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Multiculturalism in the United States

Current Issues, Contemporary Voices



Peter Kivisto / Georganne Rundblad
 Editors

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Peter Kivisto and Georganne Rundblad

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Who Gets the “Lousy” Jobs?

Roger Waldinger

Hotels: Who Takes Care of the Guests?

The epic story of the garment workers—with its cycles of oppression, revolt, and exploitation—captured the attention of reporters and researchers ninety years ago and has held it ever since. But most of the inhabitants of the “other New York” work in the shadows, where few social scientists or journalists go. In this chapter, I turn my attention to one of these unheralded trades, where less-skilled newcomers to New York have always managed to get a leg up—hotels. While the hotel account lacks the historical dimension of garments, it presents a more complex configuration, one that is also closely linked to New York’s postindustrial future. Because hotels are connected to the city’s newer economic functions, the industry has been able to grow: in contrast to the badly eroding rag trade, hotels added employment over the period 1970–1990. Like the garment industry, the hotel business is a black niche of the past, but one in which the African-American presence persisted until recent years. As black New Yorkers are but one of a varied set of groups on which the industry draws to fill its jobs, a look at current employment patterns in ho-

tels lets us observe the factors shaping the ethnic division of labor at play.

Growth and Restructuring

Unlike New York’s factory sector, which has steadily eroded over the past fifty years, the jobs of low-wage service have kept their place during the postindustrial transformation. Suburbanization and sagging urban economic fortunes spelled bad times for big-city hotels in the 1950s and the 1960s. With the upswing of urban service economies, starting in the mid-1970s, and the new forms of urban agglomeration that emerged during this period, the downtown hotel took a new lease on life. The corporate service firms, whose growth fueled a massive office-building boom, thrived on their linkages with an increasingly national and international clientele. Not surprisingly, then, “companies that settled into the new downtown offices soon wanted modern hotels nearby where they could put up out-of-town clients and business colleagues in comfort.”¹ A huge expansion in tourism accompanied this growth in business travel, further swelling the market for downtown hotel facilities.

An extraordinary burst in hotel construction has occurred over the past several decades. During the 1960s, hotel construction added an average of 4,000 rooms a year to the downtowns of the thirty-eight largest metropolitan areas; between 1970 and 1982, the rate increased to more than 5,400 a year.² Hotel construction in New York took off in the 1980s, under the stimulus of the city's boom in tourism and business and financial services, yielding many new hotels and more than 8,500 new rooms.

Renewed investment in hotels turned the job picture around. Whereas employment languished in the postwar period, as business sagged and older properties were converted to other uses, payrolls expanded during the years after 1970. Total employment increased by one-third between 1970 and 1990, a quite respectable gain for an industry that remains a cluster of entry-level jobs.

Structure of Employment

In comparison to other immigrant-reliant industries, hotels stand out in several key respects. First, the hotel is a sizable establishment that often belongs to a much larger chain. New York's largest hotel has over 2,000 rooms and employs approximately 1,400 people. Second, whether large or small, hotels maintain an elaborate division of labor. Jobs fall into either the "back" or the "front" of the house, with the latter involving activities requiring direct guest contact. Functions create further distinctions, of which housekeeping, kitchen work, stewarding, and banquet services are generally the most important in employment terms. Differentiation within these functions varies considerably, with an elaborate hierarchy among kitchen workers, for example, and virtually none within housekeeping. Alongside the major functions are a plethora of smaller departments, with a large hotel maintaining a carpentry shop, uphol-

stery shop, machine shop, lock-smith, and so on, each one of which employs a complement of specialized workers.

These various characteristics have contradictory influences on the structure of employment. On the one hand, size and organizational form lead to a formal and elaborate employment structure along the lines of an internal labor market. Many hotels have formal training programs, developed either by the owner or the chain; job-posting systems are common, as is a preference for hiring and promotion from within. On the other hand, the distinction between the front and the back of the house, as well as the functional divisions, have the opposite effect of separating job clusters and career paths within the hotel. Although workers can move from the back to the front of the house, jobs at the front usually get filled from the outside. And outsiders rarely come from the same groups as workers in housekeeping. Hotels want workers with good communication skills and middle-class self-presentation at the front of the house, which gives the edge to whites with at least some college education. In the back of the house, kitchen workers come from differing sources: professional associations or culinary schools refer chefs and sous-chefs, while lower-level help gets recruited from other hotels, restaurants, or the open market. In either case, movement occurs via the external market.

Despite its complexity, the hotel is a large service factory from an occupational point of view. At a time when the shape of so many organizations is changing, the hotel remains the classic pyramid: in 1990, managers and professionals constituted barely 18 percent of the industry's employees in New York City. The great bulk of employment in hotels lies in one of a variety of service occupations, which engages almost 60 percent of the industry's labor force. The largest concentration of workers, approximately 25 percent, is

involved in housekeeping; of employment service of largest).

