Latina* [our Latino people]”.

In discussing where the people live who the programs serves, Luisana wanted to express her concern that there is a great need for this service. She explained:

People come from the suburbs ... we allow them to do long distance classrooms. They come pick up the materials and they self-teach for the most part. But we serve them. Recently, we conducted an orientation in Elgin [a suburb of Chicago] at a community plaza in conjunction with the Mexican secretary of education and the Mexican consulate we have been able to successfully begin a program there. But for example, in suburbs closer to us such as Cicero and Berwyn, there are entire families that are illiterate. Many of them are not able to make it consistently to classes in Pilsen, they seek us out to find out if there is anything closer to them in their towns or suburbs, but they cannot make it all the way to Chicago due to economic and time constraints on them ... we have people come from all these places in the suburbs with their kids, after a long day of work or before ... the other large percentage come from Little Village [a bordering neighborhood] and then the closer area.

For Luisana, it is important to recognize that the organization identifies the needs of the population group. The mission of the organization has always been to serve the needs of the population group. It is the capacity to do that which has expanded thus allowing the organization to serve Latinos outside of the immediate neighborhood. Luisana explains, “The mission of this organization is to support Latinos and to prepare them to overcome the barriers in this country but to help them maintain our culture. The main message is that if education is power, we must feed that power so as to empower our people.

As mentioned before, leadership identifies the needs of “the community” and responds by trying to find resources. She goes on:

Well, one of the first programs that was developed by the CBO was literacy. This began with people teaching each other whatever they could, whatever they knew in the basement of a local church. Now, it’s much more developed obviously... now we have a team of leadership that diagnoses the needs of the community, and I think they’re fully capable of doing such a thing.

In talking about how the organization has expanded their resources, Luisa elaborates, “I’ve seen an enormous growth. We have multiple offices, with new services. We have a site downtown and several here in the neighborhood... we also have new programs... daycare (and well into the evenings), women’s association, youth programs - and none of this was here before. Now there is...” At THI, David, an employee of the CBO, explains that his constituents are mostly all Latinos from all over the region. Because who the organization serves is inherent in the organization’s mission, their location is irrelevant. There is indication that this is nothing new for the organization and its original mission. David clarified, “... the name [of the CBO], in the beginning, it had

Pilsen somewhere in there. But what they noticed is that keeping that in there would limit us to this community. And they asked the question: do we really want to limit ourselves to this community? Or what do we want to look at in the future? And then they took that off and that opened up the doors for us to expand into Little Village, Back of the Yards [surrounding Latino neighborhoods] ... and who knows we can expand elsewhere and help out in different ways... [that's based on] funding but also following the needs of the people". For David, it is clear that the needs of the people (referring to the Latino population group in Chicago) decide what projects the organization will develop and what they will seek funding for. What has prompted change for the organization has been the strategies that the organization utilizes and the continuous effort to innovate. David explains, "There's a lot of organizations all over the city, not only in Pilsen, but the difference is that some get to a comfort zone and don't leave. We started with 5,000 from each of a few churches, and now were at a staff of about 40 employees and about \$40 million in assets and were constantly trying to find new and more ways to help the organization grow and to help our communities grow... not just community (singular)." He goes on, "One of the things that makes us different is that we don't solely depend on foundations ... or ... funding from the state or whatnot. About 50% of our revenue comes from our housing initiatives. And it cycles through. Our revenue comes from there but it also helps maintain and grow those projects but also for future projects. I think it's been that and not being satisfied when you get to a certain point but also diversifying what you do and where you get your funding from..." This is not just one of the organizations;

both of the lead organizations on the Pilsen Development Board exhibit many of the same attributes with regard to their future endeavors.

At LPI Selina provided important insight about her organization that she implied not many people knew. “We’re growing by leaps and bounds.” She proclaimed and continued with some history:

Ten years ago we had one building. We [we’re] more program- based and [had no] particular departments. We’ve grown exponentially, we’ve grown, and were about to grow - in the next two to five years, were about to grow *immensely*. But I think with the more people you have under an umbrella, the harder it is to get everybody organized and the harder it is to get everyone on the same page. So, it all goes back to leadership and whether or not they’re prepared to handle what’s about to occur. [LPI] has been a community based organization for over 30 years but in a year or two we’re gunna take on a charter school. Um, so, in the next five years we’re gunna have... we have an alternative high school already... we’re gunna be opening up two charter schools but we’re still gunna retain our community based organization programs. We’re gunna need to fund the charter schools, which we already have a lot of the funding for, but we’re also gunna need to staff them which is going to amount to a lot of people, whereas originally, we used to be less than one hundred staff, now were at two to three hundred, and that’s just gunna make it grow a lot bigger. So it’s just a matter of people knowing the mission, the purpose and what we’re doing and why were doing it.

This brings the organization into a whole other playing field. While they had for long provided educational services that were lacking in the community, they had been on the smaller level and executed through programs in existing leased buildings. Now, the development of a new building to house a new charter school would propel the organization into new territory. Selina also implied that a new school would open shortly after the one currently planned. A fourteen year veteran confirms much of what other employees at LPI have said. Tim, a director of the workforce development programs explained the concept behind some of the expansion that has taken place over the past few years, “We have a particular set of services, and portfolio. In essence what we can do

is set up franchises in other communities... with other partners. With what we've done, we can go provide those services elsewhere ... there's tremendous potential to do more there". Time recognizes that Pilsen is not the focus of the services provided by the organization. Furthermore, he recognizes that the organization has expanded strategically to Latino neighborhoods according to the strategy and mission planned out by the organization leadership.

When asked about how and why THI has grown, one community organizer, Janet, responded by explaining that it seems only natural to the mission of the organization at this point. She replied:

Because of THI's mission – [Reading off of computer screen] “Our mission is to build relationships and to challenge people to act on their faith and values to create healthy communities through education, community organizing, and community development” ... So, THI comes from Pilsen, a Latino neighborhood. I shouldn't even say a Latino community but an immigrant community. And one of the things that we do, it makes sense for us to look outside the borders of Pilsen and ask who are our neighbors? And that is Little Village, Back of the Yards, and when we have people from Little Village and Back of the Yards that are constantly coming to Pilsen and looking for resources and asking for help we can do what we can to instead of them coming to us, we go to them. – That's the mentality. That's the thought.

