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Trapped at the Bottom: Racialized and Gendered Labor Queues in New Immigrant Destinations

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Abstract

While many studies document employer preference for Latino immigrants over African Americans, few studies provide evidence on *how* this preference translates into changes in the ethnic composition of the labor force. This paper addresses the mechanisms that account for these changes and their effects on race and ethnic relations. Using unique ethnographic data collected in new immigrant destinations, I show how the ethnic composition of a large industrial manufacturing firm changed from being almost exclusively black and white, to becoming forty percent Latino in many departments over the course of one year. Racial dynamics along with selection mechanisms, namely “labor queues” (employers’ ranking of workers) and “job queues” (workers’ ranking of jobs), are central in explaining ethnic replacement processes. Labor queues are influenced by racial preferences and the tenuous legal status of many Latino immigrant workers; job queues, on the other hand, are influenced by the interplay of race, gender and the alternatives available to workers. These dynamics carry important consequences. When workers ranked at the bottom of the labor queue face replacement pressure, they protect their positions by antagonizing their would-be replacements. This strategy protects their jobs by providing incentives for their replacements to leave for better jobs. Ironically, this successful strategy results in a stable labor queue where workers ranked at the bottom trap themselves in jobs at the bottom of the job queue.

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Background

While studies suggest that employers favor immigrant workers over native-born workers and that social networks influence changes in the makeup of the workforce, these relationships have been difficult to document empirically. Further, documenting labor replacement processes has been problematic for two main reasons. First, attitudes and behaviors that show preferential hiring practices are legally banned in the United States.² Consequently, while employers may self-report racial or gender bias in survey studies, concrete evidence on how these beliefs translate into actions that favor one group over another is difficult to obtain. Additionally, gathering empirical evidence on the immediate effects of labor replacement mechanisms is problematic because surveys tend to be the preferred method of data collection. In gathering self-reported attitudes on racial relations, surveys tend to be susceptible to the undue influence of social desirability—the tendency of individuals to project positive images in social interaction.

This study addresses the above noted concerns. Using an ethnographic approach, I examine two important, yet unsettled, questions in the sociological literature: (1) Do employers hire immigrants as replacements of native-born workers, in particular of less educated African Americans and (2) What are the mechanisms that explain immigrant socioeconomic incorporation in “new immigrant destinations” —regions with little post-1965 immigration experience. I employ a rich data set that includes sustained participant observation research and 120 interviews with Latino immigrants deriving from a twelve-month project studying the impact of immigration on race relations in the Southeastern United States. The Southeast is an

² Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 [Pub. L. 88-352] protects workers against employment discrimination on the basis of gender, national origin, color, and religion. Title VII applies to employers with more than 15 employees, including employment agencies and labor organizations.

important site for this research because the region has been attracting industries that want to remain competitive in international markets by taking advantage of regional incentives such as tax reductions, weak labor unions and low-cost labor. Due to these changes, immigrant Latinos are starting to concentrate in the region and represent the fastest growing source of new labor (Dalla et al. 2005) —consequently transforming the South into a “new immigrant destination.” To illustrate, in contrast to the 47.8 percent growth of the Latino population in traditional immigrant states (New York, California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois), the Latino population in new Southeastern immigrant destinations (North Carolina, Georgia and South Carolina) grew by 320 percent between 1990 and 2000. Additionally, due to its racially segmented past, and the high proportion of native-born blacks in the region, the South offers a unique context to uncover the interplay of racial and gender attitudes and actions when a new ethnic group is favored in labor contexts.

Given the unique context from which this data originates and its unique data collection strategy, I am able to explain the strategic actions and effects involved in the process of replacing a workforce of primarily native-born African Americans with primarily Latino³ immigrant workers in an industrial manufacturing facility. I argue that selection mechanisms (“labor” and “job queues”) and racial and gender dynamics are powerful mechanisms that can tip the balance of the ethnic composition of the workforce.

