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## The Making of an Immigrant Niche<sup>1</sup>

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Although the dominant paradigm of immigrant employment views immigrants as clustered in a limited number of occupations or industries that comprise a *niche*, the explanations of how immigrants enter and establish these *niches* remain incomplete. While most researchers emphasize the importance of social networks, the social network approach begs the issue of how to account for the insertion and consolidation of immigrant networks as opposed to those dominated by incumbent native workers. This article seeks to answer this question through a case study of immigrant professional employees in New York City government. I argue that the growth of this immigrant niche resulted from changes in the relative supply of native workers and in the structure of employment, which opened the bureaucracy to immigrants and reduced native/immigrant competition. These shifts opened hiring portals; given the advantages of network hiring for workers and managers, and an immigrant propensity for government employment, network recruitment led to a rapid buildup in immigrant ranks.

Although the dominant paradigm of immigrant employment views immigrants as clustered in a limited number of occupations or industries that comprise a *niche* (Morawska, 1990; Model, forthcoming; U.S. Department of Labor, 1989), the explanations of how immigrants enter and establish these *niches* remain incomplete. As with so many other matters in immigration research, a social network approach provides the best tool for approaching the issue (Tilly, 1990). In the context of immigrant employment, networks comprise a source of "social capital," just as Coleman (1988) has specified, providing social structures that facilitate action, in this case, job search, hiring, recruitment, and training. Networks are particularly critical for their role in organizing information flows between newcomers and settlers, on the one hand, and between workers and employers on the other; by increasing the quality and quantity of information, networks increase immigrants' ability to access employment opportunities and reduce employers' risks associated with hiring and training (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991).

While cogent, the network approach omits a critical issue: namely, how to account for the insertion and consolidation of immigrant networks as opposed to those dominated by incumbent native workers. That is, unless immigrants move into an entirely new or rapidly expanding industry, a common enough situation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but unusual today, they must enter as replacements for some previously established group.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Ivan Light, Carroll Seron, and the anonymous readers and editors of IMR for comments on an earlier draft.

Replacing incumbents is hardly a foregone conclusion since prior occupants of a niche may be organized to keep newcomer out. After all, the same features that make networks mechanisms of inclusion also make them mechanisms of exclusion. Under most circumstances, employers prefer to hire the workers recommended by incumbents, who also enjoy privileged access to job information (Granovetter and Tilly, 1989). Indeed, opportunities may become detached from the open market, being rationed instead to insiders' referrals, reflecting a *quid pro quo* between incumbents and employers (Stevens, 1978). Thus, the advantages of networks for newcomers cannot explain the factors that undermine or reverse pre-existing, network-based tendencies toward social closure.

Moreover, the social network approach ignores the broader institutional framework within which immigrant employment occurs. Stable occupation of a niche often breeds a normative consensus as to the rules of access and promotion. These rules may be purely customary or formalized in collective bargaining or civil service procedures, which in turn may gain a customary content. While the rulemaking process is often affected by conflict and the divergent interests of labor and employers, the rules become adapted to the needs of incumbent groups. Consequently, the ability of immigrant networks to function as social capital may well be constrained by the rules and structures imposed by established groups. Morawska's (1983) case study of nineteenth century steel mills and their bifurcated "occupational circuits" based on ethnic divisions exemplifies this process, with social networks operating in precisely the fashion outlined above yet feeding Eastern European workers into a clearly delimited set of jobs with low mobility ceilings.

In a sense, these conceptual shortcomings have methodological roots. Immigration studies quite naturally focus on immigrants, but understanding the development of their employment situation requires detailed attention to the native groups for whom they might be complements or substitutes. For the same reason, immigration studies have the wrong time line. Immigrants move into an employment structure established by earlier labor and employer groups; to understand how that structure impinges on immigrants, one needs to comprehend the historical context in which that structure evolved.

This article speaks to the conceptual and methodological issues in research on the making of an immigrant niche through a case study of immigrant professionals in New York City government.<sup>2</sup> Though the great bulk of immigration research has focused on other groups—in particular, labor and entrepreneurial immigrants—professionals have comprised a modest but very significant share of the U.S.-bound migration stream ever since the enactment of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965. The scholarly consensus concludes that professionals "tend to enter at the bottom of their respective

<sup>2</sup> In this article, "professional" is defined as a general, administrative category requiring higher levels of education, thus including tighter categories requiring highly specialized training, such as engineers, lawyers or accountants, but also extending to looser categories such as caseworkers or assessors for which skills are more general and training is obtained on the job.

occupational ladders and to progress from there according to individual merit" (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990:19). Nonetheless, growing evidence points in a different direction, suggesting that professionals, like less skilled immigrants, are clustering in particular niches, establishing concentrations that grow through informal mechanisms and differentiate newcomers from their native counterparts. Engineering is a case in point. Among engineers, where the foreign-born share rose from 9.4 to 17.5 percent between 1972 and 1982, an emergent pattern of niching could be detected, with immigrant engineers overconcentrated in education and in private industry, in research and development functions (National Research Council, 1988). Health care has also seen a growth in the immigrant presence, and here again there are signs that the foreign born occupy a distinct position in the division of labor, both in specialization and in sector of employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 1989).

The same pattern of immigrant concentration in specialized professional functions can be detected in government. Though African Americans and other minorities are overrepresented in New York's municipal sector—as indeed they are at all other levels of government employment in the United States—immigrants have moved into a distinctive corner of the bureaucracy. Native minority employees abound in those professional categories that are either entirely or largely monopolized by government—for example, welfare caseworkers or teachers. But where government employs professionals in technical jobs for which there are competitive equivalents in the private sector, one finds a different ethnic division of labor. Here native minorities are underrepresented; immigrants have instead emerged as the successors to the white ethnics who long dominated these functions.

While the story of immigrant professionals is distinctive, it can provide insight into the labor market trajectories of other immigrant types. Moreover, the specific case is particularly well-suited to grasping the historical and institutional context within which an immigrant niche develops. The arrangement of government jobs in New York City fits the classic image of the internal labor market. The municipal service is rule-bound, with hiring and mobility governed by an extraordinary layer of procedures that are embedded in civil service law and union contracts. The products of earlier, competitive conflicts organized along ethnic and other interest group lines, the rules are long-lived and make for considerable rigidity. Yet they are not completely real. Rules are open to give and take among the relevant players in the game, and their substance and weight are determined by their relevance to group core interests as well as group ability to exercise leverage over broader political processes.

While moving into public employment has been a mobility strategy among New York's ethnic groups for the past 150 years, it is also a story of alternating tendencies toward inclusion and exclusion. The Irish came to dominate the ranks of the public sector by the 1900s, though not without considerable conflict with white Protestants, who imposed the original civil service structures that reduced the importance of ethnic affinities (Erie,

1988). Next came Jews and Italians, whose entrance led to conflict with the Irish over the rules of entry and promotion, with a particularly harsh overtone during the Depression (Bayor, 1978). Competition was mediated, in part, through the establishment of a division of labor structured by ethnic and community linkages, still visible in the continuing Irish presence in the police and fire departments, the Jewish concentration among teachers, and the high Italian representation among the sanitation workers.

Though local government was much slower to open its doors to blacks, with black employment remaining insignificant until the late 1930s (Lewinson, 1974), recent years have seen the growth of a sizeable black employment base among the ranks of New York City workers (Bailey, 1989). Yet the passage of blacks into the public sector has been highly contentious, bringing into question both formal selection criteria that reduce opportunities for blacks and informal recruitment practices that keep information flows within white, ethnic channels. According to one recent report, blacks "remain concentrated in a narrow group of agencies where they earn low salaries" and have limited opportunities for mobility (Stafford, 1989:63).