The Hotel Industry

With a focus on the hotel industry, the text emphasizes the role of hotels in the economy, particularly in the context of immigration and labor market dynamics. It notes that hotels have a long history of employing a large number of workers, and that the industry has grown significantly since the 1970s. The text also discusses the impact of immigration on the hotel industry, particularly in New York City, and the role of hotels in providing employment opportunities for immigrants.

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involved in the heavy, menial work of house-keeping; approximately another 16 percent of employees work in one of a variety of food service occupations (of which waiting is the largest).

The Hotel Work Force

With an occupational structure that emphasizes manual skills and ability to do heavy, menial work, hotels have always leaned heavily on minority and immigrant workers. Hotels had already evolved into a concentration of black and Puerto Rican employment on the eve of World War II. Employment shrunk over the next thirty years, as the industry consolidated, modernized, and phased out older properties and residential hotels, but the minority share of employment grew. By 1970, African-American and Puerto Rican workers each accounted for about a sixth of the work force.

Though a major component of the hotel rank and file, blacks historically found themselves confined to a narrow tier of positions. In the years immediately after World War II, hotels were often charged with discrimination, not just in lodging but in employment practices as well. A 1956 review of complaints filed with New York State's Commission against Discrimination noted "an occasional breakthrough in the employment of Negroes as waiter, busboy, and bartender but the overall picture is not one of major or extensive advance."³ As if the data from its files were not enough, the commission underlined the obstacles to black progress in a mid-1950s survey of the industry's employment practices that it undertook on its own. Blacks were trapped in low-skilled, low-paying, dead-end jobs in the back of the house, with few chances of moving into positions involving customer contact; two-thirds of the black labor force was crowded into housekeeping alone, a category that only employed a fifth of

the total labor force.⁴ All thirty-three of the hotels that the commission studied excluded blacks from bar service and front-service departments; the thousand and some waiters and waitresses at work in the higher-end hotels included only five blacks; and the top-paying banquet jobs remained virtually closed off to blacks. African-Americans rarely gained promotion from rear to front elevators, a shift that opened the door to still better-paying jobs in the front of the house.⁵ Notwithstanding an agreement to use the state employment service for referrals, as part of an antidiscrimination plan, the range of job placements did not significantly expand: "Almost two out of every three nonwhites were referred and placed in housekeeping, laundry, and maintenance jobs, whereas white applicants were referred and placed in a greater diversification of jobs . . . A higher proportion of white than nonwhite referrals was accepted in each of the four major groups."⁶

Government regulators, joined by civil rights protesters, kept up the pressure in the 1960s. Picket lines mounted in front of some of the city's best-known hotels led the industry to put a training and upgrading program in place, but the job ceiling only gradually lifted. Results from a 1964 survey, which found that "a large number of Negroes [were] employed as maids, housemen, and elevator operators, but only a few or none in building maintenance positions, and as cashiers, clerks, auditors, typists, and telephone operators," showed that little had changed since the industry had been canvassed a decade before.⁷ A 1967 survey discovered that, blacks made up one of every three workers in the back of the house but only one of every ten in the front of the house. Ironically, more progress was made in the clerical and managerial positions than in the skilled and waiting jobs, where the importance of networks and a buddy system among incumbents proved much harder to reform.⁸

Table 25.1

Ethnic Employment in the Hotel Industry, 1940-1990

	Total	Whites		Hispanics		Blacks		Asians
		Native	Foreign	Native	Foreign	Native	Foreign	Foreign
Employment								
1940	43,800	14,200	20,000	3,300	—	5,500	700	—
1950	41,486	15,094	15,773	3,595	545	5,771	652	NA
1970	19,750	5,600	3,700	3,500	2,250	3,400	1,100	200
1980	21,700	4,200	2,540	2,980	4,440	3,680	3,080	640
1990	27,176	4,840	2,375	3,153	6,076	2,625	4,613	2,987
Index of Representation								
1940		0.60	1.21	8.16	—	2.33	1.54	—
1950		0.62	1.35	3.52	1.67	1.75	1.25	NA
1970		0.50	1.38	2.55	2.64	1.12	2.84	0.82
1980		0.41	1.11	1.53	2.62	1.08	2.45	0.71
1990		0.45	1.03	1.25	2.13	0.63	2.06	1.40

Note: Index of representation = share of group in category + share of group in total economy.

Source: Census of Population, 1940-1990.