This study contributes to the literature in three different ways. First, this is the first study that uses systematic ethnographic methods to conduct an in-depth analysis on the impact of immigrant incorporation on racial and ethnic relations in a new immigrant destination. In doing this, my research brings together two fields of study: immigration and racial and ethnic relations, thereby advancing the field of race relations that traditionally focuses on black and white racial

³ I use the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably.

groups. Second, it provides concrete evidence on how employers' attitudes and behaviors favoring one ethnic group over another in non-unionized new immigrant destinations may contribute to the low employment participation rate of poor black male workers. Given that black men often face employment discrimination, and that unauthorized immigrants are unprotected by labor law, explaining how these vulnerabilities play out in new labor markets will hopefully result in more equitable employment and immigration policies. Finally, it addresses the micro-social processes embedded in larger structural forces, which are deemed essential to advance the field of race and ethnic relations.

THEORY AND RELATED LITERATURE

A relevant perspective in the literature examines hiring processes and their consequences on the economic opportunities of low skilled workers. The literature on hiring practices focuses on how workers are matched with jobs and on the influence of employers' perceptions and actions. Studies suggest that principles such as race, nativity and gender are central to processes of matching people to jobs (Fernandez and Mors 2008). Some of these studies use the concept of *labor queues* (employers ranking of workers) to explain the changing composition of the workforce in the context of international immigration. These studies define the labor queue as a process of ordered elements that can have consequences on labor market segregation (Waldinger and Lichter 2003, Waters 1999).

While studies have made great strides towards uncovering the elements that drive employer preferences and the ethnic composition of the labor force, because they focus almost exclusively on the self-reported views of employers and supervisors, they have been restricted in their ability to show how different groups of workers are sorted into a labor hierarchy and the effects of this process. Furthermore, in spite of the appealing metaphorical nature of "labor queues," no study has employed this approach to examine the changing composition of the labor

force in areas with a high concentration of African Americans and a new influx of low-skilled immigration (i.e. “new immigrant destinations”). Since studies have shown that employers use labor queues when selecting immigrants over native-born workers in regions with a longstanding history of immigration (Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991), the notion of the labor queue seems central to examine the effects of immigrant incorporation in new destinations.

In this paper, I suggest that labor queues offer a unique approach to understanding the sorting mechanisms at play in producing racial segregation in employment and in the changing composition of the labor force in new immigrant destinations. I focus on how workers are selected prior to hiring and how they are driven out of their jobs. Surprisingly, almost no study examines how workers are sorted into hiring queues at the pre-hire stage (Fernandez and Mors 2008). Moreover, most studies focus on the process by which workers are sorted into labor queues and do not take into account job queues. I examine both *labor* and *job* queues and their influence on labor outcomes. The labor market is driven by both labor queues (employers’ ranking of workers) and job queues (workers’ ranking of jobs) and any analysis that only includes one side of this issue is, by definition, incomplete.

I use Reskin and Roos’ notion that the labor market involves not only labor queues but also job queues. The model “sees occupational composition as the result of a dual-queuing process: labor queues order groups of workers in terms of their attractiveness to employers, and job queues rank jobs in terms of their attractiveness to workers” (Reskin and Roos, 1990 p. 29). I pose that identifying how employers order workers within labor queues and how workers rank occupations within job queues tells one part of the story of how jobs traditionally held by less educated native-born workers become immigrant jobs. The notion of hiring queues/job queues is

of particular importance if we take into account how employer and worker queues change to provide some groups with jobs while excluding others in the process.

DATA AND METHODS

Site Selection

This research relies on data drawn from a larger study on the incorporation of Latino immigrants in the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson (GSP) region of South Carolina. The Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson (GSA) region of South Carolina is a unique site for this investigation for several reasons. First, just as much like the rest of the South, the growth of the Latino population in the region has been quite rapid and dramatic. According to the US Census, the Latino population in Greenville County alone grew by 362 percent in the last decade (from 3,137 to 14,484). Next, the region provides a context that has not experienced massive immigration since the 19th century, and consequently maintained a longstanding black and white racial demarcation. Most importantly, however, the region has experienced a rapid transformation from an almost exclusively black and white area into a black-white-Latino context in the course of a single decade.