Consequently, the niche established by immigrant professionals fits into a complex organizational matrix, molded over time and evolving in tandem with the changing interests of diverse parties. Understanding the expansion of immigrant employment in New York's bureaucracy goes beyond a social network approach, directing attention to the behavior of other groups and to the broader factors that influence the structure within which immigrants have been inserted. In studying immigrant employment, the characteristics of the case also help resolve the methodological difficulties that employment structures are long-standing, have been subject to conflict, and are part of the public arena provide a rich and continuous documentary base.

This article draws on this base in a variety of ways. The core of my material consists of 45 in-depth interviews conducted with a broad range of government officials past and present, occupying positions from top to bottom levels, as well as officials of the relevant public employee unions. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to three hours; in a number of cases, I conducted repeat interviews which allowed me to crosscheck information and assess new hypotheses. The interviews were tailored to the individual's circumstances, varying in content depending on whether the informant was a rank and file bureaucrat or a manager. Interviews with the former were more likely to focus on the individual's own career trajectory, with an emphasis on factors impeding or promoting entry and mobility within government service; interviews with the latter tended to concentrate on hiring, recruitment and promotion practices and policies, though where possible I tried to collect a brief career history.

To place the interviews in context, I have benefited from a rich body of published and unpublished material about the evolution of New York's City's civil service. These include reports of the New York Civil Service Commission; special reports commissioned by New York City on aspects of its personnel system; unpublished data about the ethnic characteristics

of its employees which I obtained through freedom of information requests; legal and civil service commission rulings; the Public Use Microdata samples of the 1970 and 1980 Censuses of Population; and relevant articles from *The New York Times*.

I now move on to a discussion of the historical evolution of the civil service system, with an emphasis on the effects of ethnic competition. This overview sets the context for an examination of the changing role of native and immigrant workers in New York City's professional service and the factors that affect the making of the immigrant niche.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: CONSOLIDATING AN INTERNAL LABOR MARKET

Though New York City's civil service system dates back to 1883, government employment remained closely tied to the party system until the Great Depression. These arrangements were broken apart with the election of Fiorello LaGuardia, who sought to undermine the material base of Tammany Hall's power and consolidate his support among groups not firmly under Tammany's tow—the most important of which were the Jews (Kessner, 1989). Both goals could be accomplished in the same way, namely by giving the green light to the administrative changes long championed by the reform vanguard which comprised a crucial part of LaGuardia's coalition (Shefter, 1985).

The reform program involved a three-front attack on the old job arrangements. First, the reformers took away patronage preserves, making the great majority of entry-level positions available by examination only. Second, they increased the importance of educational credentials and standardized testing, to the detriment of experience-based criteria (Rapoport, 1971). Third, they internalized career lines, limiting entry portals to the bottom level, eliminating outsiders from access to promotional opportunities, and striving to bring even the highest level administrative jobs into the civil service.

In sum, the reformers revamped the structure of competition in ways that benefited the more educated Jewish population, who had previously lacked privileged access to government jobs. The reformers also encouraged competition by embarking on a vigorous recruitment campaign. Made hungry for jobs by the Depression, competitors arrived in droves. In 1933, under the last Tammany-mayor, 6,237 individuals applied for government jobs; six years later, 250,000 jobseekers knocked at the municipal service's door. The search for upward mobility through civil service also accelerated, as applications for promotional exams climbed from 6,270 in 1935 to 26,847 in 1939 (data calculated from the Annual Report of the Municipal Civil Service Commission, 1935, 1937, 1938, 1939). Many of the New Yorkers who looked for government work were highly qualified: the city's workforce had been upgraded during the 1920s as a result of longer school attendance, and the ranks of the unemployed were filled with high school graduates, as well as a large number of persons who had spent at least some time in the city's

burgeoning public college sector. As the Civil Service Commission boasted in its report for 1939, more than 85,000 men applied for competitive jobs in the sanitation department, among whom were "an unusual number [of] college graduates and a few [with] post graduate degrees" (Civil Service Commission, 1940:8).

These simultaneous shifts in the structure of employment and in the characteristics of the available labor supply were felt with particular force in the professional services. Whereas Tammany's legacies included a staff of politically-appointed engineers "of whom a substantial proportion lacked a high school degree" (Caro, 1974:328), the LaGuardia Civil Service Commission turned the situation around. "Engineers [were] hired a dime a dozen," as a former personnel director noted, since you "could get them for the same price as a technician." The Commission exploited the labor market situation to raise requirements in favor of additional training, providing educational credits to be added to the scores achieved in competitive exams (Sayre and Mandell, 1938). The Commission also created engineering and administrative services, attempting at one point to bring the entire personnel of the Department of Water Supply, Gas, and Electricity into the competitive civil service up to and including the post of commissioner.

Consequently, the Depression brought New York City a cadre of exceptionally qualified workers whose imprint would last for several decades:

I came into the City during the Depression when civil service was the utopia, the absolute apogee—because it was a steady job. There was intense competition. It was highly sought after, highly prized. When I took the exam for assistant chemist in 1937, 1,200 people lined up at dawn for as many as ten jobs over next four to five years. I placed high enough and was hired off that list about three years later.

Among the beneficiaries of these new recruits were the city's engineering departments, as one member of the depression cohort, later to occupy several commissionerships, recalled:

I went into old Board of Water Supply. It was a sterling engineering organization, with world class engineers, publishing articles that were read by everybody. In the 1930s, this was the premier hydraulic engineering organization, the men were real giants in the field. Water resources was an agency led by engineers; there was continuity of personnel and mission. I was fortunate to be part of the elite team in water pollution control in the City.

In other agencies, the depression produced a crop of overqualified though highly capable workers, locked out of the fields for which they originally trained. One retired veteran from what is now the Finance Department told me that:

When I came in (just after the War), the agency had lots of attorneys. When they came out in the Depression, they couldn't find jobs, they took exams, and became assessors. The department was loaded with them. Assessor exams were made difficult because they could get the cream of the crop.

One of the top leaders of the largest City union, formerly an accountant, recounted that:

The department recruited during the Depression when they got the best accountants. When I came in most of the supervisory staff were CPAs. My crew chief, my unit head were both CPAs.

With the advent of post-war prosperity, however, the scales tipped against New York City. As the labor market tightened, government's former advantages in recruitment receded. The 1952 "Report of the Mayor's Committee on Management Survey" found that "The City does not seriously compete, from a salary point of view, with other employers in the New York area" (1952:177). The city was also burdened with a weak, understaffed personnel department that was preoccupied with administering exams, doing little to either encourage new workers to seek out city employment or encourage incumbent workers to upgrade their skills. Moreover, the huge cohort of overqualified Depression recruits found themselves pushed into less satisfying jobs. As I was told by a retired director of the Department of Personnel, engineers working as draftsmen and accountants employed as bookkeepers pleased the bureaucracy since "even a marginally good engineer makes a good draftsman and a good clerk," but underutilization kept the staff disgruntled. As the attractiveness of public employment dwindled, the flows of personnel in and out of the civil service also changed, as this former commissioner recalls:

When I came back to the City after the war, I found out that the Depression generation's situation was changing. A lot of them were recruited to the outside. In any organization, there usually is a Gaussian distribution of skills and abilities. However, in the post-war years, as the competition grew and private industry was busy recruiting engineers, chemists, and so on, a lot of the best people were hired away. Others of us, we loved what we were doing and we stayed.