After 1970, the industry's overall complexion changed abruptly, while the legacy of its racial hiring practices shifted much more slowly. European immigrants, previously a dominant presence, seeped out of the industry; as they did so, whites' share of hotel jobs dropped from just under a half in 1970 to a little over a quarter two decades later (Table 25.1). The seventies appear to be years of transition, with newcomers pouring into the industry, while the native minorities held on to their place. The industry's recovery in the 1980s added to the vacancies created by the old-timers' exodus, but the fruits of change went to the immigrants, who grabbed the positions vacated by whites. By 1990, the transition to a new configuration had been completed. Almost 60 percent of the industry's work force was foreign-born, among the highest of all major industries in the city; Asian immigrants made the most sizable gains, making significant inroads for the first time, followed by immigrant Hispanics and

immigrant blacks, in that order. Hotels also emerged as a niche for immigrant Dominicans and West Indians. The number of African-American workers eroded by over a thousand and their share of hotel jobs declined even more severely. Those black New Yorkers who remained in hotels found themselves repositioned: while waiting and kitchen jobs remained largely closed to them, employment in housekeeping plummeted, and front-of-the-house clerical and managerial jobs opened up. Despite progress on the last front, hotels underwent the changes of other black niches of the past, evolving into an industry in which African-Americans found themselves badly underrepresented.

Labor Supply Conditions

The hotel industry exemplifies the problems afflicting America's service complex: rapidly growing employment, low productivity, and declining available labor supplies.

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Nationwide, hotel employment increased from a little under 1.1 million workers in 1980 to almost 1.5 million in 1987. But in a report on labor productivity recently issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, hotels ranked thirty-seventh of forty-three selected industries in terms of the average annual percentage change in output per employee for the years 1982 through 1987. Between 1983 and 1988, payroll and related expenses rose from 32 to nearly 37 percent, "primarily reflecting high rates of hiring," according to a report by industry consultants.⁹ Although current data are not available, the industry's most recent growth followed a decade in which local productivity declined: between 1972 and 1982, the ratio of employees to rooms rose by 18 percent.

But while the industry's payrolls are growing and its productivity is sagging, finding workers is becoming an increasingly difficult task. The hotel is a relatively low-wage, service factory; hence, many industry observers contend that the industry faces "a human resources crisis."¹⁰ One consultant told the industry's weekly publication, *Hotel and Motel Management*, that he considered "the labor shortage in the market as the most difficult it's been in his 25 years of hotel experience and that it is 'just getting worse.'"¹¹

In New York, however, "there are plenty of people in the industry," as one manager put it. "We just have to open the door." In part, the density of hotel employment means that there exists a pool of circulating, experienced labor on which all employers can draw. Moreover, the labor force lives close by, in the city, whereas many hotels near new suburban office parks have no local pool of labor. But whatever the precise explanation, labor supply conditions in New York differ sharply from the national norm. "If I didn't have the hiring hall prescreen applicants," noted one manager, "I'd have a line wrapped around the block." "We could get a hundred maids by tomorrow if we needed," commented another.

"We have a nonstop flow of people coming in for jobs."

Whereas poor quality often aggravates the problems of insufficient quantity, New York's hotels seem to do better on this count as well. "The hard-core unemployed are a small percentage of the people who apply for our jobs," one manager told me. And turnover rates, which appear to be well below the industry average, suggest a more firmly attached population as well. For example, the two New York hotels operated by a large nonunion chain enjoy the lowest turnover rates among two hundred properties. "I'm surprised," said one manager, whose prior experiences had all been out of town, "that we don't have to go into the market and recruit . . . We can spend more time to find individuals who are a cut above. This further keeps turnover down."

The Role of Immigrants

Though New York's hotels had always drawn on an immigrant labor force—and which of the city's low-wage industries had not?—hotel managers have developed a new appreciation of the importance of immigrants since they entered the 1990s. "There's constant immigration," noted one veteran manager. "There isn't one department that doesn't have newly arrived immigrants." A large hotel found that its employees spoke forty-seven different languages, ranging from Creole to Twi, with Spanish, Vietnamese, Filipino, French, Polish, Russian, Italian, and Mandarin the largest language groupings. One personnel manager, a native Spanish speaker with twenty years of experience in one of New York's largest hotels, described the new immigrant influx at length: "The population in housekeeping and stewarding increasingly comes from Haiti, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Central America. Asians are starting to come: we have a tremendous number of Asians applying for jobs. Lots of Dominicans: well represented,

Asians
Foreign
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more so than Puerto Ricans. The Dominicans have come in over the last six or seven years, mostly replacing Puerto Ricans."

