The Urban Spaces Between: Finding Puerto Rico in 20th Century Manhattan

CARMINA SÁNCHEZ-DEL-VALLE
Hampton University

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the post-industrial city in the United States, efforts have been made to re-interpret the city and the forces acting on the human/urban condition. The failing Eurocentric paradigm that has guided the analysis of urban space is challenged by approaches that accept the pluralistic nature of the major cities of the United States, and some small towns. Much work has been done in urban planning and history, urban sociology, economics, cultural studies, ethnography, and geography.

Soja's *Thirdscape*[1] is one of the approaches proposing a richer, open urban analysis with a "three-sided sensibility" of intercepting sociality, spatiality and historicality.[2] Here the material reality of urban structure and morphology merges with the historical, the collective imaginary, and the perceived inhabited city. The resulting analysis transcends any one perspective; rather, it is transdisciplinary. Thirdspace draws from the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault, and responds among others, to those of Michel de Certeau and Jean Baudrillard.

Understanding the complexity of cities is urgently needed to help confront the increasing challenges they present. The global trend indicates a movement of populations towards urban locations. Cities behave like organisms, like integrated systems of systems, but they are willed by identifiable people, visions, and capital. To understand the form of the city, it is essential to identify and determine the contributions of its many creators, operators, spectators, and dwellers. The probable change in identity of post-Katrina New Orleans forces us to seriously question prescriptive options that may well carry good intentions, but are insufficient due to a lack of time and detailed study.

PROVOCATIONS

The main objective of this study is to facilitate a broader understanding of the city's multiple facets from the perspective of architecture, as a product of hybridity, simultaneous desires, conflicting forces, grand plans, and serendipity without losing a sense of the particularities. Venturi Scott Brown had already observed in the 1970's that "architecture and urban design have more to do with understanding the city," beyond the physical form to the implied dynamics working to support it."[3] Venturi Scott-Brown proposed the city as "a dynamic field of interrelated forces."[4]These ideas are still much debated today.

This study started from a personal curiosity that led to testing the long-standing myth of the U.S.A. city as innately pluralist. If we hold true the city is a mutually beneficial, diverse social entity, then we should be able to find that sentiment expressed spatially. There should be an evident interaction between the urban physical and the urban social, as it expresses the urban multi-cultural. As a Puerto Rican, with family in New York since the 1920's, my speculations on the city have been informed by these questions: Why have Puerto Ricans disappeared from recent historical narratives of this city? Why has their presence previous to the 20th century been relegated to only its latter half? Where was their first enclave? Why did it move? Did it move as a cluster – or disperse? Did it regroup and expand elsewhere? Where, when, and why? How did they impact the urban spaces they moved within? Then again, why pursue an urban mapping that goes beyond block geometry,

network form, building styles and periods, or architects? Why try to locate the spaces, the population, and chronology of the Puerto Ricans in Manhattan? Aren't they just a small cultural component of NYC's more than eight million?

Searching for the answers would resolve an issue of spatial equity for me. It would also provide a more complete – and more accurate - history of the urban dynamics at work on New York City. On another level, it was a desire to find out how Latinos have contributed to the shaping of the urban landscape in the U.S., adding to the work of many others.[5]

My inquiry considers whether the physical structure of the city is more ephemeral than what it seems. It aims to more fully characterize some of the lost neighborhoods, and find their place in time. It provides a basis for assessing an area's change of meanings. It allows an exploration of the factors that make space for community over time within a district or neighborhood can be explored. It also serves as a device for learning in the studio and the seminar, and promotes engaging in a creative process to critically consider the question: What is urban morphology? Is it about 'mapping' to determine the character of urban spaces, or is it about limiting design by restricting character? Ultimately, it is about challenging established approaches and generalizations which condition and inhibit our perceptions of the city in the past, present, and future.