When asked if the fact that those communities are Latino communities plays any role in expanding services to that neighborhood, Janet replied:

I think traditionally yes. THI started because a group of churches gave seed money to start it. So the churches have really been at the forefront to help us get established wherever we go. Melrose Park has a very organized church with active members. Those people are our base, and I think that's something that we should be proud of... because that's our history and that's how we started... and if we can't help there, where are we to go from. That's a big component... This is the Latino community... Especially, like I said, Little Village was 99% Mexican, and like 90% immigrant, they are our sister neighborhood. We need to help them.



These CBOs have sought from their inception to become expansive institutions that pride themselves on their grassroots beginnings and place great importance on Latino community-building in the existing Latino neighborhoods in Chicago. Part of this desire to expand may come about after deciding that enough has been done to address the process of gentrification that their base neighborhood is undergoing. As the THI employee David said on the topic of gentrification and his organization:

I think we're creating opportunities to reinforce and to keep a certain amount of tradition and culture and type of person and by type of person I mean somebody who's been in the neighborhood and that's been developing the history of the neighborhood to be able to stay in the neighborhood. By physically living here and being able to be involved in the neighborhood. Is that the whole solution? Probably not, right? But I think its part of it... [The] type of people and obviously one of the big changes in the community is the affordability of the neighborhood. I think THI helped pass this policy where any development in the neighborhood where there is for example a condo complex that 21% of those units have to be set aside for affordable housing... and that's not the whole solution, but it's part of it and its better than nothing. It's an approach that other organizations don't take, other organizations would go out there and directly protest [mimicking] 'oh, blah blah blah, get outta here!' but they don't look at the policy aspect... what could we do to influence policy to solve part of this issue?? What's the compromise? – is another question. There's always a compromise with this work...

David's passionate stance on the issue demonstrates THI's stake in the gentrification process. The organization, through its initiatives, tried to find a middle ground between complete opposition to the forces of gentrification, as David has mentioned that some organizations take, and a passive stance on gentrification. That is, the primary way that the organization addresses the effects of gentrification is by simply developing affordable housing units. In its initiatives and programs, THI does not explicitly address gentrification. This is also supported by observing the organization's involvement with the Pilsen Development Board (discussed below). This is particularly

relevant when we discover who actually comes to occupy the affordable housing units offered through THI. When asked about who they are, and where they are from, the housing complex project manager, Alejandro, explained that it is sometimes challenging to get people to live in the units, and so sometimes outreach and advertisement must be utilized. He recalled the opening of a large mixed-income apartment complex that had both market rate units as well as affordable housing units. To get more applications for the affordable housing units, THI aired the groundbreaking ceremony on a Spanish language television station and listed their contact information for applications. This resulted in the housing complex becoming home to families from all over the city and suburbs, mostly Latino. In fact, according to Alejandro, the majority of tenants in the new affordable housing complex were not residents or former residents of Pilsen. Furthermore, before leaving the field, I heard talk of developing affordable housing outside of borders of the neighborhood, further extending the reach of the already large CBO.

Who exactly the CBOs actually serve is often times put in general language, which if nothing else, reflects the nature of the CBOs in Pilsen. The CEO of one organization, Jose, gives a concise explanation, "... we have a mission to contribute to the fullest development of Latino immigrants and their families. To do it in a way that promotes full participation in the changing U.S. society while preserving cultural dignity and identity..." The particularities of this statement make it part of one of the most insightful conversations yet. This CEO frames his vision of the CBO in language that confirms many of the previous interviews. First, the constituency of this CBO is the

*Latino* population group, immigrants, and their families. This is not set in geographical terms other than in general, geographically undistinguishable wording in the description he provides. Moreover, he sites that participation in U.S. society need not preclude cultural dignity and identity. That is, this CBO does not focus on a geographical neighborhood; rather, it focuses on a “cultural” community upon which identification is a requisite in order to maintain membership. After circling around the same topic for some time, he tried to clarify:

... Well it depends on how you define the local community, right? Some people, you know, everybody defines it a little differently, so yeah, they all come from the local community, now if you define the local community as Pilsen, right, then, *no* they all don't come from the local community, because the people that come to in, come from the Latino community. I mean, and I used to say from the southwest side, but the fact of the matter is that when we started to create programs that had value, and weren't being done anywhere else, like the nursing program from instance, we get people, Latinos, from all over Chicago and the suburbs, we have people driving from Joliet. Um, so you know, if we describe this a little bit, if we're running an adult based education English, well there's other English program around the city, so most time, people aren't going to drive from the north side, here, take the bus, because they can get English class in their community, good for them, we want that to be the case, right? ... So we end up largely serving Pilsen and Little Village, and the people around the area. Like our high school, right. We mostly get kids from all over the southwest side, all the way over to Midway, coming this way. And the reason that service area is wider is because *Latinos are our community*, right [emphasis added]. And we are a CBO, well there are no alternatives to them closer to midway. I bet if there was an alternative school that was closer to Midway and it was a good one, they would go. But they don't go because there isn't one. So we don't like community in that kind of sense, we look at community as a community that we are *creating* in the Latino community [emphasis added]. It is a broader definition, but it is one that is more appropriate because quite frankly when you look at families they are spread out all over the place, but they're still a community. That family gets together, and you know, and groups of families get together and they are a community of themselves, you know. And so, um, when we limit ourselves by geography we are not, we are not thinking in the kinds of terms that our communities relate in ... it is not boxed in that way. And we shouldn't be...

The fact that this organization is a *community*-based organization is something that is well known and embraced by these organizers. As we have seen the CBO's conceptualization of community however, is different than conventions would dictate. The CEO of the one of the organizations put it most concisely in the response provided above. The vision, services, programs, and initiatives, therefore, all hinge on this premise and this particular definition of "community". For them, their "community" is not threatened by development or upward mobility, and thus gentrification plays a minor role as an issue for the neighborhood and its residents, at least according to the organizations. For these CBOs, the Latino "community" (population group) – the primary serving base for these organizations – exists without geographical boundaries. For them, the end of Pilsen as a Mexican neighborhood would have minimal effects on who they serve, and even how they continue to operate. Thus it should be no wonder that the organizations do not seek to out rightly and vehemently object to the encroachment of gentrification. Nevertheless, the symbolic value of being a community-based organization that serves Latinos which is physically based out of the historic hub of Mexican-American life in Chicago, provides the organizations with a historical validity to continue to serve the Latino population group and maintain the "right" to do so (See Hunter, 1979, for more on Symbolic Communities). These findings are also highlighted in the observation of the inter-organizational committee that seeks to direct local development.

