Roger Waldinger. *Still the Promised City? African-Americans and New Immigrants in Postindustrial New York.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996. x + 374 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-83861-1.

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Hard Times in the City

The conventional wisdom about the labor market and the ethnic composition of most major industrial cities in the United States, owing among sociologists to the pathbreaking work of William Julius Wilson and Saskia Sassen, goes roughly as follows: sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s, a serious restructuring began to occur to the industrial base of American cities. Large manufacturing firms began to exit in rapid order, moving to the Southern United States or, more often, abroad, and taking their jobs with them.[1] At the same time, new kinds of industries began to appear, in the form of new financial services, professional firms and telecommunications organizations. They began to reshape the economy of the city as well as that of the United States, producing, for example, what Manuel Castells has called the informational city. The effects of the loss of industry and the restructuring of the city on the human populations were striking and, in some cases, devastating. The loss of manufacturing left many people unemployed, eventually creating a large underclass, while the restructuring of the economy created a new kind of polarization, with a very rich group of people, working in the financial, insurance and telecommunications sector at the top, and a very large group of people at the bottom, more or less servicing the needs of those at the top. The devastation was particularly hard for African-Americans who, in Wilson's eyes, became the major victims of deindustrialization. The problem was compounded because some African-Americans had been able to escape the ghetto, to some suburban areas, thereby depriving the underclass of the necessary role-models to move up and out of the inner city.

In brief, this is the essential portrait of the dying industrial and emerging postindustrial city in America, and it has furnished the basis for considerable research and heated debate about such issues as race, income inequality and the urban future in the United States. Roger Waldinger, a professor of Sociology at the University of California at Los Angeles, has written a new book that addresses key issues of the debate and that is likely to further fuel some of the controversy about both the conventional theory and the assembled empirical wisdom of late twentieth century urban America.

Waldinger, a leading student of sociologist's treatment of post-1965 immigration, challenges the conventional wisdom directly. In a tightly-reasoned set of arguments, he claims that neither the polarization thesis of Sassen, nor the deindustrialization/underclass thesis of Wilson and others, is right. He suggests that the labor market is far more diverse than Sassen suggests, with a greater variety of jobs at the low-end of the scale, and that blacks were neither as unskilled nor as dependent, or available, to manufacturing positions as Wilson argues. The broad compelling portraits of these two social scientists, he suggests, simply are wrong, and he goes on to suggest another way of thinking about what has happened to the industrial base of the American city, in general, but of New York City, in particular.

Waldinger maintains that if Wilson is right in his claims about the loss of manufacturing and low-skill positions for African-Americans, then how can one possibly explain the flood of new immigrants to New York City since 1965? How, in particular, can one explain the rapid increase in immigrants from the Dominican Republic, or growing numbers of Hispanic immigrants, or even the large numbers of immigrants from Asia? Why, if manufacturing positions are drying up, leaving black Americans so vulnerable, should new immigrants be arriving by the planeload at Kennedy Airport, and on their way to becoming

so successful in the labor market?

Another way of asking the same question is to put it in the form that has been a recurring intellectual puzzle and moral nightmare for sociologists: Why does the labor market/economic mobility picture for African-Americans look so much different than for other minorities who arrive in the American city? Why are blacks different from other minority ethnic/immigrants to the American metropolis?

This is a puzzle that has occupied, and continues to occupy, the thinking of some of the best sociologists around. Answers range from the claim that blacks are the only group to have come to America unwillingly as slaves, and that they remain victim to that sorry past, to the argument that blacks continue to suffer more deeply from the American brand of racism–which has been directed historically at virtually every immigrant group–than any other group in American history. Waldinger offers his own solution to the problem, one that depends on viewing the labor market as the critical driving force for the city, and for taking account of historical contingency in a deep and important way.