The work that has most directly influenced the project described in this essay is Felicia Davis' "Walking Tours of Manhattan."[6] Davis' work appears to have been inspired by de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City," and Langston Hughes' work, as Davis' goal was to facilitate "understanding a series of stories connecting people and the landscape of Manhattan."[7] She developed three maps corresponding to three historical periods: New Amsterdam: 1623-1664, British Colony: 1664-1783, and New York City: 1783-1899.[8] These are urban temporal mappings. Davis proposes these maps are "perpetually in progress" because "to walk is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a place."[9] This seems to be a direct reference to de Certeau's argument for the impossibility of a complete mapping of New York City; it "invents itself from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future."[10]

The maps are reproduced in grayscale. Each uses the current street/block map of Manhattan, with an overlay of the corresponding configuration for the period the map covers. The names of selected streets and avenues are included. Sites are located with a number. The collection includes addresses for residences, businesses, neighborhoods, organizations, supporters, and important emancipatory events, as well as places where blacks were not welcomed, or were persecuted and executed. The resulting effect of this mix is the expansion of the perceived black presence beyond Harlem breaking with the notion African American contributions were much circumscribed, and therefore were not significant players in the gestation of the city as a whole.

Davis' maps falls in the category of "maps of resistance." According to Crampton and Krygier these "construct alternative mappings of space not represented by official state agencies."[11] Here Pickles' definition of "mapping as the production of space, geography, place, territory, and the political identities of the people who inhabit and make up the place"[12] is demonstrated. He proposes "maps actively construct knowledge,"[13] and Churchill argues "maps are proactive agents."[14] Therefore, 'mapping' does not necessarily require making a map.

PAST, PRESENT OR FUTURE? MAPPING IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN

Maps are ubiquitous, having become a mainstay for visualizations of all kinds. They have long been used as devices for documenting, analyzing and interpreting the city. In planning, mapping is instrumental and the urban an obvious application. One of its first applications in the U.S., was Jane Addams' 1895 study of Chicago's West Side. In the 20th century, the map and the map-diagram became common tools in architecture and urban design. In urban cartography, Churchill explains maps and mapping are by necessity multi-layered, multisensory, offer different temporal scales, respond to growth, change and functional shifts, as well as have iconographic functions.[15]

A multiplicity of perspectives demands different vehicles and languages to represent and communicate them clearly. New representation devices and media are already forcing a rethinking of traditional approaches to urban design. A thoughtful and expanded use of maps in architecture and urban design is called for. It should focus on a more comprehensive perspective of the city, one that links urban form with social and environmental processes, economics, culture, demographics, places, people and events. Detailed information and tools required to process information in different formats are now in the hands of the general public offering our discipline the opportunity to excavate more deeply, to challenge, confirm, and then to convey, all grounded on a more holistic notion of the city.

The urban map describing the city "in its likeness" has been long in use. A much discussed example in architecture is Giambattista Nolli's 1748 map of Rome.[16] It is often mentioned as exemplary of the new Baroque perspective where the interior and exterior become meshed. It uses the now established technique of figure ground separation where building mass is shown in solid black, and streets and public spaces are unfilled to indicate voids.[17] Nolli's innovation was to incorporate into the street network the 'public' interior spaces within the buildings. A less mentioned aspect of the Nolli map is that it also graphically indicates the portioning of the city into jurisdictional districts coinciding with markings that can still be seen on buildings.[18]. The Nolli map folds into the form of the city, the representation of the power of the people.

The Nolli map appeared at a time when cartography and architectural representation were being transformed by the ideas of the Enlightment, new political and economic experiments, the reconfiguration of empires, and the world itself. In the 19th and 20th centuries the cadastral, fire insurance, and social-economic thematical maps using a variety of representation techniques shed more light on the workings of urban enclaves, and as a consequence brought forward the new visions.

The technique of inverting the figure-ground order to highlight the network of continuous spaces created by street and open space was introduced by Gibberd[19] in 1955. Today both versions are used because they highlight different aspects of the same subject. A fascinating application of the reversed version is Joan Busquets 2003 "composite drawing of Barcelona's historic core."[20] The map shows the various layers of streets and open spaces within the old city, but instead of superimposing them, are exploded and repositioned around the oldest version. The farther the graphic elements are from the center, the more recent. It is a layering of 'spatial urban events' (voids as solids) organized by the function of time. In this map, blocks and buildings are not outlined.

