Shades of Lincoln Park: Armitage Avenue in the 1970s

Carlos Flores

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo

Part of the Latin American Languages and Societies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo/vol1/iss1/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Latino Research at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Diálogo by an authorized editor of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.
Shades of Lincoln Park: Armitage Avenue in the 1970s

Cover Page Footnote
This article is from an earlier iteration of Diálogo which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

This article is available in Diálogo: https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo/vol1/iss1/4
Armitage Avenue in the early 1970s, looking eastbound from the top of the L train stop.

SHADES OF LINCOLN PARK: ARMITAGE AVENUE IN THE 1970s

by Carlos Flores

I would like to dedicate this photo-essay to the memories of those individuals who are no longer with us, but were part of this experience. They included: Juan Rodriguez, Daniel Rodriguez, Miguel Rios, Manuel Ramos, Tony Crespo, Orlando Quintana, Cabo "Cabito" Cruz, Luis Figueroa, Andrés and Papo González, Ralph Rivera, Pancho Lind, Boquete, and many others.

It is hard to believe that 35 years have gone by since I arrived as a 10 year-old from Guayama, Puerto Rico to this big metropolis called Chicago. I distinctly remember sharing an apartment with my parents, two sisters, and a brother. This apartment was located at the corner of La Salle and Superior. A few years later the family moved to 1714 North Larrabee (near North Avenue), and I have fond memories of my youth attending Newberry and Arnold School; participating in the activities at the Lincoln Boys Club (corner of Orchard & Willow) and St. Michael’s church; visiting Lincoln Park Zoo, North Avenue Beach, and the Chicago Historical Society almost every day during the hot summers; and playing baseball at the Old Town Little League in Lincoln Park.

It was in the early 1960s when Puerto Ricans began their large migration into communities like Lincoln Park, Westtown/Humboldt Park, Lakeview, and other communities throughout the city. The area where Puerto Ricans began to
settle in Lincoln Park was bounded by North 
Avenue (South), Racine (West), Clark Street 
(East), and Fullerton (North). My experience of 
living on Armitage Avenue began in 1967 when 
my parents purchased their first property, a 
6-unit apartment building located at 1128 West 
Armitage. Today my parents continue to live at 
this location.

Growing up on Armitage Avenue during the 
1960s and 1970s provided me with some 
memorable and wonderful experiences. I con­sider Armitage Avenue (between Halsted and 
Racine) to be the main artery of the heart of this 
community. It must have been some divine 
intervention that I was chosen to document the 
many faces of Puerto Ricans living in this com­munity. Armitage Avenue was the backdrop for 
many of the images that I captured through the 
eyes of the camera.

Life on Armitage Avenue was very simple 
(there were never any problems finding a park­
ing space), and there was a true sense of com­munity. Families related to other families, 
children played with other children, merchants 
and business owners knew their customers well. 
In other words, you knew and you interacted
with your next door neighbor and with their families.

There were many Puerto Rican/Latino merchants who established their business on Armitage Avenue in order to meet the demand of providing services to many of the Spanish-speaking families residing in the community. For example, you had Arroyo’s Restaurant (front cover photo), located under the Armitage elevated train stop. Arroyo’s Restaurant provided some of the best *cuchifrito*, rice & beans.
Luis (Little Louie) Rodriguez, Fingers, and Gilbert (Karate) Vargas hanging out by the Young Lords Organization Headquarters (a.k.a. Armitage Avenue Methodis Church) on the corner of Armitage and Dayton (early 1970s).

and *rellenos de papa*, as well as provide a place where people would gather to catch-up with the *bochinches* (gossip) taking place around the neighborhood.

Armitage Avenue was also the home Arroyo’s Liquor Store, two record shops (La Estrella and Rosario’s Record Shop), and at least 4 bodegas (food mart) that included Armi-Day, Mario’s Food Mart, and Luis Bodega located on Armitage and Kenmore. The headquarters of Los Hijos Del Diablo (Sons of the Devil) motorcycle club was located on the 1100 block of Armitage and Big John’s Restaurant/Bar on Armitage near Clifton was the home of Willie’s Tavern.

Puerto Rican/Latino families living in this community were hard working families, with many of them living on the verge of poverty. I always felt that these families took the initiative to instill pride, dignity, love and respect in their offspring. This was reflected in the attitudes of young people growing up in this community.

Even though young Puerto Ricans/Latinos growing up in Lincoln Park belonged to various clubs/gangs like the Continentals, Young Lords, Black Eagles, Paragons, Latin Eagles, Latin Kings, and others, we lived and played together without any sense of danger from each other.

As a product of that environment I must emphasize that the experience of growing up in Lincoln Park during the 1960s and 1970s served as a great lesson in teaching me to become a compassionate and caring individual towards the Puerto Rican/Latino community. I am very proud to have been a part of the entire experience.

Carlos Flores is Coordinator of Project Kalinda at the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College.

At the Armitage Avenue train stop, Benny Pérez, Richie González, Ralph Rivera, and Tony Lugo welcome Néstor upon his return from the Armed Forces (early 1970s).