Analytical Strategies

I employ a multi-method approach that includes field notes from twelve months of sustained participant observation and interviews with Latino immigrants. Sustained participant observation research allowed me to unobtrusively observe and document the processes and mechanisms of social phenomena of interest (Emerson et al. 1995, Lofland et al. 2006). In the case of immigration research, studying processes and mechanisms is often more important than studying outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). However, processes and mechanisms are difficult to unveil using conventional research techniques. One reason why this is the case is because newcomer attitudes and behaviors change over time –often without actors perceiving

this change. In addition, attitudes and behaviors are difficult to survey as they are situational and context specific. Participant observation enabled me to document attitudes and behaviors, in a naturalistic manner, as they were expressed in specific situations over a sustained period of time.

I used a modality of participant observations that involves working alongside community members in order to study a specific issue, such as racial/ethnic attitudes and behaviors (McDermott, 2006). I conducted two different variations of this type of participant observation. One involved situations in which people knew my identity. The second involved situations in which I concealed it. To people with whom I established any relationship beyond the most casual, I introduced myself as a doctoral student in Sociology working on my dissertation. Additionally, I revealed the general purpose of my research to people with whom I had close relationships and to all subjects that I interviewed. With gatekeepers such as employers and supervisors, however, I limited my disclosure. I told them I was a doctoral student studying the growth and transformation of middle size communities in the South. The sensitive nature of studying race and ethnic relations precluded me from revealing the subject of my research. With random acquaintances, I conducted myself as a newly arrived immigrant from California to the South. I found that this role did not interfere with gaining an insider perspective as many Latinos are moving from other parts of the United States into medium-size Southern cities to capitalize on their bilingual skills in the rapidly growing Latino markets. Not fully disclosing my identity as an observer with casual acquaintances allowed me to document the subtleties of participants' attitudes. Crosby, Bromley and Saxe (1980) note that if people do not know that they are being observed or measured, they are more likely to behave in accordance with their attitudes.

Adding to my participant observation research, I conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with a sample of approximately 120 Latino immigrant workers and community

leaders during the last two months at the research site. I selected the sample using two different methods. In half of my cases, I used a snowball or chain referral strategy. I recruited the remaining half while visiting publicly accessible establishments (e.g. laundromats, restaurants, and community centers) located in different census tracts with an identified Hispanic population, and selecting participants from the occupants. The interviews included open-ended and survey type questions previously tested in large studies on context of reception, assimilation, and race and ethnic relations. The average interview time was an hour and twenty minutes. Following Stanford's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, I asked participants for consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded prior to the beginning of each interview. In an effort to protect participants' identity, I assigned a numerical identifier to each interview and permanently deleted all personal information that could be used to trace the identity of the respondents and names of places in their responses.

My purpose for conducting these interviews was two-fold. First, they gave me access to cases not represented in the population with which I came into frequent contact, such as highly assimilated Latino immigrants –employing what Glasser and Strauss call theoretical sampling (1967, 45-77). Second, it allowed me to check my observations against the self-reported views of co-workers and other members of the community that I had been observing throughout the year. I purposefully scheduled the interviews to occur at the end of my time at the research site as a strategy to maintain role consistency. Stepping out of my immigrant worker/community member role to take a researcher role would have unnecessarily influenced respondents' behaviors. This concern was validated once I started interviewing people I had seen on a daily basis in different contexts.

For this article, I draw primarily from sustained participant observations conducted while working as a production supervisor at a manufacturing facility of industrial equipment, which participants refer to as “the plant.” I found this entry-level job through a neighbor and informant who brought to my attention an announcement in the Spanish language newspaper for a bilingual production supervisor position in this plant. I was charged with starting a “Mexican enclave,” as the plant’s manager called it, and running a complex production line with a crew of primarily Mexican (male) workers. During a period of seven months, I worked an eight-hour day shift of five days a week at this plant. My job was to train workers and cover for them on the assembly line while they were on breaks, during periods of exhaustion, or emergencies.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The Changing Composition of the Labor Force

Changes in the ethnic composition of the workforce resulted from a strategic plan devised by management⁴ to replace existing temporary workers, primarily African American, with Latino immigrant workers. The process of replacing black workers with immigrant workers began on the graveyard shift and followed a gradual process that included swing and day shifts. Managers and supervisors wanted to create “enclaves” of Mexican workers as part of a replacement process. During hiring discussions, managers and supervisors refer to these “enclaves” as “the project.”