As New York City could no longer exploit a surplus of overqualified workers, the civil service, notwithstanding its size and importance, became a hermetic, self-enclosed entity, whose hiring practices tended to reproduce the characteristics of its incumbent workers. Recruitment had become a peripheral function in municipal government, as noted by the Mayor's Committee on Management Survey as early as 1952. A report prepared for the city by the Brookings Institution in 1963 was even more scathing, deriding the "budget and staff for the central recruiting and public relations work" as "pathetic" (Stanley and Associates, 1963: 95). Consequently, employment in those city functions with which the public had little contact—like the Department of Finance or the engineers in the Bureau of Sewer Maintenance—had come to resemble a "secret society," as one black manager described the assessor's bureau when he entered it in the late 1970s:

Looked at institutionally, there was no recruitment or effort made to encourage people. You almost didn't know that these guys existed. I just kind of stumbled across the [exam] notice.

With little in the way of an active recruitment effort, potential applicants with no prior connections had few signposts to an appropriate source of vacancies. As one veteran union leader pointed out:

How do people get jobs in the civil service? It's a ponderous process getting into civil service. Not a process designed to get you in. How do you get into a title? You have to know that there's a vacancy. The public doesn't know about the *Chief*.<sup>3</sup> So let's say you do know. My belief is, generally speaking, you know someone who's in civil service. They can't necessarily do something. But they're in it.

Indeed, a 1963 survey of more than 7,000 civil servants in professional occupations discovered that almost half found out about their initial jobs through friends or family, with an additional 18 percent obtaining information in a civil service paper (Stanley and associates, 1963:101). Thus, the professional services became an ethnic enclave at the same time as their position in the market for educated workers sharply eroded.

At first, the high quality of the personnel hired during the Depression blunted the impact of the city's weakening recruitment position, but as the 1950s drew to a close, New York City's growing inadequacies became more and more apparent (Rapoport, 1971). Personnel officials realized that "the system of the 1930s and the 1940s couldn't continue," as a former personnel director recalled, and, in 1961, the Brookings Institution was commissioned to undertake a thorough study of city policies for its professional staff.

The Brookings study, directed by David T. Stanley, underlined the depths of city staffing problems in professional occupations. New York City still relied on its cohort of Depression recruits, but this was now a badly aging workforce: 36 percent of accountants, 55 percent of civil engineers and 58 percent of administrators were over 50 years of age. Among administrators, only 11 percent were younger than 40 and none were under 30. High proportions of older employees were to be found in lower and middle level jobs, as well as at the very top. Moreover, many departments experienced shortages—during the early 1960s, vacancies in selected professional, technical and managerial occupations were in the neighborhood of 20–25 percent, with many of the vacancies surfacing in key, upper-level positions. The staffing problem had diverse origins. In some instances, the city suffered from an absolute shortage of trained personnel; more commonly, as in the cases of attorneys, accountants, civil engineers, and architects, it could not compete on salary and compounded this problem by bureaucratic delays in hiring that chased qualified people away. Finally, new hires proved unstable, with one out of every five newly recruited workers with a college degree having to be replaced each year. In sum, the City employed a cadre of discontented professionals, whose main commitment to the job stemmed from inertia:

Survey results show that the City's strongest hold on its professional, technical, managerial employees results either from their

<sup>3</sup> The *Chief* is a civil service weekly that publishes announcements about openings and exams.

own dedication to the program and service aspects of their jobs or from the pull of pensions and other benefits. There is little belief that City government offers as professionally and personally satisfying lifetime careers as can be found elsewhere (Stanley and Associates, 1963:67).

As with the raft of personnel reports that followed it, the recommendations of the Brookings Report were largely ignored. More importantly, the climate shifted attention to other personnel issues, chiefly those associated with problems of minority employment, and to concerns arising from the growing importance of collective bargaining. Under these conditions the deficiencies that arose in the immediate post-war period lingered on. A 1970 study of the Finance Department, for example, found that more than half of its employees were 50 years old or more, with 20 percent 61 years of age or older, and more than a third of recent hires older than 51 (Hirsch, 1970). While city leaders periodically voiced worries that the "Depression virtuosos" were "retiring and leaving a talent gap that . . . cannot be filled" (Reeves, 1967) and lamented their replacement by "personnel with inferior qualifications" (Carroll, 1970), how to replenish New York City's professional cadres was a problem that policymakers never addressed.

#### ENTER THE IMMIGRANTS

Thus, changes in the supply of local, native-born labor produced shortages prior to the advent of immigrants. With the enactment of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, however, new sources penetrated the ranks of New York's professional bureaucracy, first in a tiny trickle and then in growing numbers. As in many other contexts, the immigrant entry involved a process of self-recruitment, as these two lengthy extracts from interviews with "seedbed" immigrants, now occupying senior civil service positions, suggest:

I'm from Egypt. I didn't know anyone in the United States; I came in 1968. I applied just before the 1967 war; I came in under the accountants' quota. The first job—you know immigrants—I came in and worked at all different kinds of jobs for the first two weeks. Then I got a job with a Jewish company: it was in the Empire State Building. They gave me a job as a figure clerk. I worked for them for two to three months and I said, "Hey, I'm an accountant. They said, "We'll give you a 30 dollars increase." So I decided to join a government agency which doesn't discriminate and where everyone gets equal treatment. What happened is that when I decided to leave private industry, I went to the New York State Employment office and said I want a government job. And the person called up and sent me over and I had an interview with a Jewish person who said, "... that's a Hungarian name," and they hired me right away as a provisional. At that time I was hired as an assistant accountant. At the time they didn't hire you as an accountant, even if you had a college degree—always hired you for the title before. I stayed three to four months, said, "To heck with it, it's a low-paying job, I never want to stay with it. I took a leave of absence and then I went to work with private employers. Then the unions got an increase. Nine months later I ran into my boss in the street who asked me to come back. I was the first Egyptian hired (into the Finance Department). It was mainly

Jewish and Italian, because they were discriminated against during the Depression, so they all came in then. They were not Anglo-Saxons, WASPs. Then, when I came, there were two black accountants. And then it started from that time, other ethnic groups joining in.

I started in the City as a junior engineer in August 1964. I grew up in Bombay; I went to school at Kansas State; I came to New York because it was easier to communicate home, as a major airport, and cheaper travel. And also, in my case, my family was pretty much public sector, my father was a district magistrate, my brother was a clerk to a judge; a public service oriented family. The job fell into my lap. I knew one guy working with the City who had worked with me in Bombay. He said go to the Department of Personnel and why don't you see whether there are any vacancies; I was lucky to go there the day they were giving the test, and I took the test for a junior engineer—it was probably the toughest test I ever took in my life. I passed the test and got a letter saying go to these agencies. The commissioners were interested in getting real good engineers back into the system; they saw that the oldtimers were retiring, and they were looking for neophytes like myself to come in.

To some extent, the immigrant influx reflected policy changes designed to "broaden the market" when the city could no longer "get the best of the market," as a retired personnel director explained. In 1963, New York City repealed the Depression-era Lyons Act, which required employees to be residents of New York City was repealed at the same time the city persuaded the State Civil Service Commission to waive the requirement of U.S. citizenship for appointees to 43 hard-to-fill titles, including engineers, chemists, and architects (Stanley and Associates, 1963:94). In the years immediately following the Hart-Celler Act, the city was so eager for professional help that it would sponsor newcomers seeking labor certifications:

When we first came in the mid-60s, you could work for the City without a green card for a certain period of time. In our department I had a group of five or six of us; the personnel director wrote a letter to the INS, how important this was that the department retain the services of Indian engineers. For the first time in the City's history, the department wrote letters saying they needed engineers. The City became our sponsor for the green card. Since we were already on the civil service list, and they had already tested us on the working environment, they realized they wanted to keep us. Five or six of us on that list were sponsored.