The Louis Kahn's 1952 map or "plan of proposed traffic movement pattern"[21] for Center City, Philadelphia map was much publicized and, like the Nolli map, it clearly had an impact on the thinking of architects and urban designers. It was perhaps a harbinger of Bill Hillier and Alan Penn's concept of *space syntax*, a way of mapping patterns of movement in the city. In spirit Kahn's was no different from other city diagrams, a graphic speculation on the city. But it did appropriate the language of transportation engineers and planners – the circulation flow diagram - to convey a reorganization of the city. Streets are formed by a dense mass of lines and arrows, dotted lines and thick dark lines at intersections. Bridges are noted with dark parallel lines. The difference between map and proposal were blurred. Moughtin et al and Churchill all agree that the line between survey and analysis is ambiguous. For Churchill "the city and the map are interchangeable."[22] The assembling of information itself presupposes "a preconceived analytical framework,"[23] as it is "not a neutral representation, but an argument with a distinct point of view that can be interrogated textually."[24]

THE APPROACH: LOCATING PUERTO RICANS IN NYC

The first goal of this study is cartographic: to locate and map Puerto Rican enclaves in and around Manhattan since 1890. This allows an understanding of their interrelationships, and their impact on the overall life and spaces of the city. The intention is not to isolate the Puerto Ricans enclaves, but to place them in a historical social urban context facilitating a more complete portrait of Manhattan's cultural structure in space.

An authoritative ***Atlas of the History of Manhattan*** includes maps of population by culture and origin through time, but does not locate, or mention the Puerto Rican communities. Based on documented history, demographic and other records, and literary accounts it is clear Puerto Ricans have been in Manhattan much longer than just since the popularity of *Salsa*, and the discovery of *JLo*. Yet, acknowledgment of their presence has centered on the urban ghetto. East Harlem – *El Barrio Latino*– has long been the preeminent Puerto Rican district in Manhattan, but it is not the only place where this population has taken roots, and established a presence. It was, however, the main destination for Puerto Ricans displaced from the Island in the 1950's. Presently, the Puerto Rican presence is declining and is relocating to other areas of metropolitan New York, as well as other cities in the U.S. The South Bronx currently has the largest Puerto Rican community in North America.

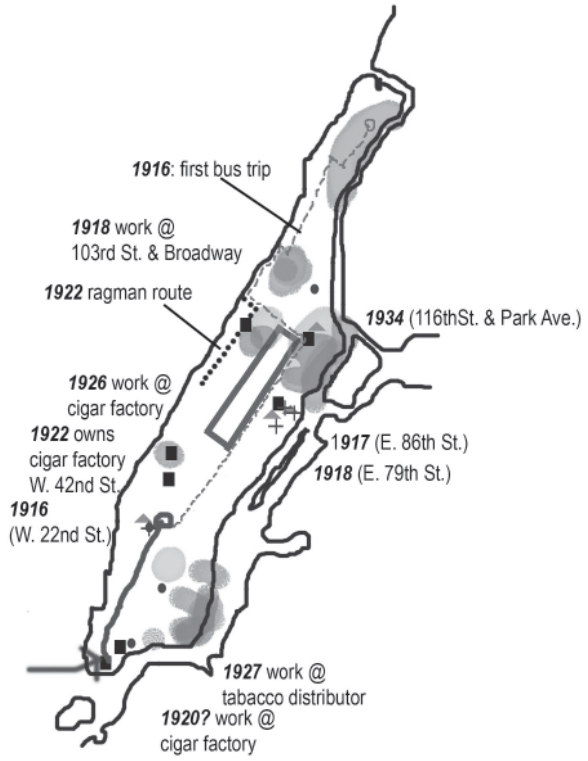

Figure 1: This map tracks Bernardo Vega's residences and workplaces from 22nd St. in 1916 to 1934. These locations are superimposed on the compilation of census tract data for Puerto Ricans from 1950 to 2000.