The Pilsen Development Board (the PDB) is a collective of a number of organizations and institutions located in Pilsen, or that are currently working in Pilsen. It was described to me by one of the board directors as an inter-organizational group that

was brought together some years ago in order to coordinate the multiple local resources but to also address the opening of a new charter school that was moving into the neighborhood. Initially, the committee was gathered to address the effects of the charter school on the existing neighborhood public schools. This referred to drawing resources and students away from the public schools in the area. Because the new school did indeed have negative effects on the public schools in the neighborhood, the PDB was gathered to attempt to coordinate future development in Pilsen. Presently, the committee meetings generally include representatives from a wide array of neighborhood institutions including a nearby community college, elementary and grammar schools, a representative from the local Alderman's office, from the Hispanic state chamber of commerce, the local clinic, nonprofit agencies, and the majority of CBOs that provide a variety services for their clients. There are also some organizations present that were from outside of the neighborhood but do provide services the residents of the area. The services provided by all of these organizations cover a broad spectrum of needs including gang violence prevention, youth arts programs, financial services, employment services agencies, workforce development, legal services, education-related services, health services, housing-related services, and immigration advocacy and activism. There are a total of 21 organizations participating at various levels with the planning committee. Most are based in Pilsen, while others are nonprofit agencies that provide services to general areas.

Since its inception, the board has segmented into task forces addressing five major concerns that have been identified by the various organizations' leadership. They identify as major issues: 1) Housing; developing housing options in the community 2)

Education; improving educational opportunities 3) Economy; building a strong neighborhood economy 4) Immigration; promote the advocacy for positive immigration legislation reform 5) Community Image; working to improve Pilsen's image as a Mexican neighborhood. However, the more visible task force is one active around the issue of education in the neighborhood. These foci are what have been identified as the important weaknesses that need to be addressed by the neighborhood and its representatives. These weakness or issue areas were first outlined in November of 2006 in the Pilsen Community Life Plan (PCLP) which serves as a "blueprint for the future that [community organizations] are already implementing. The aim of the Community Life Plan is to retain the Mexican heritage and culture of the neighborhood, to improve the educational and economic opportunities of the neighborhood, to improve the image of the neighborhood, and to improve the overall quality of life for its residents" (Pilsen Community Life Plan 2006).

The board meets to discuss each of these issue areas and to coordinate with one another in order to maintain communication in their individual organizations' efforts. At the meetings, which convene once every two months, the agenda points are based on these five issue areas. These areas are addressed according to each organization and whether or not they are oriented toward that issue. When addressing housing issues, the representative from the mayor's office announced a few programs that aim to beautify the homes of residents as well as to make "green" historic homes in the neighborhood and to clean up the streets. The alderman's office seemed to focus on services to improve the physical appearance and to modernize some of the private infrastructure of residents'

homes. This was treated at the meeting as a project that was already underway and that did not require much time on the agenda.

One of the major issues at this point in the meeting was an issue that took up a large portion of the already lengthy two hour meeting. Education in the neighborhood is looked upon by the group as a growing concern due to proposed budgetary cuts at the state level. In this conversation, it was made clear by the chair of the committee – also the CEO of a prominent CBO in the neighborhood, The Hope Initiative, when he declared that the organizations need to take a stance on the budget cuts that will effect public schools in Pilsen: “We should make a statement”, he said referring to the entire committee and each organization individually. He went on to explain, “we need to issue a statement or a petition, but we need to make sure that our state representatives and officials know that we’re serious about this and that this is an issue for their constituency”. His employee, also a key player in the committee, interjected “This is not just Pilsen; this is also affecting other neighborhoods”. He went on to indicate that he had a meeting set up with organizations based out of other neighborhoods (of neighboring predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods). They were all pleased with the news and seemed to agree that this issue would require mobilization beyond just one or two neighborhoods. But the organizations not only focus on coordinating existing resources, they also develop their own when necessary. This is in line with the work of Marwell, (2007) in that community organizations are structured to work on various “field” levels. This committee of community organizations leaders was taking actions that would apply

political pressure on representatives in order to allocate resources that their community needs.

Along the same lines, in their development of the local economy, the organizations focus on bringing in resources, creating jobs, or providing job-related training. In specific, one of the new grants that was awarded to one of the organizations was to coordinate the creation of a workforce development program where federal stimulus money will pay for the wages and benefits of newly created positions in the southwest side of Chicago. While this project was offered to the organizations at the meeting first, it will ultimately be extended throughout the city.

Just as the organizations are focused on creating a bridge between federal resources, they also voice the community's issues to the federal government through activism in attempts to influence policy. In coalition with nonprofit organizations that focus on immigration policy reform at the national and local level, one organization coordinated buses to attend a march in Washington just a few weeks before the meeting.

Another example of how the committee coordinates to gain some control over the neighborhood is how they concern themselves with the community image. Through these efforts, the organizations not only try to control the beautification of the community, but they do so with the goal of promoting a particular image to outsiders. The representative of the youth organization points out that "while there are different agendas being represented at the table, the meetings here seek to *move the neighborhood forward*" (emphasis added). One important initiative that is being spearheaded by one youth-oriented CBO is the coordination of public gardens in the neighborhood. Only



approximately five of the public gardens exist. Referred to as La Alianza Verde, “the Green Alliance” wishes to raise awareness of “green” issues and the desire for environmentally friendly, green spaces. In addition, the organization is coordinating an initiative to decommission a local railroad in order to improve the neighborhood’s image. Through these efforts, the CBOs on this board seek to improve the quality of life by coordinating and creating resources within the community. Development is a key for these organizations as they seek to create new resources in the community, to promote the existing businesses and resources, but also to maintain control over their neighborhood from outside developers and other pro-gentrification forces. As the meetings final points concluded, the issue of development of land in the neighborhood continued. The chair pointed out that there was a new development in progress of a large vacant piece of land that was being led by a catholic religious order. He seemed a bit flustered and asked his employee to look into the project so they can further discuss it.