Once a small cluster of "seedbed" immigrants were implanted, networks between newcomers and settlers quickly directed new arrivals into the appropriate places in the bureaucracy:

The Egyptians all lived in Borough Park, 52 Street and 51 Street, or in Jersey City. From the airplane they put them in Borough Park; they'd stay in someone's house until they got a job. Although they didn't necessarily stay with someone who was a friend back home, they got to know each other either living in

Borough Park or Jersey City. That's where the accountants come from. They'd always get a job somewhere else and then get a job with the City. By 1973, word went back that you could work for the City or for the federal [government].

Though immigrants began to find their way into government by the late 1960s, the 1970 Census of Population suggests that they had made only slight progress. At a time when immigrants already made up 21 percent of the city's workforce, the foreign-born share of municipal employment barely exceeded 9 percent, of whom half were of non-European origin. Nonetheless, a faint glimmer of an immigrant buildup can be detected, as 10.5 percent of the noninstructional, nonhealth professionals working for New York City in 1970 were foreign born (calculated from the 1970 Census of Population, 5% Sample).

But evidence of an unusual kind strongly suggests that immigrant networks were firmly implanted in certain portions of the City's bureaucracy by the early 1970s. The source is a stipulation from a successful class action suit filed against New York City on behalf of a group of noncitizen immigrants working for the city in the early 1970s and denied promotion or employment. This action lists the names, addresses, titles and agencies of all the immigrants who filed for settlement.<sup>4</sup> From this information we can infer how immigrant penetration into the ranks of New York City's professionals occurred. On the one hand, the immigrants comprised a group connected to each other by virtue of kinship, ethnicity, and residential nearness. Of the 277 persons listed in the stipulation, seven pairs were living in the same household (presumably as spouses). Sixty-five lived in Jersey City, an emerging area of Arab and South Asian settlement; within Jersey City, 50 lived within the same zip code. Another 24 lived in the are of Flushing, Queens, a major Indian concentration; 15 members of this Flushing contingent were to be found in the same zip code. Eighteen had the common surname of "Patel," indicating membership in a subcaste grouping from Gujarat in India. On the other hand, these same immigrants clustered into a very narrow range of occupations. Although the city maintains 641 occupational titles, the immigrants were concentrated in a subset of only 27 titles, with 42 percent of the immigrants found in the single title of accountant and another 24 percent working in one of ten engineering titles.

Thus, the stipulation hints at the early embedding of immigrant networks in very particular parts of New York City's bureaucracy. From this point

<sup>4</sup> The stipulation covers only those immigrants in the following categories: those who were promoted and subsequently demoted solely by reason of alien status; those who took promotional exams but were denied promotion solely because of alien status; those who were provisional appointees; and those who were never employed in Civil Service and who took a Civil Service exam, but were denied certification and appointment by reason of alien status. Because any person falling under these categories was eligible for a significant benefit, e.g., promotion, additional seniority, employment, etc.), and because the city made substantial efforts to publicize the court order, it seems likely that the list covers a large, if not complete, portion of the City's alien (noncitizen) workforce at the time.

on, the networks probably evolved slowly. When New York City teetered at the edge of bankruptcy in 1975, it sought to economize by reducing the size of its workforce and putting a halt to any new hiring. But the city shed workers by encouraging its most senior employees to take early retirement, leaving in place its more recent recruits, such as the foreign born (McCormick, 1984). Thus, the fiscal crisis kept immigrant numbers in check, but never dislodged the newcomers from the niche that they had previously established.

### EXPANDING THE IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT BASE

New York City's economy began to recover in 1977, with consequences that were soon noticed in the city's coffers. As revenues went up, so too did pressure to rebuild the city's labor force. By 1980, the workforce began to grow again, with small initial gains followed by very substantial additions. From 104,777 in 1980, the payrolls of the direct mayoral agencies climbed to 129,762 in 1985, and thence to 153,703 in 1989, the last year of the Koch administration (New York City Department of Personnel, Annual Report to the New York State Civil Service Commission, yearly reports, unpublished).

Growth led to disproportionate gains in those titles and agencies where the earlier immigrant employment base had been established. In the finance department, which benefited from the city's stepped-up and increasingly sophisticated tax collection operations, expanding payrolls led to greater immigrant penetration. "During my six years in the agency there's been a dramatic increase in foreign-born employees," recounted the department's first deputy commissioner. "They comprise a high proportion of the professional staff." Greater staffing needs in agencies with engineering responsibilities brought similar results. In the Transit Authority, the chief engineer, himself an Indian immigrant, estimated that Asian immigrants alone comprise 25 percent of the TA's 1,500-person engineering staff. An assistant commissioner in the Department of Highways said that "60 to 70 percent of my staff is immigrant and that includes people in supervisory positions." His deputy explained how this happened:

We started to increase the staff significantly in the early 1980s. That's when infrastructure became a critical issue. Within a few years we doubled the staff that was here. There are quite a few newer people, including myself. And in terms of ethnic mixes, we do have a lot of foreigners. The Italians and Jews, who were the earlier City workers, are now retiring or have left the City. And we are getting a significant number of minorities, mostly Asians and the Russians. I would say that it's almost three to one, in terms of non-U.S. born, often non-U.S. educated immigrants.

As an illustration of the depth of immigrant penetration into the engineering titles, the assistant commissioner in the Division of Bridge Construction offered the following anecdote:

The City had a ceremony on the 180th anniversary of the Brooklyn Bridge. We were asked to pick out a person whom we wanted to recognize: all four who were picked out were foreign born.

These are your middle management type. They will be running the department in ten years.

Quantitative benchmarks are more difficult to supply. In the absence of up-to-date census data, not available as of this writing, we turn to less satisfactory alternatives. One crude but suggestive indicator is a comparison of "typical" ethnic last names: the fact that in 1991 there were 195 Patels among the members of the technical guild, which enrolls chemists, engineers and other professionals, as opposed to 17 Cohens, provides some clue as to the extent of ethnic change. Using Asians as a conservative proxy for immigrants on the assumption that the great majority of Asian employees were foreign-born, and bearing in mind that many foreign-born professionals were classified as whites (e.g., Russians and Middle Easterners) or Hispanics or blacks, unpublished EEO data, obtained through freedom of information requests, can help gauge the level of immigrant penetration.<sup>5</sup> As can be seen in Table 1, Asians comprised only 3 percent of all municipal employees in 1990, but generally surpassed this threshold in selected agencies with concentrations of engineers, accountants, chemists, and other noninstructional professionals. When the focus is narrowed to employment in professional categories, markedly higher levels of Asian representation emerge, with the strongest concentrations occurring among agencies with engineering functions, like the Transit Authority, Environmental Protection, and Transportation. Time series data obtained from the Department of Transportation underscore the Asian penetration of specialized professional titles. Over the course of the 1980s, when total professional employment in this agency increased from 416 to 980 persons, Asian employment grew from 43 to 191 workers, lifting the Asian share from 8 to 19.9 percent.

The contrast between Asian employment, on the one hand, and black and Hispanic employment, on the other, highlights the distinctiveness of the immigrant niche. Whereas blacks comprised 36 percent of professionals in all city agencies, they fell considerably short of that level in all of the selected agencies profiled in Table 1, with the exception of the Department of Health. Even greater disparities appeared among the engineers, as in the Department of Transportation, where there were almost three times as many Asian as black engineers.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, in social services, where a black concentration in professional categories strongly emerged as early as 1963, blacks accounted for 58 percent of professional employees and Asians for barely 3 percent.

