Latino Homicide: Immigration, Violence, and Community
Second Edition
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PREFACE

I grew up in San Antonio, Texas, in the 1960s and 1970s. From 1968 to 1980 I went through the local school system with many of the same classmates in a neighborhood adjacent to John Jay High school. A couple of years later after attending junior college I went off to a local university and never moved back but did return regularly. The neighborhoods were changing during those years but not as rapidly as in other places across urban America. Scholars would describe some of the changes elsewhere as the consequences of deindustrialization, the decline of segregation, growth of the underclass, immigration influence and other urban problems. My personal impression was far less complex. As a teenager I went to school with Whites, Blacks and Hispanics but noticed it was becoming “more Mexican” or Mexican American as I approached graduation. While I grew up in a racially diverse area I noticed that non-Latino whites (Anglos) were leaving and being replaced by Hispanics or Latinos. The neighborhood was just over half white during my elementary school years but changing. By the time I went back for my 20-year high school reunion the old neighborhood was almost completely Latino.

At the time I did not realize, much less comprehend that, for the most part, the Latinos moving in were not newcomers from abroad. Rather they were from older areas in the surrounding west side where my paternal grandmother resided or from neighboring rural places where my maternal grandmother had lived for much of her life. Some residents were retired military coming back home after serving abroad. The fact that they were not immigrants was not apparent to me at the time since they only thing I noticed about them was they were Latino. It was only years later as the Latino growth became more concentrated across the southwest and the population grew in urban communities that I recalled internal migration and fertility accounted for much of the urban population transformation in places such as San Antonio. The growth of Latinos is the main
part of the story I want to tell here but their visibility as native-born Latinos is another portion of that tale. And I contend that requires more elaboration and research. The questions that motivated this second edition come out of my personal and academic experiences. I wanted to impart the past and present story of homicide in the seventh largest city in the nation – San Antonio – which happens to be my birthplace and now a majority Latino city.

I also wanted to go back and study the city of Miami my former residence, workplace and research site for almost twenty years more closely. I wanted to revisit and expand the story of the immigration experience – one that is very strongly illustrated in Miami, Florida and even a part of the “illegality status” debate that now rises in the public imagination. This is done by returning to a homicide story linked to a boatlift and boat wave over thirty years old. Many of my former students or their parents entered Miami this way and I wanted to more fully embrace that story. I also wanted to update the border story since many U.S. residents base their opinions on incorrect notions of what crime on the border means or why border control is important when considering local crime. Many readers consider the U.S./Mexican border is a dangerous place and I update the study by expanding the study of homicides in San Diego, California. In these two entry points – Miami and San Diego – I also ask what was the Latino homicide level relative to other racial/ethnic/immigrant groups? In others words, how useful is it to study Latino homicides but have little understanding of the similarities and differences to groups that are heavily foreign-born? These two cities are in the areas most heavily affected by the new immigration. Yet the Latino homicide rate declined. Why?

This edition concerns a phenomenon that has moved to center stage that is the growth of Latinos and the consequences of that transformation. Unlike the first edition I go back to the past and up to the present when possible. A sizeable portion of today’s Latino population is young and
mostly from the Caribbean and Latin America. That is an important story and one that I examined in the previous edition. Most of the public and scholarly attention focused on immigration since it was then, and in fact still is, seen as a problem of the moment. Yet most Latinos are not foreign but native-born. That angle is now more developed. This edition takes a closer look at homicide among the Latino population and does so by incorporating a new city with the previous ones. The range of the Latino experience is expanded and the diversity within the population more fully embraced by reminding readers that Latinos are both old and new.