A temporary employment agency, “WorkPower,”⁵ handled the recruiting and hiring of the Hispanic workers for the replacement. This is not surprising given that, with the exception of the Latino supervisors, most of the Hispanic workers at this plant were unauthorized. These workers were not considered “plant” employees but rather WorkPower employees, diverting the risk of

⁴ Managers or “employers” were primarily white males in senior positions

⁵ “WorkPower” is a pseudonym for this temporary agency. Immigrant workers hired during this investigation – including supervisors— were hired through this agency and were not considered “plant” employees.

hiring unauthorized workers from an established industrial company to a small employment agency. A Hispanic recruiter working for the agency described the “the project” as follows:

They [employers] are adding a new ‘project.’ They [employers] started with a team [of Hispanics] on third shift, then with a team on second shift and now they want to start a team on first shift and possibly add one more on third shift. I am having a hard time finding people to fill in the positions on the different shifts. You know that many of ‘our’ people want to work but they don’t have ‘good’ papers.

In spite of the difficulty finding workers with “good” papers, the graveyard shift changed from being 60 percent black and 40 percent white to being almost 70 percent Latino, 20 percent black and 10 percent white over two months. Day shift was the last and the most difficult to change because, according to participants, “day shift is the hardest.” The bulk of the orders are built during the day shift. The assembly line moves at a faster pace and the most complicated parts are made during this shift. Additionally, while workers on graveyard and swing shifts are not under the constant surveillance of managers, engineers, and supervisors, workers on the day shift have constant supervision from the top managerial levels. Consequently, day shift workers are exposed to more changes in the organization of work. The relative stability of the day shift schedule, however, resulted in a workforce of veteran employees too tired to comply with increasing demands in the work schedule. Many of the workers knew the production process in their areas better than the managers and engineers yet years of working in repetitive, menial and often dangerous tasks made them keenly aware of the long-term effects of factory work and skeptical of employers’ demands. Long-term relationships and experience on the job tilted the locus of control of the production process towards these workers, making them ideal targets for replacement –workers that were too powerful represented a threat to employers. Although employers recurrently emphasized that they were “not targeting anybody,” that they were only

“weeding out” the bad workers, workers with “the wrong attitudes” or recurrent absenteeism and only temporary workers.

Using a temporary hiring agency, WorkPower, employers hired immigrant workers as replacements for first shift in a way that attracted minimal reaction from plant workers. The process of replacement began in an isolated corner in the plant, “Section 24.” The area employed about 16 workers and one production supervisor. These workers gathered to eat in an isolated and small cafeteria and the rest of the plant had almost no interaction with them. Finding an isolated location to introduce the first group of Hispanic workers was the first step in the process. The next step was to hire a Hispanic bilingual supervisor, “Roberto,” and provide training for him. “Sarah,” a white supervisor running the production line in this area, was tasked with training her replacement, Roberto, in each of the jobs on the line. Roberto reported:

They [employers] told me overnight that I was going to start firing people, most of them black, and that I was going to bring Hispanics to replace them...People didn't like the change at all. They moved the white supervisor that was in my department to a different area...I think...what happens is that the company is in the red and I think someone wanted to outsmart everyone else and decided to bring Hispanics because they know that Hispanics work hard for small pay.

Of note is that Section 24 was mainly staffed with temporary workers. The temporary status of workers proved to be a central factor facilitating the replacement of one ethnic group with another. Further, the race of supervisors and managers proved decisive in the facility and degree to which the labor force changed. Because this area was under the control of white supervisors, a replacement process of native-born workers with Hispanic immigrants happened as fast as the temporary agency could “terminate” old and hire new workers. Consequently, the composition of the labor force in Section 24 was transformed from 80 percent black and 20 percent white to 90 percent Hispanic and 10 percent white. Roberto reported that it was easier for him to replace

workers and build the enclave in this area because the supervisor he replaced “was a white woman and she basically said: ‘here is the line, it’s all yours, you can do whatever you want with it.’” He reported that he “started firing everyone who didn’t want to work, most were blacks.” Roberto’s biggest problem was “getting the staffing agency to send Hispanics in time for him to do the job.” He warned me that it was going to be more difficult in Section 12, my area, because the supervisors were black and so were the workers that reported to them.