The materials used for this part of the study were statistical data, historical accounts, and the anecdotal. They were digitally layered, compared for consistencies and contradictions, and mined for other currently unrealized information. Initially, seminal texts on Puerto Ricans in NY and on the cultural landscape were reviewed. Sánchez Korrol's book, ***From Colonia to Community*** is the only source found that locates Puerto Rican communities in Manhattan with precision.[25] Another central text is ***The Memoirs of Bernardo Vega***[26] covering from his arrival in New York City on the steamer *Coamo* in 1916, to the U.S. Congress granting Puerto Rico the right to elect its Governor in 1947. Through his description, the life of a Puerto Rican in New York becomes connected to the recognition of Puerto Rico as an island-nation. *Figure 1* traces Vega's movement. Narratives and recorded events associated with Puerto Rican nationhood became an important source for specific locale information as the revolutionary wars of the Spanish colonies in the Antilles were orchestrated in New York City by a collaborative effort between Dominicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Information was also obtained from the *Social Register of New York* (1902 to 1919), and from city directories for the borough of Manhattan starting in the 1860's. The *New York Times* database was used to confirm public events and dates. Maps of Manhattan, including historical and fire insurance maps, were also indispensable sources of information.

Assembling the information presented many challenges. Paramount among them was the fact that Puerto Ricans were not identified as such until 1917, when they were given U.S. citizenship. Before 1917 they were classified as West Indians, Colored, Spanish, Cubans, and South Americans. Some may have been illegally in Manhattan, especially between 1898 when the U.S. invades Puerto Rico and 1917, when Puerto Ricans were stripped of their nationality. In addition, persons of Puerto Rican parentage were not specifically registered by the U.S. Census until 1950.

New York, like Chicago, is one of the most mapped cities in the U.S., but the maps have to be carefully studied. Like in Chicago the survey map gridiron precedes the construction of the streets, creating the misleading impression that map and network are simultaneous events. Not only is New York

City - as its name states - fairly new, but some of its sections have suffered major structural and deep transformations, and many neighborhoods have been repeatedly reconstituted."[27] Even, the ways in which the NYC public agencies collect information has changed. When maps and data were compared, the maps were often found to be riddled with alignment and discrepancy problems.

RECOVERING GROUND

My preliminary analysis located Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans in Manhattan from the 1860's to 1900's. This allowed some assertions to be made about the city. Demographic data, maps and other narratives show the Puerto Rican population has been dispersed over metro New York since the 19th century, with varying concentrations in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. I found a casual reference to a Puerto Rican colony in New York City in the 18th century,[28] but no hard data. The first documented colony was in Brooklyn in the mid 19th century close to the docks area.

What revelations about Manhattan have been attained by following the Puerto Rican diaspora? The first episode has to start in the period after the Civil War Riots – 1863. The clashes between rioters and police, and directed attacks directed at those who promoted the recruitment lottery system resulted in damaged and destroyed property, injured people, and death. African-Americans were a target. Most of the property attacks occurred below 50th St. because at that time the city had not expanded much farther than 40th St. The "Colored Orphan Asylum close to 44th St and 5th Ave. was on the outskirts of the city. Fires destroyed the financial district southeast of Wall St. Subsequently, the area was rebuilt for a third time in the 19th century, given ravaging fires had destroyed it in two previous occasions.

After the U.S. Civil War, sugar and tobacco imports from the Greater Antilles increased. The New York City docks were the main entry port to the U.S. market. Investors, brokers, merchants, and wealthy landholders from the Islands traveled often between New York and their home. The richest, the Cubans, established their offices in Lower Manhattan in the most desirable addresses: Exchange Place, Wall St. and Washington St. Wholesale warehouses were located on Pearl St., Front St. and Old Slip.

The Spanish monarchy was being shaken by a republican movement, and did not want to lose its hold on its colonies. Revolutionary efforts in the Greater Antilles were carefully watched. The revolutionaries moved their centers of operation to St. Thomas, New York City, the Samaná Peninsula in the Dominican Republic, and Paris. New York City and St. Thomas were close to the Antilles, and not controlled by the Spanish crown, thus less accessible to their spies. New York City and Paris provided access to financial contributors to the revolutionary cause. These exiles were not a large group when compared to the more than 100,000 European immigrants arriving per year during the 1860's. The Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans saw their move as transitory, lasting only until their island-nations became republics, or were annexed to the U.S.

The revolutionaries were a diverse group of people. They were men and women brought together by the desire to break with Spain; yet, they did not necessarily supporting more radical social and economic reforms. They placed themselves within the emerging cosmopolitan districts of Manhattan, as well as the long established ones. They were in the Lower Manhattan financial district and trade zone, and Broadway Ave., Union Square, and Madison Square districts. Already in the 1840s lower 5th Ave., Union Square, and Gramercy Park "were the newly fashionable addresses."[29] Homberger writes that by the 1870's "Union Square was beginning to seem a little downtown."[30] The "city's bourgeoisie" lived around 4th and 6th Ave., between 8th St. and 40th St.[31] At this time Grand Central Depot (Grand Central Station) was considered "uptown."

