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Re-slicing the Big Apple: New Immigrants and African-Americans in the New York Economy

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The continuing convergence of immigrants on New York City is a puzzle. On the one hand, the decline of the city's manufacturing sector and the growth of advanced services appear to provide little demand for immigrant labor; on the other hand, the deep penetration of immigrants into the city's economy has been paralleled by a deteriorating employment situation among native blacks. This article seeks to unravel this puzzle in the light of two conflicting perspectives, the restructuring and the replacement labor hypotheses. The paper assesses each perspective using data from the 1970 and 1980 Censuses of Population and merged samples of the June 1986 and 1988 Current Population Surveys.

As we enter the 1990s, New York remains the nation's quintessential immigrant city. But while New York continues to attract a disproportionate share of newcomers, it is not at all clear why the immigrants come. The harbor and manufacturing complexes that once supported a massive corps of blue-collar workers are now badly run down. The new sources of dynamism lie instead in the information and service sectors. Yet the corporate service complex seems to generate many positions for the highly skilled. Where do the newcomers fit in?

As Portes and Rumbaut note in their recent book, New York's experience contrasts with other major immigration cities. The rapid economic expansion of Los Angeles and Miami's equally startling growth, combined with its development as a trade center for Latin America, explain why so many immigrants have moved to these areas:

> Less obvious are reasons for the continuation of New York-bound immigration given the industrial decline in recent years. Between 1970 and 1980, New York lost close to half a million jobs; the most affected sector was manufacturing, where employment decreased by almost one-third. New York's industrial decline raises the question of why immigrants persist in going there instead of following manufacturing jobs to their new locations in the Carolinas, Florida, or Texas (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990, p. 48).

Making the New York case all the more puzzling is the contrast to the experience of native blacks, who have seen their employment situation deteriorate. How can one account for the disparity, when the skills of the two groups are roughly comparable?

This is the conundrum that this essay seeks to unravel. We begin by briefly contrasting two approaches to understanding the relationship between immigration and urban change, the restructuring and the replacement labor perspectives. We then briefly outline the salient changes in New York's economy between 1970 and 1987 before comparing the changing employment situation of native blacks and immigrants over the past two decades.

CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES ON IMMIGRATION AND URBAN CHANGE

The best developed statement about the relationship between immigration and urban economic change contends that the concentration of immigrants in New York is no surprise at all. In this view, immigration is linked to a fundamental process of urban "economic restructuring," in which the growth of services breeds a demand for both high *and* low-skilled jobs, while increasingly excluding workers with middle level qualifications (Harrison and Bluestone, 1988).

By generating jobs for people with low skills, urban economic restructuring has also created the demand for immigrant workers. Immigration provides a low-wage labor supply directly feeding into the advanced service sector. Sassen-Koob argues that immigrants can be seen as "contributing to *the operation* (of the advanced service firm) itself . . . (e.g., by working on the night shift as a janitor in an office, or as a night time elevator in a residential unit)" (Sassen-Koob, 1981). Immigrants are also a permissive factor in the continued expansion of the labor supply for newly created professional and managerial jobs. As Harrison and Bluestone argue:

> the high cost of living in cities containing corporate headquarters requires that professional households include more than one wage earner in order to sustain a middle-class life style. This, in turn, forces this new labor aristocracy to consume more and more of the services that workers in an earlier generation would have produced for themselves.

Immigrants provide the "large cohort of restaurant workers, laundry workers, dog walkers, residential construction workers, and the like" (Feagin and Smith, 1988, p. 15), and lower the costs of maintaining the labor force that the advanced services need.

While the restructuring hypothesis offers a plausible explanation of the immigrant arrival to the post-industrial city, its account is fundamentally incomplete. After all, if the urban economy has indeed been polarized, there are other groups of native, low-skilled workers to whom employers might have turned. But the restructuring hypothesis entirely begs the question of why so many new low-level jobs went to immigrants and not to native blacks. Clearly, any adequate explanation of the impact of the urban post-industrial transformation has to explain

why the immigrant economic experience has diverged so fundamentally from that of native blacks.

Secondly, the restructuring hypothesis only emphasizes demand-side changes. But just as one needs to explain how structural changes affected distinct minority populations in different ways, so too must one consider how demographic shifts, encompassing the entire urban population—native *and* immigrant, white *and* minority—affected access to economic opportunity.