To summarize, the PDB aims to operate as the gatekeeper of the neighborhood. It serves to keep and bring resources in, promote the ones that exist in the neighborhood for the neighborhood residents, but also to convey the concerns of the neighborhood to political officials. Based on these observations, the goal of this committee is to funnel resources into the neighborhood from outside sources such as the federal and state governments as well as other organizations and on the other side, they might also to try to stem any development unless they deem it to be in best serve the interests of the community according to their strategic plans. The example of this is the charter school that escaped their grasp upon entering the community. In essence, they are strategizing

how to retain control of their community. The issue of gentrification did not appear on the agenda or surface in any of the discussions observed. This is especially important to note given that control over development is such a concern for the board. As interviews with CBO representatives demonstrate, gentrification does not take a top priority of the organizational agendas primarily due to the expanding nature of organizations' serving bases.

This was further demonstrated at one of the PDB's smaller task force meetings on education. The purpose of this smaller committee according to its leadership is to organize and to strategize with the local schools in the neighborhood. They seek to address the issues within the schools and education in the neighborhood. Prior to the opening of a charter school and new schools in the neighborhood, the problem was overcrowded class rooms and deteriorating infrastructure in the public schools. At this point, the issue, the chair of the committee points out, has become to find a way to utilize the *empty* space left by students. In this light, the task force in collaboration with the larger committee has outlined a five year education plan for the neighborhood's issues with the education system. The organizations and agencies present at this meeting were few but more were focused on education in their services. For example, present were representatives from a local museum, a university in the city, middle and elementary schools, a local community college, but also present were organizations or agencies that dealt specifically with youth or had some stake in youth development. For example, a youth-arts oriented organization, CBOs with youth elements, the Alderman's representative, and the Chicago police department were also present at the meeting. At

this meeting, the key point on the agenda that took up much discussion was the efforts to involve media outlets at their presentation of their plan of action for education in Pilsen. Publicity is particularly important for this because part of their goal is to raise awareness and to place pressure on officials to allot the resources necessary for the community to improve the quality of education for its residents.

Finally, the information that was disseminated by organization representatives at the two meetings of the PDB that were observed provides great insight into the ongoing projects of the committee. After all the points on the agenda have been addressed, each organization is allotted some time to pass out flyers, memos, and other information about their current programs. These flyers and memos serve to promote all of the initiatives focused on some kind of program, all of which provided a service to *anyone*, regardless of where they reside. These announcements also included the promotion of a new online website for all organizations and services for Pilsen and people interested in Pilsen, employment opportunities, financial and homeownership workshops, free youth programs, and immigration rallies. Except for the website that promotes Pilsen as an attraction for outsiders and promotes the resources in Pilsen, none of the programs were specifically meant for Pilsen residents or limited to people who reside in Pilsen. Most of these programs and services took place up to two months after the meeting, and many events were planned at the meetings months in advanced.

The Pilsen Community Life Plan itself addresses select consequences of gentrification *indirectly*. The organizations involved in the PDB recognize that Pilsen is “in a critical point in its history where there are potential threats to its Mexican culture”

(Pilsen Community Life Plan 2006). However, according to the plan, housing options should be expanded and homeownership facilitated and encouraged for residents, with the long-term goal of creating a mixed-income community where its Mexican history and culture is preserved (Pilsen Community Life Plan 2006). This, however, does not explicitly address gentrification as an issue head on; rather, the organizations seek to encourage self-development by acting as overseers in the neighborhood. Seeking to regain control from developers and outsiders, the PDB does not explicitly state that gentrification is a pending threat. There are a number of reasons for this. The PDB is itself a committee of multiple competing institutions including an alderman who has a record of allowing development to occur without restraints. Furthermore, while affordable housing is recognized as a “partial answer” many organizations recognize that it is not possible to retain all of the long-time residents and thus, they must focus on a cultural strategy that maintains the Mexican character of the neighborhood (Pilsen Community Life Plan 2006).

While the two organizations analyzed in this project attempt to coordinate development within the neighborhood, most focus on engaging in community building around a Latino identity beyond geographical neighborhood boundaries – many if not most of the resources and direct services provided by the organizations are distributed to participants from outside of the neighborhood. In many cases, the organizations have expanded to multiple sites outside of their base neighborhood. However, no CBOs have been forced to move to follow their membership out of the neighborhood as of yet. This is most likely for two reasons. First, their identification of community would allow them

to remain anywhere in the city, since the “community” that they serve is dispersed all over the metropolitan area. Furthermore, many CBO employees talk about how important it is to remain in Pilsen because of its historical relevance. Remaining in Pilsen provides the organizations with a particular historical relevance for the Latino community of Chicago, and thus an increased level of credibility. Finally, these organizations seek to expand beyond the parameters of the local neighborhood. This helps them to see “beyond” issues of gentrification in Pilsen in particular instances. This is also reflected in the language used to describe the “community” aspect of their CBOs by their representatives. Many interviewees employ terms such as community to describe the Latino population that extends beyond neighborhood boundaries *as well as* the various individual Latino neighborhoods that exist throughout the city.

The services that these organizations provide address some key concerns of neighborhood residents. Focusing on the community organizing, workforce development, education, citizenship and immigration, and affordable housing generally, the organizations take a big burden on their shoulders. However, who their services are meant to serve is not always discussed in explicit terms and often required follow-up questions and probing. One of the major causes that organizations do not address seemed to be the issue of gentrification. The organizations also address the issue of retaining the culture and identity of the neighborhood when discussing its future, but not who will remain. In particular, issues about immigration status and immigrants are not fully addressed in the strategies that the organizations put forth. For example, when discussing the affordable housing initiatives that are the prize initiative of THI, on the question of

affordable housing and documentation status as a requisite for eligibility, the CBO

representative was hesitant and then remorseful in his answer:

Well, we have to do background checks and credit checks ... we don't necessarily... I mean, for example, there's one couple that lives in one of our apartments, the wife is documented and the husband is not... I would say, yeah, there are probably a few people that aren't necessarily documented. *It's not common*. I do think we do have some families that use their ITIN [International Tax Identification Number]... (Emphasis added)

Some CBOs in Pilsen, including the two analyzed in this study, attempt to address the local issues in the neighborhood. The Hope Initiative through the Pilsen Development Board attempt to address five issue areas in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, not even the PDB addresses gentrification out right even though it was partially formed to address that very concern. While both the organizations through the Pilsen Development Board attempt to act as gatekeepers in the neighborhood, to solicit resources for its residents, to “improve” the quality of life of their residents, they simultaneously look to expand their services, to serve people from without the neighborhood, and thus ignore the changing nature of their neighborhood.