Section 12 was the second area on day shift to undergo an ethnic replacement process. While the temporary status of workers and the race of the supervisors continued to play a role in the changing composition of the labor force, the processes in this area were more complex. Section 12 was located at the start of the production line (a critical production stage) and employed from 36 to 42 workers on any given day. To be sure, Section 12 was more visible and larger than (more than double) section 24. Before the replacement process began in section 12, the ethnic composition of the workforce was 80 percent African American (40 percent female, 40 percent male) and 20 percent white (15 percent female, 5 percent male). Two black supervisors (one male, one female) and an assistant (black male) ran this section of the assembly line.

I was the supervisor hired to replace all temporary workers in Section 12 with immigrant workers. The first group under my supervision was a crew of seven Hispanic males (five Mexican, one Puerto Rican, and one naturalized Peruvian). My task was to build a solid Hispanic enclave with “heavy lifters” —“heavy lifters,” the euphemism used by employers and supervisors to refer to male workers. Employers defined the “enclave” as a group of Hispanic people working together as a team under the supervision of a leader, someone who can be an interpreter or translator. Within two months, the composition of the labor force in Section 12 had changed

from 80 percent African American and 20 percent white to 60 percent African American, 20 percent white and 20 percent Hispanic male. Five months later, this area had become 40 percent Hispanic female, 50 percent African American and 10 percent white. What mechanisms contributed to the observed changes in the racial and gender composition of the labor force at this plant? It is to this question that we now turn.

Hiring Queues

A growing body of research supports that principles for allocating workers to jobs based on group characteristics such as race, nativity and gender are central to processes of matching people to jobs (Fernandez and Mors 2008, Waldinger 2003, Waters 2009, Lieberson 1980). These studies additionally show that the notion of a labor queue plays a central role in the changing ethnic and gender composition of the labor force. Consistent with this notion, the process of replacement observed at this plant suggests that employers' prejudgments and stereotypes about different ethnic/racial groups created a system of discrimination that generated a specific rank ordering of workers. Employers held a defined initial hierarchy of ethnic and gender preferences in which native-born white male workers stood at the top, followed by Hispanic male workers, Hispanic female workers, white American females and, at the bottom, native-born African Americans. Hispanic workers were further ranked based on nativity status. Foreign-born Hispanics were preferred to native-born Hispanics. And Hispanics with a tenuous legal status were the most favored of all Hispanic immigrants. Following cognitive maps of where different groups fit in the hiring queue, employers hired Hispanic workers to replace white and black workers.

When employers talked about Hispanics they always referred to them as "hard workers," "reliable" and "dependable." The idea that Hispanics are perceived as reliable and dependable

finds support in other studies (Waters 1999, Waldinger, 1996). Taken at face value, these descriptions appear to reflect employers' concerns with productivity. Zamudio and Lichter (2008), however, rightly point out that "this is a productivity derived from pure exploitation, not one rooted in a skilled workforce as commonly understood." While there is no doubt that in this case employers wanted to maximize productivity, objective differences in skill levels favored non-immigrant workers yet excluded them from this internal labor market. To be sure, immigrant workers had little or no experience in manufacturing and, with the exception of supervisors, spoke no English. In contrast, most native-born workers had several months of experience on the job and could communicate without reliance on interpreters. This suggests that the dominant criteria influencing the labor queue were not objective differences but rather subjective characteristics framed as objective. Attributes such as vulnerability, compliance and disposition to submit to managerial control made workers more attractive as replacements. A Hispanic recruiter at WorkPower portrays the tension between racial/ethnic prejudgments and notions of productivity:

The factory is a rough place, and you are going to face resistance from some of the people that have been there for a long time. Many of them think that their jobs are secure...but the company cares about "the numbers" and wants people that can be fast and highly productive. The company really likes hiring Hispanics. They know that our people are here to work hard...they like that Hispanics are always on time for work and that they are rarely absent...you know how...if they are going to be absent they call and tell you straightforwardly why they can't make it... but they tell you. Hispanics are dependable and reliable and the company likes that.