While immigrant ranks expanded in the 1980s, this change was not simply a direct consequence of growing payrolls in the sectors where foreign-born workers had earlier concentrated. Rather, the expanded im-

<sup>5</sup> According to the president of the Chinese American Civil Service Association, immigrants comprised the great majority of Chinese municipal employees. This seems likely to hold for other Asian groups as well, since calculations from the 1980 Census of Population show that in 1980 there were almost 110,000 foreign-born Asians employed in New York City, almost eleven times the number of native-born Asians, and New York City continued to experience high levels of immigration from China, India, and Korea during the 1980s.



TABLE 1

## ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF NEW YORK CITY AGENCIES, 1990

	Total	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)
All City Agencies	375,407	48.0	36.0	13.0	3.0
All Direct Mayoral Agencies					
Total	149,925	50.0	37.0	12.0	2.0
Administrators	15,842	49.6	39.9	8.2	2.2
Professionals	27,892	49.4	35.9	8.2	6.3
Transit Authority					
Total	40,549	43.0	42.0	10.0	4.0
Administrators	6,230	62.7	27.4	6.4	3.4
Professionals	2,426	54.9	22.3	5.5	17.4
Department of Health					
Total	4,455	25.0	56.0	15.0	4.0
Administrators	360	46.9	41.9	9.2	1.9
Professionals	1,534	35.7	48.7	9.3	6.3
Environmental Protection					
Total	5,428	62.0	21.0	8.0	10.0
Administrators	690	65.1	23.3	5.7	5.9
Professionals	1,130	54.8	14.5	5.1	25.4
Finance					
Total	2,266	45.0	39.0	6.0	9.0
Administrators	364	52.7	33.8	8.5	4.7
Professionals	690	48.8	29.9	4.3	15.7
Transportation					
Total	7,757	43.0	42.0	10.0	4.0
Administrators	697	55.8	36.0	6.0	2.0
Professionals	1,031	60.0	16.4	3.6	19.9
Management and Budget					
Total	446	63.0	17.0	8.0	12.0
Administrators	140	71.4	13.6	10.0	5.0
Professionals	239	66.9	8.8	6.7	17.6
Comptroller					
Total	944	60.0	24.0	10.0	5.0
Administrators	287	79.1	15.3	4.5	1.0
Professionals	321	58.6	22.7	9.3	9.3

Source: Unpublished data, New York City Department of Personnel, 1991.

migrant employment base emerged out of a matrix shaped by differences in the behavior of native and immigrant workers, the role of recruitment networks, and the internal labor market structure of the civil service itself.

### NATIVE AND IMMIGRANT WORKERS

"The fundamental reality," explained a Hispanic human resources manager for an agency in the engineering area, "is that the city has not been able to get people to come and get these jobs, except for the immigrants." The alternation of bust and boom decisively weakened the city's already attenuated hold on white ethnic workers. City salaries stagnated badly in the aftermath of the fiscal crisis; having resorted to layoffs, New York City could no longer promise security; and the layoffs and hiring freeze accentuated the generational gap that already existed by the 1960s. Once the city's fiscal condition improved, it had difficulty competing with the private sector—which was enjoying even fatter times. While the City did improve starting salaries and offered other incentives, such as superb opportunities for hands-on training, it could not compete with private employers for native, white workers. "In the private sector," noted one manager as he looked over his workers, "a data base expert making \$55,000 could get \$20,000 more; a girl (sic) who is a crackerjack programmer could get another \$10,000."

Agencies with engineering responsibilities found themselves in a particularly tight corner, as the city's infrastructure program began at a time of intense private sector demand for engineers and diminishing production of new engineers at the undergraduate level (Fowler, 1979; National Research Council, 1988). Under these circumstances, the city could occasionally succeed in recruiting, but "could not keep up over time," and all too often saw its best people "jump ship for the dollars":<sup>7</sup>

The entry level, the experience and the salary are not bad. It's after that, that you get into trouble. The sense among the chief engineers is that they're not getting the best people. It probably has to do with salary more than anything else. Recruiting new people from U.S. schools, U.S. trained is a problem. But I think it's the salary that's the problem. And the uncertainty of the city government. We have had a difficult time recruiting, even having dollars to go and recruit from the top schools.

<sup>6</sup> Using Asians as a proxy for immigrant employment probably underestimates both the degree of immigrant concentration and the degree of native black underrepresentation in these professional functions. As one engineering manager noted, "We have blacks, but not American black per se—Haitians, Jamaicans, East Africans."

<sup>7</sup> Only in two cases, involving management information systems functions, did I find few immigrants in highly technical, professional titles where a foreign-born presence might be expected. But both cases "benefited from slack labor markets" since they did most of their hiring after October 1987, at which time there was a "glut, a surplus" of highly specialized computer specialists among "laid-off Wall Street types." As an indicator of the city's newly competitive situation, one department received 500 resumes in response to an ad place in *The New York Times* in early 1992, a clear contrast to the situation prevailing among the engineering departments earlier in the decade. Thus, these two deviant cases confirm the argument that economic developments during the 1980s pulled native white workers up the hiring queue and out of the City's effective labor supply.



Generally speaking, once we reach a certain level—the problem is that the entry-level salary is very competitive plus better benefits—but as they go through two, three, four years of experience, the salary flattens out, and that's where you see people move out to other private firms. Because in the city in order to move up you have to have the PE [Professional Engineer license]. You can only reach the assistant civil engineer level without a license. From that point on you have to have the license which is a fairly difficult exam. Even with the PE, the scale doesn't go up that much; in terms of comparison with private industry, it doesn't go up that much. A project engineer for private industry makes in the mid-60s (thousands); for the city, a project engineer makes mid 40s. The max for a project engineer, without going into the managerial level, is \$48,000. And it's the same kind of work as in private industry.

"I'm a dinosaur, I'm a relic," reflected one Jewish union leader on the diminishing attraction of city work for white ethnic professionals. By contrast, the city was a magnet for immigrants, who appeared impelled by a very different set of motivations. To the immigrants, the city offered a more readily permeable environment, one which was more likely to provide employment commensurate with their skills and prior training. "In the audit area, we have many people who are extremely well-educated, with advanced degrees," explained a high level official in the Department of Finance. "The pattern is that government is the first employer: these are not people who could get jobs at the big eight (accounting firms)." Language difficulties, as a Chinese assistant deputy commissioner in the Department of Transportation explained, often precluded private employment:

A lot of the immigrants have language problems. They can run numbers, calculate things, but they can't go to a community board with you and discuss with people. They can do things if you tell them what to do. If you go to a private firm, English is a primary concern: you have to deal with clients. If you don't have the language capability, you couldn't handle it.

Skill and credential thresholds are also more of a barrier in the private sector, but easier to surmount when working for the city, as a Labor Relations manager pointed out:

The immigrants are people for whom, relatively speaking, City jobs are well paid and give them the opportunity to get good experience in preparation for the PE. Lots of people come here without the PE degree. The City gives them several titles—assistant civil engineer, civil engineer trainee—that don't need the PE. They might be licensed in the country of origin and at least have a degree in their country and would qualify.

Consequently, "private sector firms are forcing them [the immigrants] to come to the City," as a black manager in Finance noted:

Many of the foreign-born people come in with MAs, MBAs. When you look at their resumes [as they come in from the private sector], they've been downgraded to account clerk or bookkeeping type.

Moreover, immigrants were attracted to the civil service environment in ways that native whites no longer seem to be. "Immigrants view government as a stable and secure environment," one manager pointed out. In this respect the newcomers seemed to "be the same as the older generation," noted the Jewish president of the Assessors' local, a 40-year veteran of the civil service. "People who are not immigrants, their motivation is different." An Irish-American executive in the Transit Authority, whose father had previously worked for the TA, had the same view:

In the past, people would sign on for security, benefits. Today the workforce is much more dynamic; this is one stop on the career changes they make. I think that the immigrants are more like the traditional civil servant types—this is my gut feeling. Not as mobile a workforce [as natives].