These organizations have expanded their services at an exponential rate. They have outgrown the conventional image of a small, organized contingent of local neighborhood residents. LPI is on its way to becoming more than a local organization. From nine full-time employees fifteen years ago, to over one hundred and growing, LPI has expanded from training workforce development to having its own charter school and day care among other services. The same goes for THI. From having \$30,000 in 1990 to currently holding around \$40 million in assets, it has surpassed the status of the small volunteer-operated, church-based organization it once was. New operation sites are in the

plans for both organizations as well as a collaborative effort between the two to develop a residential dormitory for Latino college students from colleges and universities from all over the city of Chicago. Thus, the issue of gentrification takes a backseat to others. This is because at the ground level, neither of the two organizations limits who they provide resources or services to. The organizations cater to the greater Latino population group of Chicago on one hand. On the other hand, the two organizations are involved on in a committee of organizations that attempt to control the neighborhood development and to foster an organized, united front for the neighborhood.

These organizations negotiate between geographical neighborhood community pride and their ethnic and cultural identity. The organizations provide resources on the bases of common needs of broader class and race-based inequalities, but frame their actions as community-development often in often vague language. To many of them, their conceptualization community is different than conventional definitions. That is, these organizations define the “community” in their community-base as the greater Latino population of the city rather than the historically Mexican neighborhood of Pilsen. These two organizations have expanded the scopes of the services they provide. They focus on broader issues facing Latinos in general. For them, gentrification has either taken a back seat to more pressing issues or it has already been addressed as much as they feel it has needed to be.

Of special interest is the fact that many of these organization representatives recognize that Pilsen has always been an activist center, probably because it has long been the one of the oldest Mexican settlements in Chicago. They recognize that Pilsen

has an immigrant history. They also recognize the distinct ethnic identity origins of their organizations given that they were founded by Pilsen residents. This raises several questions. As the community becomes increasingly gentrified, the character and culture of the community will also change. As these CBOs seek to preserve the identity of the community in part by retaining some of the residents, the strategy leaves room for some questioning. Because affordable housing apartment complexes are a major initiative being employed by the THI which aims to retain the residential character of the neighborhood, the requirements for eligibility should be further examined. Lack of citizenship documentation could serve as a limiting factor for who can remain in the neighborhood through these affordable housing units. As a result, Pilsen's status as a port of entry for undocumented immigrants may remain in jeopardy.

Community Organizations were hypothesized in this project to be one of the primary formal resources for immigrants in their port of entry. As immigrants began their lives in America, their informal social capital which led them to the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago would also lead them to the services provided by CBOs. This is especially true since at least one of the CBOs traces its history to local Catholic Church parishes which often also serve as primary sources of support for Mexican immigrants. When residents were questioned about their involvement with the CBO, they had nothing but positive feedback. They continue to use the resources whether or not they live in the neighborhood. However, residents have differing perspectives than that of CBO representatives when it came to issues and concerns related to the neighborhood. For residents, concerns that required attention from leaders and organizers were related more



to issues of safety, perceived criminal activity, in addition to housing and ownership of the neighborhood.

Francisco, a 40 year old electrician from a small town in Jalisco, Mexico immigrated to Chicago when he was fifteen years old. He moved directly to Pilsen and has lived in four homes, all in the same community. He has been participating for four years in the adult literacy program at the Latino Power Institute. As he says in his own words, this program has given him an invaluable gift:

I would say that as far as my life goes, this has been one of the nicest experiences I have known so far. I like to say that I was blindfolded or that I was blind, but that my eyes have been opened. I see things so clearly now and I have a more extensive vocabulary. Prior to coming here, I would drive everywhere, not know what signs meant. But it was difficult to drive around and to do any little thing when one doesn't know what streets and places and names, because one is blind when they cannot read ... This opened a big window in my life.

For Francisco, participating in the program offered by LPI provided him with a new set of skills that facilitated his life in the U.S. This is true for most all of the residents interviewed. While some residents have some reservations, they all choose to participate in programs. Some residents, like Silvio and Maribel, two other residents of Pilsen and participants in the adult literacy program at LPI, participate in multiple programs through LPI. Maribel has lived in Pilsen periodically since she first arrived in Chicago just under five years ago, having moved in and out at different times. She comments to me without being prompted to:

As far as the organizations go, they are all *good* in every sense of the word. I have known little about them, but have begun to participate in them [...] I'm participating in the program, well, its school basically. I never finished it in Mexico. I want to get my G.E.D. and it's also practically free. That's the only one. Or, do you want to know about other programs that I'm part of? [Yes] well, in my daughter's school I am in a sewing class. And there it's only every Tuesday

every week. Then Wednesdays there is a program that orients women economically. They also go over our rights, the laws, we discuss what it means to be a Latina woman, we also talk about how to become more independent...

Maribel was eager to discuss the programs she participates in. She was a young mother of two and very talkative. This enthusiasm stemmed from a positive experience and her determination to advance herself as an independent woman as she would later discuss with me in great detail. Silvio was also aware of many programs through LPI and participated when he could. He lamented:

They told us about the marches in Washington DC. But, unfortunately, I couldn't participate because of my work schedule you see? I work all night cleaning offices and try to sleep during the day, and then I come to classes here in the evening to try to get ahead. It is hard ... and I have trouble learning the material at times, probably because I'm getting old already...

The problem for Silvio was that his long and odd work hours left little time to become involved with the many programs and initiatives offered through LPI, even though he desired to do so. These experiences of exploitative work conditions, which translate to exploitative living conditions, are all too common for the residents of Pilsen. All of the informants to some extent discussed the plight of the immigrant. For many of the residents, they move frequently, every few years until they are able to settle in one place. In some cases, this includes purchasing a home. Many of the residents live in a home for as short as six months before moving somewhere else, often in close proximity to their previous place of residence. Silvio moved out from his brother's home to move only 1 block away, then, six months later, he moved into a better apartment only 2 blocks away, in the same neighborhood. Maribel also moved around three times in the four years that she's been in Chicago. Other residents move only initially, until they are able to purchase a home or settle on a location where they'd like to live most. Maria, another

long-time Chicago resident lived in an apartment in the heart of Pilsen for a few years before moving just on the boundary of Pilsen and the bordering Lawndale community where she has lived for almost ten years now. Maria moved to Chicago in the early 1990's. She participates in the adult literacy classes at LPI. Mauricio has lived in the U.S. for twenty years. He also participates in the GED program at LPI. After living in an apartment for a few years after he first arrived in Pilsen in 1997, he moved into an affordable housing unit through The Hope Initiative in Pilsen after which he purchased the home he presently lives in.