Between 1865 and 1868 Puerto Rican revolutionaries, in collusion with Cubans and Dominicans planned and implemented from New York City an attack on Spanish forces in the center of Puerto Rico. This location allowed them to seek funding and to buy arms. However, the attack was overtaken and the fighters were killed or were taken to jail. During this time, the Cuban Revolutionary Junta, the official body controlled by the wealthy, operated from the Lower Manhattan financial district. Its headquarters were on

Broadway (#71) across the street from Trinity Church. It had a recruitment post on Broadway close to Bleecker St., one block from the famous Grand Central Hotel. Dominicans and Puerto Rican supporters willing to fight for Cuba,[32] thinking that their islands would also be liberated, were recruited here. On E. Houston (#51) and Mott St. the Junta had set a clandestine training and boarding post to attract Civil War veterans, Germans, Irish, and Italians. In 1869 a fair was organized to gather funds for the Cuban Revolution at the Apollo Hall (Broadway and 28th St.). Later that year members of the Junta were arrested at the E. Houston location during a meeting for breaching the 1795 laws of neutrality agreed on by the U.S. and Spain,. In the 1870's General Sanz arrived in Puerto Rico and waged a brutal persecution of pro-independence groups. He was replaced by Romualdo Palacios who increased the repression. As a result, more exiles arrived in New York. The New York headquarters were maintained until the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898.

The Antillean immigrants in the 19th century, wealthy or not, tended to group around locations that were specialized areas, and that offered a cosmopolitan environment. The wealthy, the bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, and the workers mixed at events held at the Apollo Hall (Broadway and 28th St.) Chimney Corner Hall (W 25th St.),Masonic Temple (W 23rd St.), Hotel America (15th St.), Steck Hall (E 14th St.), Clarendon Hall (E 13th St.), Pythagoras Hall (Canal St.), Military Hall (Bowery and Spring St.). Both Martí and de Hostos gave speeches at the Masonic Hall, Clarendon Hall, and Speck Hall in the Union Square district. More exclusive appointments were staged around the Madison Square area (Hotel Saint Julien), at the homes of the more established individuals, and in the late 1890's at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Puerto Rican doctors had their offices on 14th St. across from Union Square. Other professionals had their businesses on Broadway below 14th St. Places of residence were spread in an area that covered from 12th St. to 47th St., and from 3rd Ave. to the 9th Ave. José Martí, the famous Cuban poet and thinker and the intellectual mind behind the late 19th century revolutionary efforts, was an exile in New York City. He lived in a boarding house on W 29th St., and worked for the *New York World*. He traveled between New York and Florida consolidating forces, acquiring funds, speaking for the revolution. A few of the wealthier lived outside the city in San Juan Hill, Carnegie Hill, 110th St., and St. Morris Park (Marcus Garvey Park). The workers – mainly *tabaqueros*, but also factory and dock workers – lived in Chelsea around 13th and 14th St., and Waverly Place. The poorest lived in "Shanty Town" between Lexington and 1st Ave., 72nd St and 101 St. In the late 19th century six railroad lines served Manhattan. The Shanty Town area was connected by the 3rd and 2nd Ave. railroads, and by the more luxurious New York and Harlem railroad. The working-class Antillean newcomers settled areas that were being redeveloped, new, or in development. *Figure 2* diagrams the scene of the moment.