In contrast to the restructuring hypothesis, we offer a supply-side approach which draws attention to the shifting composition of the urban population and what this implies for both immigrants and native blacks.[1] In this view, shifts in the ethnic proportions of a population—in particular, a relative decline among whites—create replacement demand. Since the labor market is ordered by a racial queue on which white persons of European ancestry stand at the top, a change in the relative availability of whites can generate opportunities for other groups up and down the hierarchy of jobs. If, in cases of economic decline, the white outflow exceeds the erosion of jobs, or, in cases of economic growth, the white population does not keep pace with the increase in jobs, compositional change can give rise to sustained demand for replacements.

Thus, compositional change creates opportunities; other factors determine the allocation of groups among vacated positions. Differences in group predispositions, skills, vulnerability to discrimination, and past experience interact with changes in the economic structure to create initial economic specializations or niches. Given the way in which ethnic networks channel the flow of information and job finding assistance, recruitment into positions tends to build on these original specializations. And since access to ethnic networks is based on particularistic criteria, and job information and assistance comprise scarce resources, the creation of these specializations involves a process of boundary creation and maintenance, restricting members of other groups from jobs or occupations within the niche.

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS[2]

New York's manufacturing sector began an unchecked period of decline in 1969. During the 1970s severe losses were sustained among private employers in construction; transportation, communications, and utilities; trade; and personal services. Total employment in the public sector also declined, though prime-age adult workers, as can be seen from Table 1, were largely immune from the impact of attrition and layoffs. In the private sector, only professional services generated substantial numbers of new jobs, though finance, insurance, and real estate, and business services grew substantially in percentage terms.

New York City's economy expanded steadily during the 1980s, during which time the broad industrial trends established during the 1970s continued, though with some important changes. Construction gained more, in percentage terms, than any other sector and some other previously declining sectors also saw some mild employment gains. But the motor force of New York's recovery remained the advanced services: almost a third of all new jobs were generated in business services, followed closely by the financial sector. The public sector also played an important, if adjunct role, accounting for a little over a fifth of the jobs generated during the 1980s.

TABLE 1
INDUSTRY OF EMPLOYED NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS, 1970-1987

Sectors	Total Employed			Percent Change		Distribution		
	1970	1980	1987	70-80	80-87	1970	1980	1987
Construction	92,200	58,920	103,194	-36.1%	75.1%	3.8%	2.6%	4.1%
Durable	172,000	136,560	78,478	-20.6%	-42.5%	7.1%	6.1%	3.1%
Nondurable	345,600	258,120	229,830	-25.3%	-11.0%	14.2%	11.5%	9.0%
TCU	191,900	163,820	189,571	-14.6%	15.7%	7.9%	7.3%	7.4%
Whole	126,200	104,860	78,988	-16.9%	-24.7%	5.2%	4.7%	3.1%
Retail	327,700	253,500	234,671	-22.6%	-7.4%	13.5%	11.3%	9.2%
FIRE	225,400	241,700	324,870	7.2%	34.4%	9.3%	10.7%	12.8%
BusServ	120,200	140,560	236,200	16.9%	68.0%	4.9%	6.2%	9.3%
PersServ	109,400	75,780	87,142	-30.7%	15.0%	4.5%	3.4%	3.4%
ProfServ	268,800	343,460	399,526	27.8%	16.3%	11.1%	15.2%	15.7%
Misc	35,700	38,860	63,190	8.9%	62.6%	1.5%	1.7%	2.5%
PubSec	416,600	437,100	503,994	4.9%	15.3%	17.1%	19.4%	19.8%
Total	2,431,700	2,253,240	2,548,000	-7.3%	13.1%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: 1970, 1980 Census of Population, Public Use Microdata Sample; 1986, 1988 Current Population Survey, merged samples.
Note: All data in this and succeeding table are for employed residents 25-64 years old.

Contrary to the claims of the restructuring hypothesis, the shift to services did not produce occupational polarization. Professional and managerial occupations experienced the greatest gains between 1970 and 1987; by contrast, employment in sales and clerical occupations dropped in both absolute and relative terms. Further down the job hierarchy, operative jobs suffered severe erosion, while craft employment expanded in the 1980s, presumably as a result of the construction boom. Service occupations expanded in the 1970s and in the 1980s, but at modest rates greatly exceeded by the growth experienced by the highest-level occupations.

A look at skill requirements, as measured in terms of years of education completed, also contradicts claims of polarization. In 1970, 74.5 percent of the city's workers had no more than a high school degree; by 1987, that proportion had fallen to just over a half. The number of workers with low levels of education fell in all sectors, though the trend toward heavier use of better educated workers was led by the advanced service sectors that fueled the city's growth during the 1980s.