Most residents that have lived in the neighborhood for some time or those that currently live in the neighborhood have an acute awareness that displacement does take place as a result of gentrification. However, while some have mixed sentiments about it, most believe that other issues take precedence over what needs to be addressed in the neighborhood. Residents like Mauricio, Maribel, and Francisco all observe significant changes in the neighborhood that they attribute the introduction of newer, predominantly white, residents. After introducing the general goals of my research project, and explaining that I am interested in learning about his interaction with CBOs in the neighborhood, Mauricio quickly acknowledged that there were significant changes going on in the neighborhood:

There are a lot of people leaving that area [...] its changing. For that reason, we left. They were remodeling all the areas near Halsted and all the way up to Roosevelt. There were a lot of white people moving in... and new condominiums going up. So the reason that we left that place is because they wanted to increase the rent. They were increasing our rent and the apartment remained the same. How could we pay more and more and the apartment remain the same?

For Mauricio, the push factor was simple. Changes in the neighborhood, positive or not, effectively made the neighborhood unaffordable. But aside from that, he realized that the neighborhood itself was changing in its inhabitants and thus, was not *his* anymore. Other residents like Francisco took a more passionate stance on the changes going on in the neighborhood as he states later on. Some residents are generally aware that changes are occurring in the neighborhood and have mixed sentiments about it. For example, Maribel made her concerns about the neighborhood clear.

Well, I think its fine that they fix up homes. If someone is going to get charged a rent, the houses should be well maintained ... that the heat works, windows are good... And aside from that, it should be an area that's safe. The houses could be great and beautiful from the inside but if the area is dangerous and not a good area...

For Maribel, the changes are positive. She rationalizes that if homes are being renovated, then the rent in the area needs to be commensurate to the changes. She emphasizes the issue of equality. For Maribel, payment of rent should be commensurate to the services rendered. This idea is repeated in less depth by Francisco when asked about the changes in rental prices. He states, "The rent has increased significantly. But there is a higher quality of life."

However, these physical changes are only meaningful if the neighborhood safety also increases. This is a major issue that is repeated by all the residents. Specifically, all residents voice their concerns for safety in Pilsen to some degree or another. This affects their desire for staying in the neighborhood any longer. When asked if she had any plans

to stay in the neighborhood, Maribel thought about her response before providing an answer:

Well to tell you the truth I don't see the neighborhood being very secure. The truth is that there are a lot of problems. I've seen a lot of gang activity. It's not the ideal place to ... for a family with two kids. But I don't know, I'm here now, but I would like live somewhere else. Like Cicero for example, where I was before. It's more secure there.

Maribel went on to explain that the housing stock is in better conditions in other areas and suburbs of Chicago. However, even when there are other factors such as homeownership or affordability involved in the residential decision-making process, crime and safety become relevant issues. In the case of Mauricio, his friends and he decided to leave the neighborhood to purchase a home in what is considered a safer area. In a discussion about the changes in the neighborhood, Mauricio is sure to make clear that the changes are occurring:

The majority of the people that I knew were leaving because they were buying homes. Some friends left to rent in another area... and the thing is that because of gangs some others left the area too... but that's the thing about gangs is that it's the same everywhere. Some differences, it's closer to you over there. Here not as much. For example, when I lived there, a stray bullet hit the window in the apartment and we were all scared. That has not happened here.

Gang activity, safety, and crime remain concerns for residents despite gentrification efforts. For other residents like Francisco these concerns are all interlinked. He becomes emotional when talking about issues related to his safety and his community probably because of his life-long connection to the community – Francisco has lived in the neighborhood for twenty five years now:

Francisco: I live on [states some nearby cross streets]. That's where I bought a home.

Interviewer: Why'd you move?

Francisco: Ok, look. The reason we moved was because that area was very violent. [In] this area there is less violence ... Mainly because of the violence. [...]

Interviewer: Why did you move from those locations?

Francisco: Well, *first, because of the violence*. Second, we were helping someone who owned a building. I worked in construction and maintenance. I began to help him and he had a house that he was renting where he offered me a good price to move and so we did. After that, I worked for him and so I moved away and began my own company where I could find work elsewhere. He sold that house anyway. We lived on Cullerton for two to three years. Then I moved to another place, where I lived with my brother. We rented there for a few years. And now I own my home...

For Francisco, violence and the opportunity to move made it an easy decision.

Nevertheless, he's made a conscious effort to remain in the neighborhood, never straying too far even when deciding to move. Crime came up again in conversation, mostly from the side of the respondent. Francisco insisted that he be allowed to tell me about a recent experience he had in the neighborhood:

I want to tell you a story so that you can see how the system works here: I was getting home one Sunday morning when I got back to my home I had just cut my hair... I saw that in front of my house, I have my truck parked and in my truck is my work equipment. I saw two black guys putting my tools into their car. When I saw that I pulled up in front of their car and I say, hey, what's going on, leave my equipment alone, that's what I work with... They got in their car, and fled. So, I got in my car and followed them. They had an \$800 tool that was difficult for me to purchase. So, I ran into a police officer as I followed them and asked him to do something. He said he had a victim in his backseat and could not do anything, so I said, "well you've got a radio, call someone for help" and to return my machine. I kept following them, after a bit, the officer pulled me over and said that we needed to file a report. "For what?" I asked him, "the report does me no good, I need that tool. I don't have insurance on it" ... He told me to go home, so that a policeman could meet me there and do a report. The getaway car had no plates. It would have been difficult to get them later. So I go home and waited for the police. After an hour or so he showed up. So I gave him the information he requested and asked him why they didn't go after the thieves. He responded to me by saying that "it's hard" and that this happened because it was cold and because the gang members were not out on the streets. Had they been, they would not have allowed for those guys to come into the neighborhood. Now... what is that about?! I pay taxes. I should be protected from these things by the police. Not

given these reasons for this happening. *We get no protection here. This is how things work around here ...* I don't think so ... I think it shouldn't be that way here ... We are unprotected here. The gang members are not going to protect us. Who knows what they are here to do, but it's not to protect us. We are unprotected here – that's the reality. We've gotten to this point, but who knows where we are going... They look at us like if we are a plague and we are not. I've been here for twenty five years now and I've done a lot here. I've fixed homes ... I am helping this country move forward. I don't have a bad record, and there are lots of people here like that.

