

Response Paper on A.K. Sandoval-Strausz’ *Latino Landscapes: Postwar Cities and the Transnational Origins of a New Urban America* (2014)

Sandoval-Strausz’ research in the Dallas neighborhood of Oak Cliff can be viewed as a blueprint for urban historians interested in urban renewal through migration in the postwar U.S. His analysis of the “processes of Latinization” (805) highlights the transformative impact of Latine¹ – particularly Mexican, in Sandoval-Strausz’ example – migrants on urban environments during the periods of urban crisis and increasing suburbanization in what he calls the “countertrend of Latino urbanization” (808). As such, Sandoval-Strausz’ article is part of the transnational turn in urban history and related fields; in centering Latine communities, he emphasizes their indispensable role in reshaping urban America. Foundational to his arguments in the article is the impact of segregation and racist zoning practices in Oak Cliff, the dissolution of which led to white flight in the 1970s. Though Sandoval-Strausz stresses the importance of racial discrimination on the development of Oak Cliff leading up to the period of white flight, little is revealed about potential tensions between the resident communities of color once Hispanic, Latine, and Black residents increasingly took over the previously Anglo parts of town. It is important to note here that, as Sandoval-Strausz points out, the Latine residents of Little Mexico had themselves been subjected to racist urban planning practices in the form of a highway cutting through the heart of the neighborhood (813). Indeed, given the massive racial discrimination outlined in the beginning of the article, it is somewhat disappointing to note the absence of inquiry into Latine-Black relations following the introductory overview of Oak Cliff’s racist past. It would certainly have been interesting to learn about possible cross-racial coalitions, given the negative impact of urban planning decisions on both communities outlined by Sandoval-Strausz. His thorough examination of Latine citizens’ daily practices as pivotal to the urban transformation of Oak Cliff, on the other hand, is incredibly compelling. The importance of walking, for instance, on the restructuring of downtown Oak Cliff serves as an important example of a fairly mundane activity that is nonetheless distinctly different from Anglo-American urbanity, which explicitly caters to automobility and U.S. cities thus often remarkably unsuitable for pedestrians. Similarly, the accelerating trend towards corporatization, shopping malls, and chain stores during the second half of the 20th century left many small shopfronts in Oak Cliff vacant only to be repurposed by Latine citizens who, in turn, often preferred family-run businesses and benefitted from the lack of language barriers (819). Lastly, by emphasizing the reciprocal relationships between the Latine communities of Oak Cliff and their familial networks in

¹ I am using “Latine” as a gender-neutral umbrella term for people of Latin-American descent.

their respective home countries, Sandoval-Strausz delineates how Latin American cityscapes were, in turn, transformed by the migrants who resettled to Oak Cliff throughout the 1970s and 80s. Not only did people migrate, but so did capital, eventually leading to the institutionalization of these community-based projects into transnational development funds by the countries' respective governments. His article, then, serves to illustrate the very phenomenon of cities as interrelated, as dynamic and fluid spaces, and challenges the notion of unilateral urban decline in the second half of the 20th century. Latine communities so profoundly transformed formerly vacant and destitute parts of Oak Cliff that they are now subject to increasing efforts of gentrification, in turn threatening to displace the very people who made the neighborhood attractive again in the first place through decades of hard work. Sandoval-Strausz' article is remarkably broad in scope, thorough and compelling, and firmly locates Latine communities as central to the processes of urban transformation in postwar America.