Thus, New York's employers demanded an increasingly educated workforce over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. But even at the beginning of the period, when the economy had greater need for less-schooled workers, the educational levels of the city's native black as well as its immigrant population compared unfavorably with that of the workforce overall. Though educational levels for both groups rose substantially after 1970, the increase did not keep up with employers' skill requirements. And the educational gap between native whites and either group widened even further.

POPULATION CHANGE AND EMPLOYMENT IMPLICATIONS

Thus, the puzzle remains. Changes in the structure of jobs and industries would seem to have made New York's economic environment increasingly unfavorable to immigrants. Contrary to the restructuring hypothesis, skill requirements have increased in all sectors of the economy; and while immigrant educational levels have also improved, the pace of improvement has not kept up with the change in the economy.

However, for almost two decades, the negative impact of these structural changes has been offset by the shifts in the relative supply of alternative labor force groups. The key factor has been the decline of the native white population, which shrank dramatically during the downturn of the 1970s and continued to lose numbers during the improved economic climate of the 1980s. Even more importantly than its absolute losses, the white population has eroded at a pace that has been disproportionate to any shift in the city's economic base.

These changes are shown in Table 2, which displays the population of native whites, native blacks, and immigrants in 1970, 1980, and 1987. Column 4 shows the expected change of population if each group had grown or declined in population in proportion to the total change in employment for the period. Column 5 shows the actual population and Column 6 the divergence of actual from expected changes. Column 7 shows the ratio of change, which was strongly negative for native whites in both the 1970s and the 1980s. Thus, in the most self-contained of urban labor markets, with the great bulk of workers residing and living within city boundaries, population shifts of this magnitude have created ample replacement demand.

TABLE 2
POPULATION CHANGES, NEW YORK CITY, 1970-1980, 1980-1987, RELATIVE TO CHANGES IN ECONOMY

1970-1980	POPULATION		CHANGE			
Group	1970	1980	Expected	Actual	Actual expected	A-E/ 1970 Pop
WhNb	1,967,000	1,533,840	(117,366)	(433,160)	(315,794)	-16.05%
BlNb	594,100	609,440	(35,449)	15,340	50,789	8.55%
Fb	785,800	962,980	(46,887)	177,180	224,067	28.51%
1980-1987	**POPULATION**		**CHANGE**			
Group	1970	1980	Expected	Actual	Actual expected	A-E/ 1980 Pop
WhNb	1,533,840	1,493,707	188,163	(40,133)	(228,295)	-14.88%
BlNb	609,440	634,157	74,763	24,717	(50,046)	-8.21%
Fb	962,980	1,157,528	118,133	194,548	76,415	7.94%

Note: WhNB=white native born; BlNb=Black native born; FB=all foreign born; Population figures are for all residents, 25-64 years old; "expected" change is equal to change in employment of all New York City residents, 25-64 years old. Parentheses denote negative change.
Source: See Table 1.

NATIVE BLACKS AND NEW IMMIGRANTS IN A CHANGING ECONOMY

Replacement demand affected new immigrants and native blacks in very different ways. Despite their skill deficiencies, and in the face of the difficulties associated with migration and settlement in a new society, the immigrant role in New York's economy expanded substantially over the past twenty years. Immigrant employment rose 22 percent during the 1970s, a period of economic contraction, and 21 percent during the 1980s, when the local economy grew. By contrast, black employment slumped by 4 percent in the seventies, while rebounding by 10 percent in the eighties—a lower rate than the net gain recorded by the economy during that period. More strikingly, immigrants maintained employment to population ratios that compared favorably with that of native whites—notwithstanding the swelling immigrant population base. Among native blacks, however, employment-population ratios underwent severe decline.

These contrasting fates can only be understoood in light of the positions that each group occupied in the city's changing industrial mix. To examine the distinctiveness of each group's position we have calculated an index of representation for each major industry sector and for native whites, native blacks, and immigrants in 1970, 1980, and 1987; the index is shown in Table 3. Values over 1.0 on the index indicate that a group is overrepresented with respect to its share of the employed

labor force; values under 1.0 indicate underrepresentation; a value of 1.0 equals parity with a group's share of all employed workers. For example, in 1970, the index of representation for native blacks in the construction industry was .83 whereas in 1987 it was .37, indicating that black representation in this industry, which had never reached parity, has considerably declined over the past twenty years.