When probed about the changes that are taking place in the neighborhood,

Francisco engaged the question with a number of concerns:

... there are more people who come are [indiscernible]. There are communities who come here, like for example, in Chinatown. There they put up their signs and protect and maintain their community more ... They are more united, as far as I've seen. They help each other. Here, when the houses were valuable, many people began to sell their homes because they really couldn't afford it any more. It was more sensible for them to sell and to buy somewhere else. And so, Americans would buy them and make condominiums. I'm not in agreement with that. Because... well this is an area where immigrants have lived, and live, and that's how we should have kept it. That's what made this area known. And it's known for that. Right? And because of that it should have been conserved as such. But now that it's being invaded and people are being removed, and there was no help from anyone to help us, to protect us from that. Here was the heart, the center of Mexicans, it could be said. And then, I think that we needed more support from those that represent us, and protection from the things that the people here don't know about – that will cause more harm than good. When those people get here, they are going to raise taxes and remove all of us. This area, when I got here was *worthless*. And the people here, I have seen, worked to make it something. They installed new windows, built new walls, painted things... So, this area ... it was *of our people*. So, there is this going on. And I think it's really sad, because in reality it has been conserved like it was, people should have respected that the same way they respect the Italian town, and the Chinatown. For us, we are being moved by a system that we don't understand about finance, about legal matters. And they move us out whenever. You've got to remember that many of us work at a factory, where most of us gain a wage that is the bare minimum often times. Our representatives should have protected us better. They should have *warned* us. They should have helped us. Something has happened. We are figuring things out when that's already happening.

Thus, Francisco understood the long-term effects of gentrification. For him, the

“changes” also meant that his community was subject to displacement by the high-

income white “invaders”. In his observations, he outlined how there is little leadership that actually cares about his concerns of this resident. Representation and protection, safety and crime were the major issues that arose when residents and former residents chose to talk about the neighborhood. Residents have other concerns than displacement and gentrification, although, they understand that it is occurring and in some cases are opposed to it.

This project used in-depth semi-structured interviews to examine the effects of gentrification on the neighborhood level and transnational networks of immigrants in Pilsen, Chicago. While the research questions proved to be too large to obtain empirical answers through this project, the interviews led to valuable insight and preliminary findings. At least, these findings suggest a new set of research questions.

Gentrification has had many observable affects on the residents of Pilsen, and the residents and former residents recognize this. As the interviews demonstrate above, residential patterns are influenced by a number of factors. As we have seen in the interviews, residents of Pilsen generally move out when the opportunity arises and when they can find a place where they are comfortable living. Violence and affordability are also decisive factors in this process. For many, it is not worth staying in Pilsen even if they could afford the rent, simply because of the violence and safety issues that permeate the neighborhood. Thus, it is unclear if as a port of entry, Pilsen has lost its role as a threshold. This process is too complex to understand through a small number of interviews. It is necessary to contextualize Pilsen in relation to other neighborhoods and communities within Chicago as well as suburbs of Chicago. Immigrant networks have



long been established in Chicago, and are difficult to track. This requires further in-depth research. That is, this question requires us to broaden our scope and to look at regional dynamics of immigration and residential patterns.

The data suggest that gentrification does cause some concern for ownership of the neighborhood among residents, his dedication to the neighborhood and years of hard work that he put into the community were determinants for his ownership of the community. For him, the neighborhood belonged to the people who made it something. In this case, he believed that to be the Mexican population of the neighborhood. The culture that it maintained as well as its immigrant history, Francisco argued, should be preserved and protected by those representing it. Other respondents talked about this, but not as passionately as Francisco. On the other hand, other residents also believe in the positive effects of improving the neighborhood infrastructure and housing stock, as it was initially a major reason for their exodus from the neighborhood.

The residents and former residents hold some reservations about gentrification, but tend to highlight several other important issues with the neighborhood rather than gentrification. Most residents were likely to talk about neighborhood safety. They simply felt that the neighborhood hosted criminal activity without much being done by police officers or political leaders of the neighborhood. Residents also continuously talked about the poor conditions of the available housing options in the neighborhood. CBOs do address the issue with housing stock in the neighborhood through affordable housing developments. However, as the findings indicate above, who lives in these housing developments are not necessarily existing neighborhood residents.

The connection between the neighborhood's resources and its residents was further elucidated in this portion of the project. Interviews with residents suggest that the relationship between CBOs located in the neighborhood and its inhabitants is not a geographically-based relationship. That is, wherever residents reside, generally does not stop them from participating in programs. They travel far and wide for these resources. A few of the respondents resided outside of the neighborhood because they moved after they began participating in programs or classes that were offered at the organization, but continued after they moved. Directors of programs talk up the value in their program when they highlight how they have people participate in the programs from outside of the city and far suburbs. This provides us with some indication that if residents continue to become displaced or move out of the neighborhood, the organization is not required to move with it. This suggests that CBOs are not required to move with their serving base.

The findings here also indicate that the neighborhood's vulnerability to gentrification partially stems from its status as an immigrant community. New immigrants look for affordability and a quality of living in their first places of settlement. They move around frequently before settling on a home bought or rented, both undergo the same process. This is further supported when we look at the affordable housing efforts of CBOs in Pilsen. The Hope Initiative legally requires all tenants of their affordable housing units to have legal documentation to live and work in the U.S. Thus, Mexican immigrant communities remain a vulnerable population despite the increasing quality of life that occurs due to gentrification in Pilsen.

As a neighborhood that has been the renowned port of entry for immigrants and the hub of Mexican and Mexican-American culture in Chicago and the Midwest, what takes the place if and when it loses its status as a port of entry due to the displacement that occurs as a result of gentrification? Development is an issue that is tackled head on by the community organization leadership. The data suggests that community organizations seek to maintain the culture of the neighborhood through nurturing Mexican businesses, beautifying the neighborhood, emphasizing the Mexican culture that purveys the neighborhood and through affordable housing that will maintain some of the residents in the neighborhood. While it is the goal of CBOs to create a “Mexi-town” it is unclear what will occur as many of its Mexican inhabitants, especially those from Mexico, continue to become displaced.