In addition to its literal meaning, "working hard" in this context meant that immigrant workers complied more easily and affably with unreasonable demands in the organization of work. Employers believed that they "had a lot of people issues" and that they needed "to work on weeding out those people who arrive late to work, who show up when they want, who don't want

to work hard...” But they also believed that it was important “to do it one at the time.” Employers explicit instructions for building a “Mexican enclave” were: “you decide if you want to bring one person at the time or two people at the time, it doesn’t matter how long it takes, we are going to do it at your own pace.” The first workers to “terminate” were temporary workers. This process simply involved a call from the temporary agency telling workers they no longer needed their services. Although employers continuously stated that they just wanted to replace temporary workers, their goal was to “eliminate” people who were “not working hard.” As the perception of people who did not want to work hard also included people who were not temporary workers, the strategy for this purpose was more sophisticated. They instituted a program to apparently “eliminate six jobs to save hundredths” by increasing the speed of the production line—which gave workers less time to complete their tasks—and by adding tasks to existing jobs. This strategy included training some supervisors and gaining their buy-in to “eliminate” positions that were “only half-jobs.” Another strategy was to dissolve social cliques by dispersing workers in different areas of the plant or by introducing Hispanic males in groups of black males or Hispanic females in groups of native-born female workers. Finally, supervisors also assigned workers to jobs that were dangerous or unpleasant. Typical example was a job that involved cleaning with concentrated alcohol. The alcohol fumes made workers nauseous and only a few people lasted an entire shift in this job.

Strategies that increased demands on native-born workers such as increasing the speed of the line or adding tasks to their jobs, created antagonism. It was common to hear from non-immigrant workers: “They don’t pay us that much to ask us to do more. I don’t have no time for more work.” Many workers opted for calling in sick and not going to work. Kesha, the black female supervisor in charge of female workers in section 12 noted: “They are mad, they don’t

like what we are doing. People are saying about the changes ‘I can’t do this.’ Seven people called in sick today [the day after we implemented changes in the line]. Many people didn’t show up to work...they don’t want to do more work.” She also heard people concerned about the stability of their jobs: “people have been calling me, they’re worried about losing their jobs. They tell me: ‘Kesha, don’t let me lose my job.’”

Native-born workers complained and developed “an attitude,” as supervisors call their response, about the increased demands placed on them. Immigrant workers, on the other hand, expressed no complaints about the added work. A Mexican immigrant worker expressed how the changes could be implemented: “It can be done, but with ‘them’ [black workers], it’s very hard. They drop the parts on the floor and leave the wires all tangled.” Kesha often noted, “some temps [Hispanics] do a better job than plant people.” Employers were not surprised that immigrant workers were more acquiescent than native-born workers, as this differential response aligned with their categorization of the different ethnic groups in terms of their ability to work hard.

And while employers stated that they were “not targeting anybody” with their strategies, their behaviors contradicted their claims. They specifically instructed Hispanic supervisors⁶ to hire Hispanic workers as replacements of workers that were being “terminated,” “weeded out” or driven out of their jobs (I expand this idea later in this paper). Further, while positions for bottom level jobs at the plant were advertised in local Spanish language newspapers, no positions were advertised in the local English language newspapers. These examples clearly illustrate employers’ preference for Hispanics in their workforce. Additionally, social characteristics such as the tenuous legal status of many members of this group played a central role in how

⁶ Of note is that white and black supervisors did not intervene in the hiring of replacement workers. Hispanic supervisors, the hiring agency and the employers handled recruiting and hiring of temporary workers.

immigrant workers positioned themselves over black workers in the labor queue. A Hispanic supervisor reported:

Carla [the bilingual recruiter at WorkPower] told me she has piles of applications from Hispanic men wanting a job but they don't have good papers. We all know that the people that work here are all illegal but we just play fools and ignore that they are. The difference is that these are people who found papers that work for the agency...Carla said that she can't tell the workers to find good papers, she said some times she wanted to tell them but she can't do that.

The tenuous legal status of Hispanic workers not only gave employers more control over Hispanic workers but also over the labor process in general.