Drawing on sociologists, such as Stanley Lieberson, Waldinger argues that one must think of immigration to the city as a queuing process.[2] Immigrant groups arrive at different times in the city; they start at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy (or class system); they move up the ladder, depending on the numbers of jobs available at different rungs and/or their own numbers of people available for employment; and sometimes they gain a foothold in a particular category of employment, such as the garment industry or construction trade in New York City, and they create an ethnically-closed labor market, or what he calls "ethnic niches". The general notion of the queue is that newer groups arrive and must start at the bottom of the occupational ladder, and that groups, in effect, must wait for others to move along in order to move ahead themselves. History plays a key part in the sense that there is no structural imperative for determing what occupational category a group might take over, nor when a group might leave for better rewards at higher rungs on the ladder. Agency also plays a part, particularly evident in the way that the public sector in New York City became available to different ethnic groups at different times, depending on the role that mayors and their administrations took to open, or to close, the civil service positions.

Waldinger proves and illustrates his arguments with a variety of data. He draws on census data to illustrate the decline of industrial jobs, but also the opening of other kinds of positions in the New York City labor market. He relies on "shift-share" analysis to argue that African- Americans never gained a strong foothold in the manufacturing sector, hence when manufacturing left the city it did not leave African-Americans without employment because they had never looked to that sector for jobs in the first place. He also relies on interviews with various workers and labor figures to document the ways in which certain industrial sectors, like the garment and hotel industries, became the province of certain ethnic groups, such as Jews or Italians. And he uses general historical information, plus quantitative evidence, to show how blacks in New York City gradually moved into the public sector, where one of every four employed blacks now holds a job. In his continuing argument about why the fate of African-Americans differs so sharply from other groups, he notes that while the public sector provides plenty of jobs for blacks it does not furnish the rich financial prospects that jobs in the private sector might.

Waldinger has developed this argument, about ethnic niches, over a number of years, and written about it in different respects. It is imaginative and it is intensely sociological in the sense that the labor market in his view is a place where ethnic groups and their internal social networks are able to close off certain occupations to outsiders. Waldinger suggests, for example, that blacks were never able to make it in the construction sector of New York City, in large part, because they never gained a strong ethnic foothold there. Lacking such a foothold, they could not develop an array of contacts and networks for fellow blacks looking for work. Also, because they lacked a foothold, they could never develop the necessary skills that would have moved them along the career path of the industry.

This is an immensely valuable and detailed work, drawing on a rich variety of sources, a long period of research, and articulated in a closely-reasoned fashion. Yet, it does raise a number of questions, and is not entirely convincing in its argument. For example, Waldinger suggests that the mismatch scenario adopted by Wilson, among others, to explain the growth of unemployment among blacks simply has no basis in fact. He suggests that there was no mismatch: blacks were never attached to the industries that left, and therefore the loss of manufactur-

ing meant no special harm to them. But he does not quite test the mismatch scenario adopted by Wilson. Wilson argues that a mismatch occurred when industrial jobs left the inner city, and the new jobs that became available for the less-skilled workers began to reappear in industries on the outskirts of the city, in suburban areas, which were inaccessible to inner-city residents. Wilson also argues that poverty set in because the jobs which did open up in the inner city paid less than manufacturing positions. In other words, Wilson's argument, and that of those who adopt the mistmatch view, is based on spatial locations of industrial loss and growth in the city, where jobs are lost, where new jobs appear, and where people actually reside. Waldinger has not actually tested that argument. Indeed, his is a view of New York City that is a city that seems to possess no space, for people or for work–though it does possess a labor market.

In addition, it is not entirely clear how large a sector of the labor market ethnic groups actually control in New York City. Waldinger shows some general data on ethnic over-representation, hence ethnic niches in particular occupational sectors, but the data is too superficial to draw any broad conclusions about ethnic niches and their impact. Here it would have made much more sense for him to show the wide array of occupations in New York City, and which occupations represent niches and which do not. Equally telling would have been an analysis that focused on under-representation of certain ethnic groups in certain positions, and how that worked across a broad array of industries and occupations in New York.

After all is said and done about this book, it is, indeed, a very serious and sober account of immigration and New York City over the past three decades especially. It does offer a helpful way to view the record of immigrant history and an accounting of why blacks have done less well in New York than some other minority groups. It may not represent the last word in the debate–and I am not sure there ever will be a last word–but it does demand a wide readership among social scientists and historians.

Notes

[1]. William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Saskia Sassen,*The Global City: New York, Tokyo and London*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[2] Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie* (California: University of California Press, 1980).

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