While the immigrants are important for "filling jobs from which other people have moved up the ladder," they also frequently import specific proficiencies that expand their role in the industry. "Many immigrants bring skills that we want," commented one experienced manager in a large hotel, who maintained that one-fifth of his immigrant contingent had arrived with home-country experience. Often, immigrant workers have backgrounds in related trades, acquired either at home or in the United States, that can easily be transferred to hotels. In general, "ethnic cooks—Italians, Chinese, Greek specialties—seem to be always needed," according to an employment service official. Certain cooking skills—for example, experience in the preparation of cold meats and hors d'oeuvres—favor the entry of Thai and Chinese workers into specialized kitchen occupations. "Filipinos with housekeeping experience in hospitals at home become housekeepers here," related one manager. "I get calls from lots of waiters in Indian restaurants," noted another.

However important the immigrant influx, there are no signs that it has occurred in response to deliberate employer efforts. On the contrary, the hotels seem to be the passive "bellwether of what's coming into the population." "With more than enough workers," most employers are content to "satisfy needs from the applicant flow." Thus, as the city's population has diversified, new groups have spontaneously streamed into the labor force. "The ethnic group to choose from is Indians," reported one new manager in a comment echoed in other interviews. "They are the number one group of applicants." But the Indians are only one of a batch of newcomers, as I learned from the interviews, where one informant told of "all of a sudden getting lots of Irish," and another of "an influx of literate Russians and Poles, some mid-easterners."

Thus, "with different groups now entering, looking for any kind of employment," natural turnover combined with ethnic differences in predispositions for hotel work have expanded the immigrant employment base. "Blacks and Puerto Ricans are being replaced by immigrants," noted the manager of a downtown tourist-oriented hotel. "This is strictly what the market has born."

Weakly Attached Workers

The advantage of immigrants, as one personnel director pointed out, is that their "need to work is as great as our need to fill the position." But the supply of immigrants is not unlimited and, more important, their skill levels often preclude them from jobs that require communication with guests. Even housekeepers have contact with guests; as one informant noted, "95 percent of what a housekeeper does will not require English; the problem is what they do when they're stopped in the hotel by a guest." In contrast to the manufacturing sector, where sign language is sufficient for instruction and any continuing interaction with employers or workers, some English-language ability seems to be a prerequisite for employment in the hotels. One job developer for a refugee-placement program observed: "Service demands for English are much greater than in manufacturing. When I get someone an interview with a hotel personnel department, the expectation of the hotel personnel people is that the person will speak for himself, although I will accompany him. In a factory, the expectation is that I will do everything—fill out the interview, translate at the interview, explain what the job involves." Moreover, immigrants are looking for stable, steady employment, but hotels also want a labor force that can adjust to changing hours and uncertain, flexible staffing requirements.

For these needs hotels turn to actors and students, a veritable "blessing to me," exclaimed an interviewee who ran a Broadway

hotel. In actors and students, the hotels secure "overqualified workers at bargain rates." "What are the advantages of employing these people?" asked one manager rhetorically. "Above-average people skills and communication skills." Another informant added that "their good educational background makes them easy to train." Where immigrants tend "not to work in guest contact areas," actors and students ideally suit these roles. They have an additional virtue as "people who want less than the traditional workday. Actors want to be available in the day, and are therefore willing to work nights." Since hotels operate as seven-day-a-week, twenty-four-hour enterprises, they have staffing requirements that many workers, especially those with families, find undesirable. If students or actors can be hired for part-time, weekend positions, it relieves the strain of having to find full-time adult employees to work during these undesirable shifts. Furthermore, hotel occupancy rates are notoriously volatile, but weakly attached workers like students and actors move out of the industry without friction. Rather than laying career workers off, hotels are able to adjust to slow seasons, such as summer, by waiting for the students and actors they employ to simply quit.

Clearly differentiated from the hotel rank and file, actors and students make attractive recruits. According to the white officials in the New York State employment service whom I interviewed, hotels prefer to fill their positions with a "younger, yuppie, white crowd. They'd like to present that image right down to the maid: a blue-eyed, blond kid." Moreover, these same recruits are unlikely to feel much sense of kinship with less-educated, more heavily minority back-of-the-house workers—a not unimportant consideration in the industry's changing industrial relations environment. Tastes in compensation and benefits also vary among these two groups in ways that work to the advantage of management. "At the Marriott," noted a former employee, now a manager with a union-

ized hotel, "actors don't want to join the union, with its \$200 initiation fee and \$25 monthly dues." And one large nonunion hotel with a sizable labor force of actors and students emphasizes that its employees do not have to use union clinics but can consult their own doctors—a feature more likely to appeal to workers of middle-class background than to the hotel rank and file.

Native Black Workers

Although the hotel industry has long found a sizable share of its workers among African-Americans and continues to do so today, immigrants appear to provide a preferable labor force.