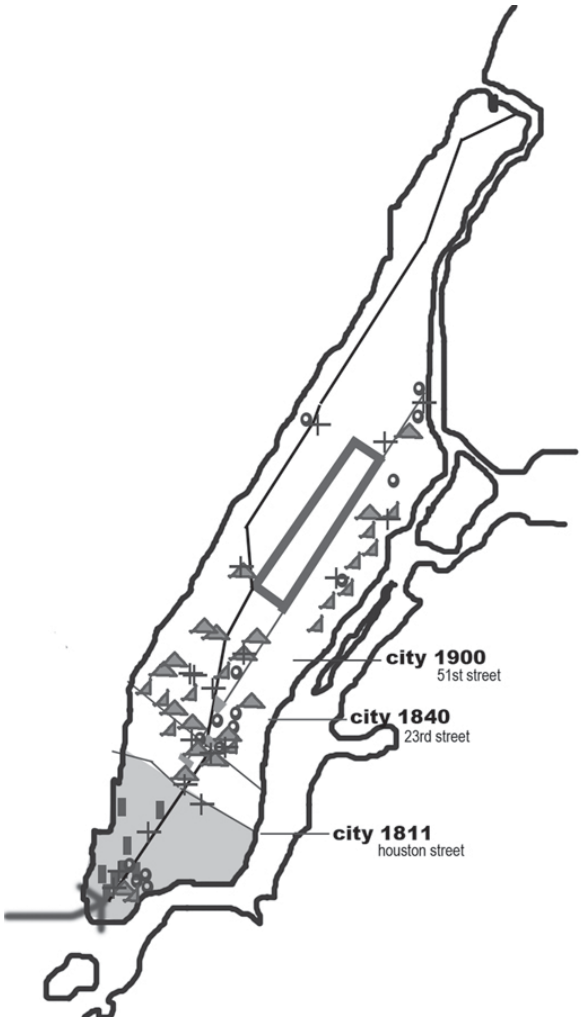

Figure 2: Puerto Ricans and Cubans in Manhattan from 1867 to 1900: residences, businesses and meeting points. [Source: compilation by the author from historical narratives, city directories, newspapers, etc]

In the 20th century, areas of Manhattan associated with Puerto Ricans have been perceived as ghettos. However, as shown in *Figure 3*, before the largest number of Puerto Ricans arrived in Manhattan in the 1950's, those areas were already identified by the NYC Health Department as having "decreased to next lower class," in the 1930's. *Figure 5* shows the layering of demographic data maps for Manhattan from 1950 to 2000, and reveals that *El Barrio* (East Harlem) is the only area consistently having a Puerto Rican population during the 20th century. This map also shows in those fifty years many Puerto Ricans lived in African Americans neighborhoods, such as Harlem and the West Side.

CONCLUSION

This paper is the first in a series that will pursue the extent and depth of the Puerto Rican presence in, and impact on the urban spaces of New York. Taken together, each study in the series will contribute to our understanding of a culture's legacy in specific urban environments: how it is made manifest, how it establishes a continuum over time; and will examine how a unique culture enriches the amalgam from which a new culture emerges.

These findings are preliminary and incomplete, but promising. The on-going work is to serve as a demonstration project to be presented to