Job Queues

Just as ranking of workers shaped labor queues in bottom jobs at this plant, workers rankings of jobs shaped queues. Of note, however, is that there are different elements that contribute to these conceptually distinct notions. That is, while labor queues were influenced by race, nativity and legal status, job queues were heavily influenced by the interplay of race and gender. To begin, the introduction of Hispanic immigrants without creating new jobs had to result in some groups of workers losing their jobs to the newcomers. The data suggests that the interplay of gender and racial dynamics plays a central role in who stays and who leaves when replacement workers are introduced in an organization. In this particular case, Hispanic men and black females exited the organization while black males and Hispanic females stayed. Several ongoing forces drove this change in the ethnic composition of the labor force.

First, black males had many reasons to be concerned about the introduction of Hispanic immigrant workers. The intimidation tactics used by employers (i.e. "giving their jobs away," "weeding out people who don't want to work hard" etc.) made black workers cognizant that they were likely to be replaced. This was because no new jobs were being created yet the Hispanic

workers brought in as replacements were expected to train in jobs currently occupied by black males. Moreover, black men had information on the replacement processes undergoing on graveyard and swing shifts that had heavily impacted black males. Further, black male workers were often the source of complaints to supervisors. Rose, a female worker confronting Darius, the black male supervisor in Section 12, illustrates a typical complaint from females:

What's going to happen when we are building "simple units?" Are those guys [black men] going to be standing around without doing nothing? Darius answered that everyone was supposed to be working the same – either cleaning or helping out. She responded: "Don't get me wrong. I like working, and I don't mind working hard. But you are going to hear us fussing if we are working our butts off and other people are just standing around without doing nothing." Then she looked towards me and said: "you know how this place is, you have seen it, there are many people here who do nothing... We don't have time to play games like some people here do.

As noted in the quote, female workers often complained that Darius exempted his friends from doing unpleasant jobs (i.e. sweeping) and gave them advantages such as rotations and breaks. Additionally, there was a generalized sense that Darius "protected" the black male workers as he had strong friendship (and family) ties with the black males in Section 12.

Second, black females (including the supervisor) were more amenable to Hispanic male workers than to black male workers. Black female workers were friendly towards Hispanic males but had a more terse relationship with black males –the three white male workers in their area received little attention from them. Some black females asked that I teach them Spanish to talk to Hispanic male workers and even assisted with their training. Additionally, they considered Hispanic males to be "hard workers," "cool" and that they were doing "a great job." White females were also impressed with Hispanic males: "determined is what they [Mexican workers] are, they need the job and they learn to do it...determination is what these guys have." Women's relationships with black males, on the other hand, appeared to be confrontational. Daeshona, for

example, confronted Darius when he asked her to speed up: “What? You think you’re a big dog today? You are a dog, but you ain’t big.” On a different occasion Kamesha was cursing loudly and Darius stopped her: “Watch your mouth! stop it!” Kamesha snapped back: “What? Are you going to take my job...just like?” Darius yelled: “Shut up! Watch it!” Tisha, another female black worker, explained that a black male worker “aggravated” her and asked him to “go F off, go F off!” More importantly, however, women complained that many of the black males stood around “doing nothing.”

Third, jobs at the factory paid above the minimum wage and were considered appealing not only to immigrant workers but also to native-born workers. In fact, the low cost of rent and general low cost of living in the US South meant that a job as a full-time assembly worker at the factory allowed people to make ends meet. The data suggests that black male workers had less employment alternatives than any other group, creating incentives for them to save their jobs. Two elements are salient. First, many of the black male workers at this plant, including Darius, had a criminal background that limited their access to job opportunities. Darius explained why he did not apply for a supervisory job at a prestigious factory:

“They won’t take me...see...I have a criminal record...they don’t take people with criminal records...I’ve tried many places...but, no, they don’t take people like me. There are no second chances for people like me. The only way to clear my record is getting a pardon from the Governor. I’ve written... but he never answers my letters. I’ve been thinking about writing to Oprah, I want someone to listen my story and see if I can do something. I got this job because they were taking everybody who applied”

Others felt limited in their skills and education: “I don’t know anything else to do.”