The propensity for the civil service had diverse sources. In some cases, there was a carryover from prior employment experience. "In general, the City has been perceived as a safe, steady job," noted the director of a placement office that works with Soviet refugees. "It falls more into the pattern that people from the Soviet Union are used to, for better or worse." An immigrant executive in the Transit Authority pointed to the importance of situational factors:

As an immigrant you feel a lot more insecure than the second generation person. What happens is... my kids now, at least they will have a house, their parents to look up to and what not... but when I came here I landed with \$10 in my pocket; for me, security was a lot more important. I had to make sure that I eat someplace, and sleep someplace. Therefore, they [immigrants] feel that in a civil service environment they have a lot more security than in a private corporation. Therefore, more immigrants stay with civil service.

In addition to security, the city bureaucracy also provided the immigrants with a more hospitable environment. As an employer, the city is both diverse and accommodating of difference. "We don't discourage people from speaking their own language among themselves, we allow for religious observances," noted an EEO officer. "We tend to make reasonable accommodations of their requests." In a similar vein, a top union officer pointed out that "When you're working for a government agency, you have liberal leave time, for example, for Ramadan." Immigrants also valued the City's highly structured environment, which seems to offer a more predictable and less arbitrary pathway to mobility. One of the most senior Indian engineers contended that:

Foreign trained engineers, when they come in, they feel from the security point of view that they're better off in the government. I know quite a few foreign trained engineers who came back from the private sector. Their motivations were the extent of responsibility and their inability to advance. There's comparatively greater discrimination [in the private sector].

The same point was echoed by a Pakistani accountant in the assessor's bureau of the Finance Department, who offered his own personal experience as a case in point:

I found out about a job as an office aid for the City; no education or experience required. I took the test along with 80,000 other people. They didn't ask any requirements. I did very well because of my background in math. I had about 96 percent on the test. There were only three or four questions which were quite new to me. I expected that it would take quite a while to get called, but I got called after eight months when they told me to show up for a job fair at the City Department of Personnel. I was looking for something where I could use accounting skills, finally saw Finance and said this is the job for me. And I had no idea about real estate—though Finance must be everything, every type of figure work. So I chose that. And they sent me to the Municipal Building. I had no idea about blocks and lots. The very first day they put me with an assessor, to work as an assistant assessor. After three months there was an opening for an assistant assessor. I applied for that and they knew my work, they knew I could do it... but for some reason, they said no. They hired someone else from outside. I felt very bad at that time. I took the job of office aid just to start somewhere, though I felt more qualified. After a couple of months I took the assistant assessor test, worked very hard and passed the test and was number one on the list, though a [military] veteran got extra points and he was the real number one. So after a year I was promoted to assistant assessor. Then after another two and a half years I was promoted to assessor. In 1983 I took the test and became a certified city assessor. Then it took me another two years to be promoted to Level 2, for which there is no test, only based on interviews and evaluations and experience. And then, in 1990, I was promoted to Level 3, which is a very senior position, supervisory, and given a good area... It took ten years to move to Level 3. I feel comfortable, especially when I remember that ten years ago I had no idea about block and lot.

In the public sector, you take the test, pass it if you are qualified; and they hire you if you pass. In the private sector, no test. They want certain people, maybe for good reasons or bad reasons. I can say very crudely that discrimination... this is a fact. The city job is not that attractive to certain groups who are already here and who can get better jobs in the private sector. Immigrants feel they can get into the system, take tests, get jobs, and they're better protected. I can say that the merit system, it works.

Data on engineers in the Department of Transportation, displayed in Table 2, bolster these accounts of the disparities in native and immigrant preferences for city employment. The agency hired most of its engineers, both whites and Asians, during the 1980s, with Asians comprising almost 50 percent of those brought in during the last half of the decade. But the agency had been far more reliant on Asians to fill the higher-level engineering title than the lower-level assistant title for which a PE license is not required, pointing to the more circumscribed opportunities of immigrants

TABLE 2  
ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF ENGINEERS, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, 1991

All Engineers	Total Employment	Hiring Date					
		pre-65	65-70	71-75	76-80	81-85	86-90
White	127	27	12	4	8	30	46
Asian	102	0	10	3	5	13	71
Black	34	5	2	0	1	3	23
Hispanic	8	0	0	1	1	2	4
Total	271	32	24	8	15	48	144
Assistant Civil Engineers	Total Employment	Hiring Date					
		pre-65	65-70	71-75	76-80	81-85	86-90
White	70	15	5	2	5	16	27
Asian	43	0	2	1	3	5	32
Black	27	4	1	0	1	2	19
Hispanic	7	0	0	0	1	2	4
Total	147	19	8	3	10	25	82
Civil Engineers	Total Employment	Hiring Date					
		pre-65	65-70	71-75	76-80	81-85	86-90
White	57	12	7	2	3	14	19
Asian	59	0	8	2	2	8	39
Black	7	1	1	0	0	1	4
Hispanic	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	124	13	16	5	5	23	62

Source: Unpublished data, New York City Department of Transportation, 1991

and their correspondingly greater predisposition for government work.

### NETWORK RECRUITMENT AND LABOR MARKET STRUCTURE

Thus, immigrants and white natives fell out along different supply curves. In a situation where "the city was hiring a great deal and not turning away anyone who was qualified," as one deputy commissioner put it, the disparity in the availability of immigrant and white native professionals meant a quick buildup of immigrant employment. But in order to act on their predisposition for government work, the immigrants also needed to be able to access hiring portals. Connections between newcomers and veterans provided the crucial entry mechanism, transforming the ways in which information about job opportunities and workers' characteristics were transmitted to prospective workers and to employers. "Our biggest recruitment is by word of mouth," explained a labor relations director. "People who are in the department are sharing with their respective communities openings that they become aware

of." As in other migration situations, pointed out a refugee placement officer, "some people find out about positions [in the city] even before they come to this country."

Consequently, "word of mouth says Transit Authority"—or Finance, Transportation, or some other agency—is in need of professionals. Information about job opportunities is carried rapidly—and widely—through the immigrant communities, as managers frequently commented with some amazement. In a new spin on classic arguments about the secular consequences of religious behavior, one manager told me about "an [immigrant] applicant [who] heard of an opening in church." An information services manager remarked that "The Indian connection is amazing, that's a phenomenon. They network like crazy, they look out for each other like unreal." To illustrate the point, he offered the following example:

When we began putting in the PCs, and of course I had a Patel working for me, and she would be the first person whom I would tell that we'll bring in WordPerfect or Multimate and all Indians would be here the next day and I had just signed the order that night.

An executive in an engineering agency had a similar story:

There seems to be a tremendous network of friends and family; real contacts socially. Even in the past when we were first conducting our own provisional hiring pools, with no lists, we would post or gather resumes, send out call letters, and then have them come to hiring pools. We would invite 50 people and 80 would show up, "Oh my brother's friend's cousin called and said there would be a position." Once we had a recruitment for managers and engineers by invitation only. And there was somebody who flew in from India that day.

After many such recurrent incidents, executives came to understand that "a network gets established. There's a large amount of nepotism. Lots of related people—actual by blood or marriage. And from the same neighborhood."