Finally, the fact that violence, crime, and fear still concern the residents (and former residents) raises an intriguing question about the newer residents. Especially because previous research shows that the neighborhood’s racial demographics are changing, as the community further gentrifies what are the differences between groups with regard to the reception of crime and violence (Betancur, 2005)? What are experiences racialized according to police interaction and gang-related interactions? The question of race came up repeatedly in “us” and “them” language in many of the interviews both with CBO representatives and residents. It is important then to understand the differences in the problems each group identifies with living in the neighborhood.

## Conclusion

This project addresses several broad macro-level research questions through in-depth analysis of organizational operations and group experiences. Interviews with community organization representatives revealed both the Latino Power Institute and The Hope Initiative diverged from conventional meanings of “community” in community based organizations. Contrary to what Marwell (2004; 2007) argues in her works, these CBOs demonstrate a reconceptualization of what constitutes their “community”. Rather than thinking of community as “... organized around a particular geographic place (i.e., a "community," such as an urban neighborhood)”, the two Pilsen CBOs studied here use the term to refer to a population groups – Chicago Latinos – rather than a “population territorially organized” (Park 1936). Thus whereas Park and other sociologists have regarded community as “more or less completely rooted in the soil it occupies”, these CBOs have operationalized “community” in new terms (Park 1936). With regard to the local neighborhood, the organizations maintained a foot in the neighborhood to attempt to control further development. In addition, they claim to be lobbying on various levels in the interests of the neighborhood. However, the organizations have also expanded their services to include multiple neighborhoods. They recognize that they are catering to a Latino community, and not a specific geographical neighborhood. These organizations make conscious efforts to expand and to continue their missions.

This expansion has at least one unanticipated consequence. Specifically, as a result of this continuous expansion and outward look the Pilsen organizations studied seem to have neglected the gentrification of their home-neighborhood. The organizations

responses to gentrification have been minimal or indirect at best. By downplaying gentrification and addressing some aspects of the consequences of this process, while simultaneously expanding their serving base to new neighborhoods, these CBOs are able to maintain their status as a “community” based organization in every conventional meaning of the title. Because the organizations require the symbolic connection to their history as well as their Latino serving base, addressing the needs of the local neighborhood, at least superficially, allow the CBOs studied here to maintain their positions as prominent leaders in the neighborhood.

Gentrification and its displacement effects are of real consequence for Pilsen’s immigrant residents. The port of entry status of Pilsen may not be totally at risk. The strategies that indirectly address the displacement effect of gentrification (affordable housing) may still remove some of the more vulnerable subpopulations. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for affordable housing programs due to their documentation status. As a result, they can be easily removed from the neighborhood. Their stance on the issue is not always one coherent picture. As they voiced again and again, their concerns for the neighborhood are different than the issues with gentrification. For residents, issues of quality of housing, crime, safety, and equitable treatment by local officials and authorities seems to take precedence over gentrification, even though it is still recognized as a problem as well. This perspective differs from that held by CBO representatives who tend to emphasize the five areas of concern outlined in their strategic plan: Education, Economics, Housing, Neighborhood Image, and Immigration Policy.

These processes have multiple social consequences for organizations and residents. If CBOs continue to operate outside of neighborhood boundaries, they will continue to do good work and positively affect people's lives everywhere. They will serve those who need it and those who they can reach. In effect, while the organizations attempt to address one of the consequences of gentrification through affordable housing, albeit indirectly, they contradict this commitment to the neighborhood by providing this and other services to a service base not limited to the geography of their neighborhood. If this continues, they will not be attuned to the particular needs of each of their neighborhoods. As a result, they will also risk losing sight of processes that could indefinitely change the character of their neighborhood. If displacement increases and the most vulnerable populations are moved out of Pilsen, the character of the neighborhood also changes. It is the immigrant population that has given Pilsen its reputation as well as its social organization. As a port of entry, Pilsen may still operate as a gateway for documented immigrants and their descendants. As an enclave, resources may still remain in Pilsen and Pilsen will remain as a hub of resources where participants can come from all over the city to take part in the programs and services available through CBOs. However, the character of the neighborhood may also fall out of tune given that the immigrant population will decrease. One might argue that it was the immigrant population that gives Pilsen its cultural distinctiveness, unique identity, and "authentic" flavor over other ethnic neighborhoods.

The future of Pilsen remains to be seen. It has most definitely come into a new era where innovation and leadership are key components in determining the identity of the

neighborhood. What will be true is that all community change will face resistance, even if it is not on purpose. Pilsen has remained a hub of Mexican cultural and political activity since the late 1950's and early 1960's and this will take much more to change. As the interviews demonstrate, there is no doubt that CBOs based out of Pilsen will continue to flourish. As they continue to expand, however, they continue to lose the connection to the local neighborhood that they once had. Residents and displaced residents will continue to face many of the same plights that they did, regardless of where they live. Many of their concerns with safety and equitable treatment by police officers continue to go unaddressed by their political and CBO leaders. Nevertheless, because these organizations serve the Latino community no matter where it is, there is still the opportunity to address these issues in the future. With over twenty organizations and agencies, there is room for endless possibilities for the Latinos of Pilsen, as well as those who reside outside of the cultural Mecca of Mexican Chicago.

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## VITA

David Orta was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, he attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, with Departmental Distinction, in 2008. He also received an interdisciplinary concentration in Latina/Latino Studies.

David has received an honorable mention for his project “Erasing Mexican Chicago: The Role of Community Based Organizations in the Gentrifying Neighborhood of Pilsen” from the National Science Foundation and has presented preliminary findings of his related project “Shifting Borders: Community Sentiments and Gentrification” at regional conferences such as The Chicago Ethnography Conference in 2010. David is scheduled to complete his Master of Arts in Sociology at Loyola University Chicago in August of 2010.

His current research interest areas include Latina/Latino Sociology, Race and Ethnicity, Sociology of Culture, and Urban Sociology. He is currently working on a study of Latino-based Greek Lettered Organizations tentatively titled, “Cultivating Culture: Latina/o Greek Lettered Organizations, Collective Action, and the Production of Identity”.