TABLE 3
INDEX OF REPRESENTATION, NATIVE WHITES, NATIVE BLACKS, ALL IMMIGRANTS, 1970, 1980, 1987

	Native whites			Native blacks			All immigrants		
Sector	1970	1980	1987	1970	1980	1987	1970	1980	1987
Constructn	0.99	0.95	1.00	0.83	0.70	0.37	1.68	1.32	1.42
Durable mfg	0.86	0.72	0.82	0.87	0.81	0.57	1.14	1.34	1.45
Nondur mfg	0.90	0.85	0.79	0.74	0.61	0.70	1.23	1.35	1.32
TCU	1.03	1.11	0.97	1.20	1.08	1.24	0.76	0.85	0.87
Wholesale	1.07	1.14	1.10	0.68	0.63	0.74	1.26	0.99	0.92
Retail	0.95	0.91	0.76	0.85	0.69	0.82	1.35	1.32	1.33
FIRE	1.20	1.18	1.11	0.63	0.70	0.60	0.85	0.90	0.94
Busnss Srv	1.09	1.13	0.78	0.89	0.88	1.09	0.87	0.92	1.18
Persnl Srv	0.53	0.47	0.61	1.90	1.35	0.83	1.23	1.67	1.78
Prof Srv	1.08	1.12	1.17	0.89	0.86	0.71	0.93	0.95	0.87
Misc	1.27	1.48	1.55	0.88	0.51	0.76	0.58	0.61	0.49
Public Sctr	1.06	0.97	0.87	1.51	1.86	1.92	0.50	0.55	0.54
Total	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Source: See Table 1.

This table shows substantial contrasts in the employment distribution of the three groups. The distribution of white natives has been relatively invariant. In 1970 this group was overrepresented in the industries that were to grow in the next two decades and underrepresented in the industries that were to decline. While that pattern basically remained in place over the next two decades, whites steadily diminished their concentrations in declining sectors like manufacturing or retail, while increasing their concentrations in finance and professional services.

The native black distribution stands in sharp contrast to that of native whites. First, native blacks were overrepresented in only three industries in 1970—Transportation Community Utilities (TCU), personal services, and the public sector—and underrepresented in all other industries. Second, relative to immigrants and whites, blacks were more overrepresented in the few sectors in which they concentrated: thus, the black score for personal services was the highest index reported for all groups in 1970, followed by the black score for the public

sector. Finally, of the three black concentrations, only one, personal services, was to subsequently suffer considerable decline.

This basic pattern—confinement to a much more limited employment base than other demographic groups and strong reliance on the public sector—continued through the 1970s and 1980s. The public sector provided a platform for constant employment growth during the seventies and eighties, with the result that native black overrepresentation in the public sector increased significantly during this period. By 1987, 38.3 percent of native blacks were employed in government work; neither immigrants nor native whites approached this level of concentration in any other sector. At a lower level of concentration, TCU provided a supportive environment for continued black employment; a slight, but possibly significant concentration also developed in business services during the 1980s.

But apart from these three sectors, the data paint a bleak picture of employment change. Growth sectors that provide good jobs proved impenetrable to blacks—witness declining representation levels in finance (FIRE), professional services, and construction. Though educational deficiencies may have impeded the route to black employment in finance and professional services, construction remains a bastion of jobs for workers with low-levels of education. Yet nowhere did native black employment erode quite so severely.

The story in declining sectors reads much the same: losses fell with disproportional severity on blacks. Personal services, long a historic concentration of lower-level jobs, saw the black employment base badly erode. In 1970, black employment in personal services stood at almost twice parity; by the end of the 1980s, it had slipped well below parity. Native blacks never really made it into New York City's manufacturing sectors; hence, black employment was less at risk when the factory sector started to empty out. Nonetheless, manufacturing became an arena of diminishing black presence: by the end of the 1980s, blacks were considerably more underrepresented in manufacturing than they had been in 1970.

Immigrants began from a position that was at once better and worse than that of native blacks. On the positive side, immigrants were far more dispersed among sectors and not nearly as dependent on the fortunes of one or two major employment concentrations. On the negative side, the immigrant employment base was built on precisely those industries that were most vulnerable to economic decline and industrial change. Of the six industries in which immigrants were overrepresented in 1970, five—the two manufacturing and trade sectors and personal services—were to decline over the next two decades; the only growth sector—construction—slumped badly for most of the seventies. As for the growth sectors, these were arenas of underrepresentation. But the most severe immigrant underrepresentation was to be found in the public sector; indeed, the immigrant score

for public sector employment was the lowest registered by any of the three groups in any sector in 1970.

Thus, the immigrants sat poised for disaster. But, of course, disaster never arrived. As the immigrant population grew from 1970 on, the newcomers deepened the original concentrations in declining sectors like manufacturing, trade, and personal services. In fact, by 1987, immigrants were even more heavily represented in both manufacturing sectors and in personal services than they had been 17 years before.