The entry and recruitment of immigrants seems to have little to do with wages or the immigrants' supposed susceptibility to exploitation. Those in immigrant-dominated occupations like housekeeping receive higher pay than those in front-desk occupations, where the immigrant penetration is much lower. Still higher wages are to be found in the kitchen, where the disparity between immigrant and African-American employment levels is the greatest. Nor can a strong case be made for employers' preference for immigrants on the grounds of the latter's greater vulnerability. Pay rates in the nonunion hotels equal, when not surpassing, the union rates, and the benefit packages are often better. Moreover, obtaining actors and students is a more effective union-avoidance strategy than hiring immigrants and one that large nonunion hotels have employed.

Despite their restrained labor market role, hotel employers still appear to prefer hiring immigrants. To some extent, employers evince "the philosophy that you get an immigrant who hasn't been spoiled by the welfare system, they're a lot harder working." More important, managers perceive a congruence between the hotels' competitive strategy—which increasingly emphasizes the quality and quantity of service—and workers' as-

sumed traits. Hotels want workers known for their "friendliness," "service-orientation," and "smiling faces"—in short, "people-oriented intangibles that make people come back." Personnel officials think that these attributes, and an orientation more accepting of menial work, are likelier to be found among immigrants than among native minority workers. "Lots of new immigrants have more acceptable work ethics," noted one manager. "Asians have a culture for dealing with people in a courteous and respectful manner. They are here to work." An official in the state employment service advanced the same view, putting employers' motivation in a less flattering light: "The industry is elitist. They look for characteristics that are intangible, gratuitously hiring Orientals because they think they're hard working."

Ultimately, African-American participation in the hotel industry reflects a broad complex of factors—of which the entry of immigrants is just one part. Most important, the structure of incentives works less favorably for blacks than for immigrants.

Differences in preferences play a part. Interviews and statistical data both suggest that African-American workers are slowly moving out of the industry's effective labor supply. "For native black Americans in the past twenty years," reflected an official in the industry's joint labor-management training program, "the idea of service as a mechanism to make a living is simply not attractive." Similarly, many of the managers I interviewed agreed that the industry's legacy as a repository of the traditional jobs to which blacks had long been confined deterred younger African-Americans from taking hotel jobs: "American-born blacks see hotel work as servitude. They don't want to be a bellperson or a waiter. They don't want to do it. They say so. They're willing to take a lower paying job if it gives them a higher level of self-esteem." (manager of a New York business hotel)

But if African-Americans judge the benefits of hotel work more harshly than do im-

migrants, they also confront problems in their search for upward mobility that further diminish the attractiveness of hotel work. To begin with, the natural starting point for movement into hotel management is the front of the house, an area in which blacks have historically been underemployed. The blatant discriminatory practices that previously kept blacks out operate with much less force than before, but the basic pattern remains in place. Until recently, African-Americans had been confined to the back of the house, which offers relatively few options for upward mobility. Currently, there are few takers for the available management positions—like executive housekeeper or executive steward—that open up: "the pay is not great for these jobs and the positions aren't great either. Managers have to fill in for workers if the latter don't show up for work: in other words, the managers have to make rooms or serve." These back-of-the-house managerial positions are also detached from the main lines of upward mobility, which are to be found in the front.

The case of food service occupations provides further insight to the barriers to black employment, especially since it highlights the difference between African-Americans and immigrants. Kitchen and catering jobs contain a range of opportunities for upward mobility, yet African-American employment in these categories remains well below parity. The kitchen, "where the average temperature is 120 degrees," is not an inherently attractive place in which to work. For those kitchen workers who start at the bottom without any skills, the appeal is diminished because "hotel kitchens don't have opportunities to train hands-on." Getting ahead in the kitchen requires entering with training, which gives other groups a leg up over African-Americans. As already mentioned, immigrants often arrive in the United States with cooking skills or else learn them in the burgeoning sector of immigrant restaurants. "Culinary schools are exploding with graduates," who,

as it turns out, are mainly middle-class whites. Thus, African-Americans are the most likely to get stuck at the bottom of the kitchen hierarchy, which discourages them from starting there in the first place.

If lack of skills and exclusion from the skill-acquisition process impede access to high-paying cooking jobs, the case of banquet waiting illustrates other obstacles. Banquet waiting requires strength, quickness, and care but no skill that involves years of training. Still, it is "considered a high-prestige job," one of the industry's most desirable. Banquet waiters receive a salary supplemented by a tip, based on a predetermined percentage addition to a banquet's total costs. A worker attached to a hotel with a good volume of business can earn from \$40,000 a year in a run-of-the-mill establishment in New York to over \$100,000 a year in a top-of-the-line deluxe hotel, though these earnings will vary, depending on the ups and downs of a hotel's catering business.