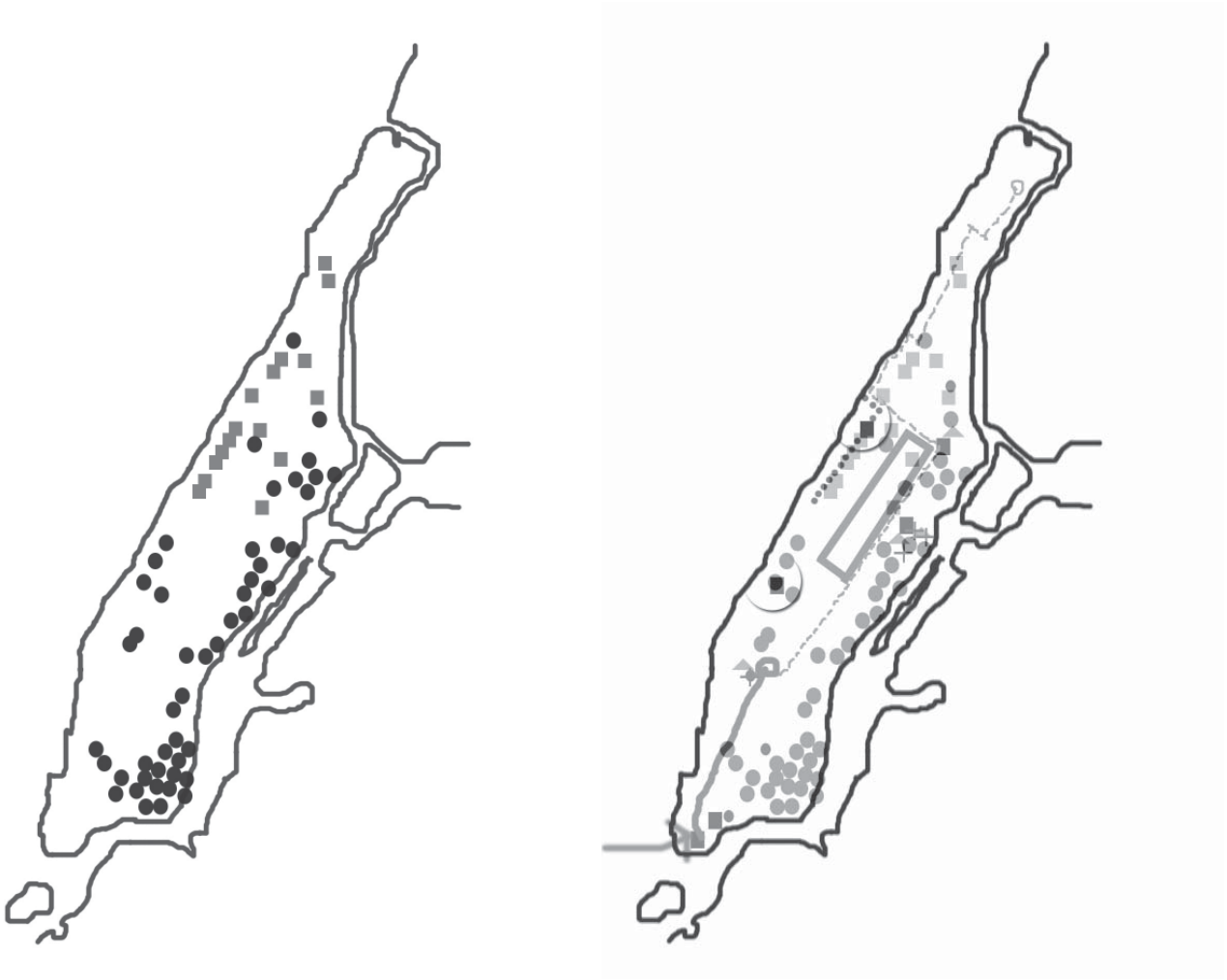

Figure 3-4: The map on the top indicates census tracts that in 1930 had decreased (circle), or increased (square) to next lower class. [Source: New York City Health Department]. On the bottom Vega's locations between 1916 and 1934 superimposed revealing only two intersecting points.

Figure 5: Layering of census tract data for Puerto Ricans and of Puerto Rican parentage from 1950 to 2000. [Source: U.S. Census]

students in the urban history and theory courses in architecture. It can serve as a basis for collaborations with faculty and students in other disciplines. One of the intentions of this study is to open up an the overriding question raised by the insightful students in my courses. After getting comfortable with the accepted tools for urban space analysis – from the grid, block, lot unit to edge, center, and corridor – and methods of inquiry offered by Lynch, Alexander, Krier, Koolhaas, and unavoidably the Congress for the New Urbanism, the more inspired will ask, "*Where are we in all of this? Where's our contribution? Where are our spaces? There were a lot of cultures here over time. They all helped make this place what it is. You mean to tell us there's no trace of any urban space or aspect that came from any group, but the Europeans?*" They look at me, waiting. I sense what may be the beginnings of despair standing at the threshold of unrealized possibilities. We have a lot of work to do together.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was made possible thanks to the New York University Faculty Resource Network Summer Scholar-in-Residence Program, and to the support of Hampton University. I am indebted to my colleagues at FRN for their insights. I appreciate V.M. Price's incisive editorial comments, and my students' insistence on candor and openness.

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4. Ibid., 38.

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6. Felicia Davis. "Walking Tours of Manhattan," in Sites of Memory, ed. Craig E. Barton (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 27-36.

7. Ibid, 27.

8. The information on the maps was extracted from three sources: M. A. Harris 1968 A Negro History Tour of Manhattan; I. N. Phelps Stokes Iconography of Manhattan Island 1489-1909, and information provided by Christopher Moore, a historian whose body of work focuses on the African American experience.

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32. In fact, some of the most famous generals of the Cuban revolutionary war were Dominican and Puerto Rican.