Not only does the story in the declining sectors contrast with the experience of native blacks; so too, does the pattern in the growth sectors. At the height of New York's building boom, as Table 3 shows, a disproportionate share of well paying manual construction went to immigrants whose index of representation for this industry was more than the level scored by native blacks and where educational barriers played a far more important role in determining access to an industry such as financial services, immigrants increased their penetration, in contrast to blacks who remained at very low levels of representation.

The public sector provides the one constant: In 1987, as in 1970, immigrants were sorely underrepresented among the ranks of government's employees.

CONCLUSION

The rise of the post-industrial city is not only a momentous event; it is also the central influence on urban analysis. The structural transformation of urban economies—in particular, the effects of changes in the distribution of employment across industries—is so great that it seems to offer the best clue to understanding the relationship between minority employment and urban economic change. If nothing else, a demand-side perspective such as this offers the advantage of simplicity: groups concentrated in declining sectors are most likely to be hurt by structural change, while those lodged in the dynamic industries are most likely to benefit.

Though the logic of the argument seems unassailable, it is difficult to reconcile with the continuing arrival of immigrants to New York. The restructuring hypothesis offers an intriguing, demand-side alternative to conventional analyses that emphasize the impact of manufacturing decline on opportunities for the unskilled: In this view, the crucial structural change involves the proliferation of low-skilled jobs in the growing, service sector. And thus, changes in the industrial distribution of jobs can continue to explain why immigrants have flocked to New York.

For conceptual and empirical reasons, the restructuring hypothesis falls short. By placing exclusive emphasis on structural change, it fails to explain why one low-skilled group—immigrants—benefit from the growth of low-level jobs, but not another—native blacks. And it does

not stand up empirically, as low skill jobs did not proliferate and immigrants did not concentrate in the growing, service sectors.

In this paper, we shift the focus of debate from an argument about which sectors are really growing, to a discussion of the interaction between changing ethnic proportions in a population and structural shifts. In this process, the key factor is compositional change—the relative decline in the white population—which creates replacement demand for non-white workers. Thus, in New York, the employment problems of blacks had little to do with confinement to declining industries but rather their difficulties in building an employment base in the growing sectors. By contrast, immigrants succeeded in increasing their employment despite concentration in declining industries both by dramatic increases in their shares of those industries as well as gains in industries where they had previously found little work.

ENDNOTES

[1]This argument is further developed in Waldinger (1986-87); Bailey (1989); and Bailey and Waldinger (1991).

[2]The remaining sections rely on data from the 1970 and 1980 Censuses of Population and from a merged sample of the June 1986 and 1988 Current Population Surveys. For further details, see Waldinger and Bailey (1991).

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Why Immigrants Stay in Fashion: Insights from New York's Garment Industry

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For many observers, the influx of immigrants into New York's garment industry seemed to exemplify the deleterious impact of undocumented immigration: native displacement and a simultaneous deterioration of wages and working conditions. This article argues that this conventional view is incorrect. There is little evidence linking immigrant presence to the availability of undocumented workers. Rather, the immigrant presence is the consequence of the industry's basic labor strategy; immigrants have moved into garments as an older labor force deriving from earlier waves of migration has cycled out.

From the late 1960s to the final passage of IRCA in 1986, the question of undocumented immigration dominated the immigration policy debate. While a variety of concerns moved undocumented immigration to the top of the policy agenda, there can be little question that policymakers were particularly attentive to the effects of undocumented immigration on the wages and employment of natives. Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, legislators generally concurred with the conventional view, fearing that the jobs of native-born workers were threatened by undocumented immigrants who were willing to work long and hard hours for low wages at substandard conditions. Thus, the Report of the Senate Judiciary Committee on the 1985 Immigration Reform and Control concluded that:

> we believe that there have been adverse job impacts, especially on low-income, low-skilled Americans, who are the most likely to face direct competition, even though we also perceive a degree of short term economic advantage from the use of "cheap" labor. Such adverse impacts include both unemployment and less favorable wages and working conditions (quoted in Fix and Hill, 1990, p. 25).

To see just how this scenario of undocumented penetration and displacement was played out, many observers of the immigration scene turned to the New York garment industry. Immigrants flocked into the garment industry in the years following the Hart-Cellar Act. This change occurred just when economic restructuring appeared to have greatly reduced the number of entry-level jobs for native-born New Yorkers, suggesting that the influx of newcomers had aggravated the economic woes of native minorities. Not only did the immigrants penetrate deep into the industry, but their growing presence seemed to