The problem is that there is no fast road to banquet waiting in union hotels. One must have five years of prior service as a hotel waiter to apply to be sent out as a "roll-call" waiter when additional banquet staff is required; with enough seniority, one moves to a hotel's list of permanent "B" waiters, from which one eventually steps to the "A" list and serves on a more regular basis. Thus, to become a banquet waiter, one first needs to be employed in the front of the house. To maintain the long effort to gain a permanent banquet job, one also needs information about opportunities in the many different hotels, and contacts with waiters who are on the permanent A or B list. Those contacts are not equally available to all. "Banquet waiters have been cliquish," admitted one union official, himself a former banquet waiter. "Blacks and women have had a hard time breaking in. It used to be Italian; it's now more Greek and Latino." Today's cliquishness has long-standing roots: in the past, as we have seen, blacks seeking employment in a high-paying,

low-skilled job like banquet waiter found few doors open, with informal practices that generally restricted access to whites. There is little evidence to suggest that things have since turned around.

Thus, the case of banquet waiting illustrates the vicious circle that keeps mobility opportunities closed. Discrimination, past and present, reduces access to this particular ladder; discrimination also lowers the probability of movement up that ladder, thereby reducing the incentive to obtain initial front-of-the-house jobs. Whereas African-Americans lack a network that might connect experienced and aspiring black banquet waiters, other groups are well-connected, possessing the contacts and ties to other waiters and banquet managers that blacks, given their history and smaller numbers, cannot possibly possess.

Other factors—limited skill backgrounds, problems in communicating, and lack of facility with computers—impede access to those front-of-the-house positions directly linked to managerial tracks. As the director of a union training program pointed out, minority workers who want to move up to front-desk jobs "must be trained explicitly for middle-class norms." Though rank-and-file hotel workers find the "front office very attractive, there's lots of competition, especially from middle-class whites." Large hotels maintain active college recruitment programs, which funnel an ample supply of new trainees from college and university hotel management programs. The Council on Restaurant and Institutional Education includes almost two hundred college hotel management programs among its affiliates and reports that the number of such programs has grown considerably in recent years. Yet, hotel schools appear to enroll a very small minority population. For example, New York City Technical College, a community college unit of the City University of New York where the student body is 87 percent nonwhite, maintains a hotel and restaurant management

program in which at least half of the students are white and a high proportion of the remainder are foreign-born. Similarly, New York University runs a hotel program in its extension division, which enrolls a principally immigrant student body, while the students in the hotel program at the university's main campus are predominantly white.

Peripheralization?

Perhaps the African-American exodus from hotel work is a response to the declining wages and work standards that sometimes accompany immigration. Although that hypothesis frequently appears in the literature, the hotel case offers little support. New York is an old union town, with a powerful branch of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, which established firm control over its respective markets during the heyday of labor-movement activity over half a century ago.¹² Though union-management relations in the hotel industry changed during the 1980s—with nonunion chains experiencing growth and the industry's productivity squeeze motivating cost-cutting measures—these shifts had little impact on New York. Only two of the hotels that opened in New York during the 1980s remained nonunion, a status that has entailed substantial costs in wages and benefits, which compare favorably with union standards. Consequently, even in the market of the early 1990s—when demand was weak and unemployment rising—the very newest hotels signed neutrality agreements with the hotel workers.

The recent collective-bargaining experience attests to the stability of these arrangements. Negotiations over the 1985 contract broke down, leading to a thirty-five-day strike, the industry's first in over forty years. In the settlement, the union assented to only two of the more than thirty give-backs with which management had originally come to the table. The most important concession involved a two-tier wage agreement, which in

contrast to that implemented in many other industries, held for only first-year employees, who would then automatically move up to the standard rate for their classification. In return, hotel workers received sizable wage increases. In 1990, however, negotiations pivoted around health care costs. But union and management averted the conflicts that had earlier led to stoppages in private hospitals and the telephone industry, successfully restructuring their benefits plan without imposing deductions or coinsurance and signing an agreement ahead of its expiration date.

Alternatively, we might expect to see an immigrant effect on wages, which could suggest a tie-in to broader arguments about the relationships among service growth, immigration, and earnings inequality. Nationwide, real earnings for hotel and motel employees declined, falling from \$181 a week in 1972 to \$160 a week in 1990. But in New York, hotel workers' *real wages*, which stagnated during the 1970s, rose during the buoyant 1980s. Likewise, a look at wages for detailed occupations in unionized hotels confirms the picture of rising real wages during the 1980s, while providing no evidence of growing inequality. On the contrary, wage trends showed a slight shift toward compression between more- and less-skilled occupations. Hotel workers also moved upward relative to their counterparts in manufacturing while holding their own in the overall economy.¹³

As Figure 25.1 shows, however, the hotel industry did pay immigrants better than their native black counterparts. That advantage is hard to square with the usual claims of immigrant competition: after all, why should the hotel industry have substituted immigrants for African-Americans, if the result was a higher wage bill? But the disparity fits the argument I have made all along: that immigrants found a more supportive environment in hotels than did African-Americans, a difference that in turn helps explain the diverging supply curves between the two groups.