To some extent, immigrants were the beneficiaries of post-fiscal crisis changes in personnel practices that intensified recruitment efforts and directed them toward immigrant and minority communities. "We go out of our way to attract a diverse group of candidates," noted one EEO officer. "We send all of our vacancy notices to the Chinatown Planning Commission, the Greek organization, the Muslim organization. We reach out in ethnic newspapers. We have their listing on every job, not just a few." In the engineering sector, immigrant agencies performed an important role as a source of skilled personnel. "We called NYANA,"<sup>8</sup> recounted an executive in the Transit Authority. "They emerged as an organization that was able to provide candidates and could just feed people as they came over." Nonetheless, "knowing someone" remained a more effective device for

<sup>8</sup> The New York Association for New Americans, a Jewish organization for Soviet Jews. In 1990, about 1,500 Soviet Jewish engineers were assisted by NYANA. According to the director of their placement service, a "significant number" find work with a government agency.

entering the civil service than formal methods, mainly because the bureaucracy's door to the external labor market opened widely during the 1980s. To a large extent, the formal civil service procedures that had previously made hiring and recruitment such a cumbersome process were put on hold during this period. New York City's staffing needs played a role, as hiring accelerated just when the traditional labor force was slipping away. Unlike the Depression era, when a surplus of overqualified workers led the city to upgrade qualifications, "we were not turning away anyone who was qualified" during the 1980s, as a Finance Department manager noted. More importantly, the political supports for the traditional civil service approach weakened. Equal Employment laws and guidelines made for a much more complex process in civil service examination preparation. As one high-level personnel official noted, "Where we used to be able to grind out one of our standard multiple choice tests—which used to take us a few months—we now have to do research to show that the test is job related . . ." Consequently, it "could now take two to three years from when we start [preparing a test] to actually establishing an eligibles [hiring] list. So you have a proliferation of provisionals because we didn't get lists out."

But the crucial factor, in the words of a personnel official, "was City Hall." In the post-fiscal crisis era, the civil service came under attack from the Mayor, Edward I. Koch, and a new generation of reformers. The reformers saw the civil service as a chief impediment to badly needed administrative changes. For Koch, it was also a brake on the executive's power and a source of strength for the public employee unions, with whom he was locked in conflict. Whereas the leaders of the bureaucracy, and later the public employee unions, had always sought to control personnel systems (Sayre and Kaufman, 1960), the Koch Administration tried to shift influence to City Hall (Shefter, 1985). As noted in a report issued by the New York State Commission on Government Integrity in 1989:

The New York City civil service system is in a state of crisis. Anecdotal evidence related by experts and confirmed by a number of commission staff interviews suggest that Civil Service Law is now widely regarded as something it is desirable to bypass or avoid, when possible. Adherence to the law is viewed as hampering the effective recruitment, deployment, and retention of employees (p. 73).

Consequently, "people hired whom they wanted," in the words of a high level Department of Personnel official, with the city relaxing its hiring requirements and bringing the great bulk of new hires into the bureaucracy as "provisional" employees. Between 1979 and 1990, when permanent employment in the direct mayoral agencies grew by only 7,500, the number of provisionals increased from 6,583 to 40,340 (New York City Department of Personnel, Annual Report to the New York State Civil Service Commission, 1979–1989, unpublished; Memorandum from Douglas White, Director of the Department of Personnel to Mayor David Dinkins, Quarterly Report on Provisionals, December 31, 1990). Unlike civil servants, provisionals were hired directly, without recourse to exams and bypassing lists.

Thus what had been an hermetic system, whose slowly grinding, complex procedures excluded outsiders, opened up. These circumstances put a premium on workers' knowledge of vacancies, and the value management placed on their referrals; having a richer array of contacts to workers seeking government employment than natives, immigrants were well suited to funnel new recruits.

Immigrant insiders gained an initial advantage because "they're privy to vacancies. All vacancies get posted." More importantly, network recruitment provided management with a means of quality control.

When I came in 1983 [to start up an information services department] the people I got through the [civil service] lists were natives. They were marginal. The tests were not conducive to eliciting the best technical knowledge. A lot of the people I got in the beginning for analysts/data base managers couldn't cut it. So I found a way around the civil service list. I found a way to circumvent it. I hired mainly provisionals. I got them through people I knew.

The promise of greater reliability led managers to encourage insiders to refer applicants and made them eager to tap into the recruitment stream that incumbents could generate. One union official, previously a manager in the Finance Department, offered the following case in point:

The extension out to the Third World came through the [ . . . ] Division. When they set up the [ . . . ] Division, no exam was needed to get hired. It allowed a lot of people to come in. It was an open bridge into the rest of the agency. Finance didn't have a pool of provisionals lying around. People were retiring and there was no list; so they hired provisionals. Management engaged in active recruitment among the people already there. Supervisors would say "give me your resume." The theory was these hires are per diems. In the interviews we would say, "This is a data collection unit. The job will last from September to June. No guarantee. But we think that it will last for two years or more." The people [inside] knew the kind of work we were doing. It was an established practice that people wouldn't turn you on to knuckleheads. Generally, those that we contacted were those that were recommended from the inside. For example, Z . . . came to me and said, "My wife is coming over, can you hire her?" Then his brother came over and I hired him. The agency would love the foreign boms. They came in prepared. They had engineering, accounting backgrounds. They were easy to train and used to the engineering, math environment. Management recognized that they [the immigrants] had a hard work ethic. Not tainted by the American work ethic of stretching out three hours into eight hours work. They recognized that immigrants work much harder. They'd bring their lunch to work. The immigrants' work habits were different.

"Once you get in, you work your way up," noted one assessor who came into Finance "from a temporary agency, quite by happenstance," and then acquired civil service status and several promotions. "My story is not that unique." With a foothold in the bureaucracy, ample opportunities allowed for gradual conversion from temporary to permanent status. One immi-

grant assessor noticed a posting for a per diem position in the Finance Department, shortly after his wife, the holder of an MBA, arrived from South Asia:

She was initially hired [in that position]. Per diems have no rights at all. At the time, they were expanding, she was given another eight months. Based on her evaluation, she was given a provisional test. From there, she took the test. She is now an assessor.

Just as insiders are the first to know about vacancies for provisionals, so do provisionals "have a six-month lead time in terms of knowing when the exam [for a civil service title] would be given." Moreover, both management and the union have interests in encouraging provisionals to convert to civil service status: management in order to gain a return on its investment in training, the union in order to reduce the potential for conflict between permanent and temporary workers. As one EEO director explained:

Provisionals will be encouraged to take the exam when it comes out. Working with the union, we will let them know about prep courses for exams and will work with the union to make sure that all eligible employees can take the courses. The union generally holds prep courses. Everyone is eligible to go. The union has a set up where they have an educational fund—this subsidizes prepping. The department encourages people to do this, to make sure that the union has a Saturday class. And we follow up to see you are getting into the prep course, might try to work out different hours for studying, try to see if they can be reasonably accommodated, maybe co-workers will bring home study materials. I spend a lot of my time on this, because I want to attract minorities and keep them.

The immigrant propensity for security played a role as well. As one manager put it, "the immigrants take every test available" since "they want to be protected [and] don't want to be exposed to the possibility of layoffs. They're great test-takers."

Thus, a predisposition toward government employment directed immigrant professionals toward New York's bureaucracy. A variety of structural factors secured their passage into the civil service, however. Most important was the relaxation of normal entry barriers, which brought government employers into close connection with the external labor market. In this context, informal structuring mechanisms, like ethnic networks, played a crucial role. On the one hand, networks between settlers and newcomers allowed for rapid transmission of information about openings outside the bureaucracy. And on the other hand, the networks provided better information within the bureaucracy, reducing the risks associated with initial hiring. Since the immigrants tended to be "more conservative about leaving government service," the immigrant base built up at a particularly rapid rate.