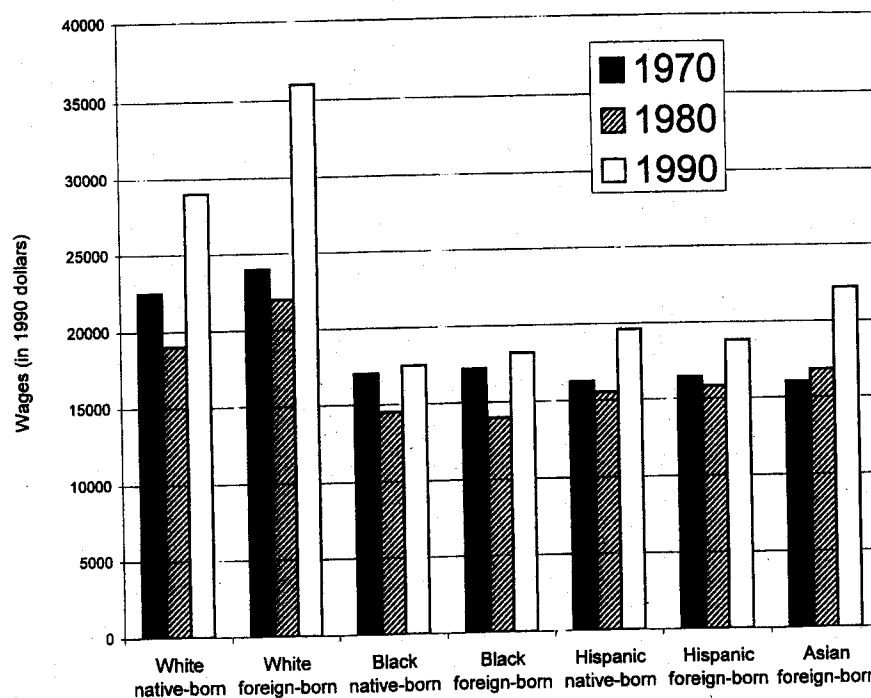


Figure 25.1. Wages of Hotel Workers in New York City, 1970–1990. (Source: Census of Population, 1970–1990.)

On Different Tracks

The portals to the bottom of New York's economy have run through the city's garment and hotel industries for the past hundred years. At midcentury, those characteristics led African-American New Yorkers to gravitate toward hotel and garment work. But now, when both industries remain concentrations of easy-entry jobs, their native black workers have largely gone. Instead, hotels and garments, like so much of New York's low-skilled sector, have reverted to the earlier pattern of immigrant domination.

The histories recounted in this chapter suggest that African-American trajectories have been shaped by a complex of interacting sociological and economic factors. The African-American experience in hotel and garment work coincides with the years of the great migration, as black workers converged on the lowest-level jobs, filling positions va-

cated by whites. In both cases, attempts to move up the hierarchy ran into the obstacle of competition with better-established white workers. Good jobs got rationed through informal ties among established workers and the younger members of their core networks. As long as white ethnics sought work as cutters, banquet waiters, cooks, or skilled seamstresses, opportunities for African-Americans remained largely foreclosed.

African-Americans subsequently moved out of both industries; the timing of those shifts casts light on the factors that triggered the outflow. The supply of native black labor began to fall short in the garment industry by the early 1950s, but not in hotels. The pace of wage change has much to do with this development, as wages in the garment industry fell behind in the city's wage hierarchy, while hotel wages pulled ahead.¹⁴ Similarly, African-Americans' discontent with garment work conditions first showed up in the industry's

recruitment problems; active protest emerged only later, toward the end of the 1950s, as the growing protest movement reflected shifting black aspirations. By the late 1960s, when the city's economy reached its postwar boom and apparel employers were searching for workers as never before, African-Americans dropped out of the industry's effective labor supply for good. Similarly drastic change did not occur in the hotel industry until the 1980s, a period of considerable improvement in the industry's real wages. As the interviews suggest, the attenuation of African-American ties was linked to the emergence of new generation that rejected stigmatized service jobs to which blacks had long been confined.