Opportunities for growth and promotion provided further stimulus to the self-feeding recruitment processes of the immigrant networks. As immigrants converted their status from provisional employee to civil servant, they became integrated into the established channels of mobility and pro-

motion. "In the last two to three years, the [civil service] list's gotten better," noted a manager who complained about the quality of the civil service referrals he received in the early 1980s. "The most intelligent Russian, Chinese, and Indian immigrants have taken the test." Since eligibility for many upper-level positions is restricted to civil servants in lower titles, the structure of the bureaucracy, itself, has reduced competition from the outside and encouraged efforts at internal mobility. The facts that "immigrants have people from their countries working as supervisors and see opportunities to advance" increase the incentives to seek out public employment.

#### CODA: CONFLICT IN THE IMMIGRANT NICHE

While vacancies at the bottom have allowed immigrants to move in without displacing native groups and the highly structured civil service environment has encouraged newcomers to use the exam system to move ahead, the search for upward movement has run into roadblocks. Although the immigrants may outclass natives in terms of credentials and schooling levels, they are perceived as being deficient in other respects. Several managers voiced the complaint that "you can't get the type of correspondence you need that's professional and appropriate for the organization without a lot of effort." Friction is also inherent in this multiethnic environment. Network recruiting's exclusionary bias does not go unnoted by natives. One native black union official, for example, complained about a Jamaican manager with a preference for hiring his own, imitating him with a heavy West Indian accent, "Mon, I've got to take care of my people." Differences in culture and interactional styles also need to be carefully negotiated, as this manager's account suggests:

There are two negatives [to employing immigrants]. The issue of attitude. A lot of the foreign born have a dignity issue. I have no problem with telling my people "you're stupid, you screwed up"; I have to think twice before I say anything to the foreign born. Second, technically the foreign born are superior, no question about that, but written or spoken communication is a problem.

The same factors that limit immigrants' opportunities in the private sector operate in the civil service as well, albeit to a lesser extent. One informant noted that immigrants have not always "fared well in upgrading. There's the language barrier. Some just like safety and security." The quest for promotions into top ranks also brings immigrants into conflict with higher-resource whites. A high-level immigrant veteran contended that "engineers of Indian descent have reached a glass ceiling," and other informants supported that claim. Ironically, the bureaucracy's reliance on provisional appointments, which helped open the door at the entry-level, has impeded their prospects for promotions into managerial ranks. Bureaucratic politics are most keenly felt in the engineering agencies, with their concentrations of Asians at higher-level engineering titles, and where the advantage seems to go to white professionals with better ties to appointed, mainly white managers. As with blacks or Hispanics in other sectors of New

York City bureaucracy, the immigrant engineers have turned to the courts to redress their grievances—with some success.

#### CONCLUSION

Research on the immigrant niche is a case study in the sorting of categorically distinctive workers into an identifiably distinct set of jobs. From this perspective, an emphasis on social networks tells only half of the story. Because the "social structures of migration" (Tilly and Brown, 1967) link newcomers to settlers with established positions in the division of labor, new arrivals "may be poor in financial resources, but they are wealthy in social capital, which they can readily convert into jobs and earnings . . ." (Massey, *et al.*, 1987:17–171). The social structures of migration facilitate job search, hiring, recruitment, and training because they fulfill the needs of workers and employers alike, furnishing reliable, low-cost information about the characteristics of jobs and workers, while also providing a set of controls that increase the probability that firms and/or workers will use the skills in which they have invested. Once in place, ethnic hiring networks are self-reproducing since each new employee recruits others from his or her own group (*see* Granovetter, 1974). Thus, the development of the ethnic niche can be seen as an instance of the embeddedness of economic actions within social relations that generate trust, establish expectations, and create norms (Granovetter, 1985).

As outlined above, however, a network approach only illuminates the supply-side; as employers can recruit among a variety of categorically distinctive workers, the question is how and under what conditions immigrants' supply networks link up to the recruitment networks of employers (Granovetter and Tilly, 1989). In this light, the embeddedness perspective can produce little insight. As Coleman (1988:597) notes, its emphasis is on "social organization and social relations . . . as a structure with history and continuity that give it an independent effect on the functioning of economic systems." But the emergence of an immigrant niche is an instance of discontinuity in which prior recruitment patterns are ruptured. Since incumbents benefit from inside information, a common management preference for reproducing the existing workforce, as well as selection criteria that are more closely related to an established group's skill levels than to job performance, how do outsiders get through the door?

The case study reported in this article can help answer that question because it allows us to track the history of the employment structure in New York City government and pinpoint the time and conditions under which it changed. Municipal jobs in New York have been the locus of competitive, ethnic conflicts over jobs for over 100 years. In the 1930s, shifts in the resource mobilization capacity of outsider and insider groups changed the structure of employment: during the Depression, advantage shifted from Irish to Jews and, to lesser extent, Italians, with the Jews, in particular benefiting from higher human and social capital and both Jews and Italians enjoying greater resource bearing capacity in the political arena. These shifts increased Jewish and Italian access to jobs, thus producing the multiplier effect predicted by a network approach. Moreover, once in place,

these groups became engaged in bargaining games that altered rules of entry and promotion in ways that reduced access to a new set of outsiders.

Had incumbent groups remained wedded to their niche, as occurred in such other functions as police, fire or teaching, the portals to the professional jobs with which this study has been concerned would have remained closed. But incumbents' contact networks began dwindling in the 1950s, as younger cohorts shifted upward in the occupational structure and the City's position in the wage hierarchy dropped. Under these circumstances, immigrants' predisposition for civil service employment led to the build-up of immigrant employment prior to New York's fiscal crisis.

By the time the City resumed hiring in the 1980s, the supply of native whites had further diminished. In this period, control over personnel systems, a key element in reducing competition from outsiders, also changed, with the bureaucracy and civil servants' organized representatives, the unions, losing influence to other political actors. Once the bureaucracy opened up to the external market, connections between newcomers and veterans could be transformed into social capital. "What's helped the foreign born," as one of my informants explained, "is that there's someone in the department to lead them through the maze."

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## Internal Migration for Recent Immigrants to Canada<sup>1</sup>

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Internal migration decisionmaking for recent immigrants may occur under conditions of extreme uncertainty and limited information. Migration behavior may be constrained by language barriers, availability of settlement assistance, and differential levels and access to information about alternative locations and opportunities. Poisson regression models are estimated for the number of internal migrations experienced by immigrants in the first three years of residence in Canada. The results suggest that internal migration in the first year after arrival is strongly affected by characteristics such as admission status, destination at arrival, reason for immigration, and area of origin. With increasing length of residence in Canada, though, the effect of these admission factors on internal migration behavior diminishes.

Economic approaches have suggested that all human behavior involves participants that accumulate an optimal amount of information and behave in such a way as to maximize their own utility (Becker, 1976:14). Models of migration often use this economic framework as a basis for assuming that migration is both a rational and an income-maximizing behavior. Evaluations of these assumptions about migration have criticized them for being too restrictive and unrealistic (Fusfeld, 1989:359; Boudon, 1989:194-195). Rational behavior does not necessarily have to be income-maximizing. As Fusfeld (1989:361) noted, individual choices are made within a constraining sociocultural environment.

Migration must be within an individual's realm of conceivable behavioral responses or else the behavior will never be chosen. As Sell and DeJong (1978:324) noted, the population under analysis should have migration within their physical abilities and should be able to conceive of migration as a potential behavior. There is no reason to study people that would never consider migrating for any reason; migration for these people would not be a rational behavior. Behavior must make sense within each individual's perceived environment.

For individuals who consider migration to be a viable, potential behavior, the actual decision to migrate occurs only when those individuals perceive additional benefits, not necessarily monetary, accruing to them as a result of the move (DaVanzo, 1981:93; Wilson, 1985:279). The "... individual must

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