In both industries, differences in economic aspirations put African-Americans and immigrants on different tracks. But the hotel case further suggests that the structure of opportunity systematically varied between African-Americans and immigrants, in turn yielding divergent motivations and incentives to develop the relevant skills. In hotels, African-American movement beyond the entry level is hindered by a variety of factors that do not hold for immigrants. The skills needed to enter at higher levels of the blue-collar hierarchy are *more* difficult to acquire for African-Americans than for immigrants; at the lower levels of the white-collar hierarchy, African-Americans encounter substantial and effective competition from whites; and African-Americans seem more victimized by discrimination than immigrants, as indicated by black underrepresentation in food service occupations.

What about the alternative hypothesis, that cheap immigrant labor pushed African-Americans out? Timing seems to rule that possibility out. African-American employment erosion began *before* the new immigrant influx; as noted above, the most severe African-American losses seem to have occurred in the 1960s, just when employers were most desperately seeking bodies. In ho-

tels, the decline in African-American employment occurred in the 1980s, when real wages grew. The fact that relative wages for the most immigrant-dominated hotel occupations rose fastest makes the immigrant-displacement hypothesis still more implausible. In any case, African-Americans' chief competitive threat in hotels comes from actors and students, who provide the preferred sources of flexible labor, *not* immigrants.

But the seepage of African-American employment from industries like hotels and garments, and its replacement with immigrant labor, does seem to produce an irrevocable and irreplaceable loss. Once in place, immigrant networks have an inherently exclusionary bias, an effect that only grows when newcomers concentrate in an ethnic economy, as in the case of Chinese in the garment industry, or in an ethnic occupational niche, as in the case of hotel kitchens. Although the arrival of the new immigrants seems to be an instance of self-recruitment, not manipulation by employers, the evidence from the hotel industry indicates that employers prefer immigrants to African-Americans, when they have the choice. To some extent, employers also respond to the preferences of their immigrant workers, whose involvement in the struggle for place may yield an antipathy for African-Americans.

In the end, the immigrants may have hastened the African-American exodus from New York's low-skilled sectors, but if so, they only pushed along a development that was well under way before they arrived. African-Americans stopped doing New York's dirty work more than a generation ago, a change that has now run its course. Today's areas of African-American concentration are to be found in activities that require more schooling and provide much greater rewards. But this particular path of adaptation leaves behind the low-skilled. For these black New Yorkers there are no alternatives to work in the city's traditional, easy-entry industries.

Unfortunately, that option is largely foreclosed: African-American recruitment networks into low-skilled industries like garments or hotels have dried up; and the advent of immigrants means that the newcomers have a lock on those jobs.

Notes

1. Bernard Frieden and Lynn Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).
2. Ibid.
3. New York State Commission against Discrimination, *Employment in the Hotel Industry* (New York: Commission against Discrimination, 1958), p. 11.
4. New York State Commission against Discrimination, *Hotel Industry*, p. 24.
5. Herman Bloch, "Discrimination against the Negro in Employment in New York, 1920-1963," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 24, 4 (1965):365-366, 373-375; U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, *Investigation on Extension of Coverage to Laundry, Hotel, Restaurant, Bar, and Hospital Workers*, 87th Congress, 2d sess., 1962, pp. 22-29, 53-56.
6. New York State Commission against Discrimination, *Hotel Industry*, p. 14.
7. "Americana Picketed in Racial Protest," *New York Times*, February 8, 1964, p. 11; Damon Stetson, "Hotels and Labor Spur Integration," *New York Times*, October 15, 1964, p. 20.
8. Edward Koziara and Karen Koziara, *The Negro in the Hotel Industry* (Philadelphia: Industrial Relations Unit, Wharton School, 1967), pp. 15, 29.
9. Laventhol and Horvath, *U.S. Lodging Industry* (Philadelphia: Laventhol and Horvath, 1989), p. 5.
10. T. Lattin, "Human Resources Crisis Looking for Hotel Industry," *Hotel and Motel Management*, April 3, 1989, p. 30.
11. P. LaHue, "Employee Shortage Clouds Hospitality Hiring Practices," *Hotel and Motel Management*, November 2, 1987, p. 130.

12. Morris Horowitz, *The New York Hotel Industry: A Labor Relations Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

13. See my article "Taking Care of the Guests: The Impact of Immigrants on Services—An Industry Case Study," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 16, no. 1 (1992); and Dorothy Sue Cobble and Michael Merrill, "Collective Bargaining in the Hospitality Industry," forthcoming in Paula Voos, ed., *Collective Bargaining in the Private Sector* (Madison, Wis.: Industrial Relations Research Association).

14. Wage data from the period 1947-1955 from Segal, *Wages in the Metropolis*, pp. 178-179.

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Waldinger:

1. In what ways did economic restructuring affect employment opportunities in New York for minority groups of people?
2. What are some of the tools that new immigrants have used to allow them to more easily move into hotel positions and what have been some of the consequences for non-immigrant hotel workers?