Consequently, black male workers resorted to strategies to drive Hispanic immigrant males, their strongest competitors in the labor queue, out of this labor market. One common strategy was refusing to train them. For example, I was asked to place a Hispanic male for

training in a tight black male clique that employers wanted to dissolve. A black worker reacted: “Put him somewhere else, I don’t want him here! He’s like a little baby, you need to do things for him, I don’t want to load the motors for him...I need muscle here!” While this type of resistance is not uncommon in shop-floor dynamics, a more interesting reaction involved complaints about lack of Hispanic competence for the job using attributes often associated with African American workers. Black male workers complained that Hispanic males had “an attitude,” and that they were “not cutting it.” Black workers complained that Hispanic males expected to be given preferential treatment. Complaints from black male supervisors sounded like: “he has to do it the same way everyone does it, they are all the same!” To this type of claims Hispanic males typically responded: “I am going back to keep working. I don’t want the supervisor to think that I don’t want to do the job. Tell him that I don’t do that job on graveyard shift...that’s why I am falling behind.” Furthermore, when placed to train with black workers, Hispanic males often suffered mild injuries such as times when a black co-worker “accidentally” dropped a motor on a Hispanic male’s thumb or a wooden crate on a Hispanic’s foot. While terse interactions with male co-workers are one attempt to influence Hispanics’ decision to drop out of the labor queue, it was not sufficient to drive Hispanic males out of this labor market.

In contrast to black males, the job at the plant was not the highest ranked in Hispanic males’ queue for multiple reasons. First, male Hispanics had access to jobs in other booming industries such as construction. Jobs in construction paid a higher salary than assembly work (\$10 per hour compared to \$8.50). Second, Hispanic males had a strong preference for jobs that offered a full-time work schedule with the option of overtime. This preference conflicted with employers’ desire for “flexible” workers. In this context, flexibility in the labor force meant that workers came to work day after day even if they were only paid for four hours of work every

other day of the week. Third, Hispanic males preferred jobs that overlooked their lack of proper work documents, typically jobs where they could keep a low profile and maintain a focus on work. A Hispanic supervisor explained: “Hispanics arrive and focus on their work. If you observe this area (pointing to the people under his supervision) when people are working, nobody talks, but if you observe other areas, it looks as though there is a *fiesta* going.” Not surprisingly, as many of their preferences were unmet, Hispanic males left the jobs.

African American females followed Hispanic males in their exit from the plant but for different reasons. First, black females valued having a black female supervisor. In spite of also having a black male supervisor, many primarily interacted with the female supervisor and other female co-workers inside and outside the plant (i.e. church, children’s school). Second, they appreciated having a certain degree of control in critical sections of the production line. Only a small group of women could build a circuit board that was key to the process. Third, they had established their own rules for breaks, rotations and scheduling. Finally, in spite of the somewhat terse relationships they had with black males, when they were doing jobs in close proximity to black males, they engaged in word games with them to make their jobs more enjoyable. As evidenced by this list, women had some reasons to rank their job at the plant favorably. However, this changed when employers decided to move Kesha, the black female supervisor away from Section 12 and when the social and employment conditions worsened for them.

As managers started “eliminating people” and calling for Hispanic replacements, the temporary agency could not find enough Mexican men to fill the jobs in the different “enclaves” forming in different sections and shifts of the plant. Roberto, the Mexican supervisor in Section 12 complained: “I have only women on the line, I don’t know why the agency is only sending me women.” Marcus, the black manager supervising the replacement process in my area noted

with surprise: “I asked the agency to send me “heavy lifters”...I don’t know if they forgot or...” The temporary agency staff would say, “I got two regulars. They are not Hispanics but they are going to your area [...] Marcus wanted four but this is all we got.” A Hispanic female summarizes the dynamics: “My brother left to get another job because they were sending people home all the time and you know...for men...with children and a family...they need a good job...now we are not even making forty hours. A woman manages...but not men. He got a job in construction and makes \$100 a day...he doesn’t like to be out in the sun but it pays much better.”

With the exit of Hispanic males and under the pressure to replace native-born workers with Hispanics, Hispanic females moved up in the labor queue typically to replace “a guy with two women.” Suggesting a dominance of racial over gender boundaries in the context of job queues, black females did not consider the arrival of Hispanic females a positive. In fact, the presence of Hispanic females as replacements drove black females to rank this job lower in their job queue. Except for a handful of jobs, men or women could perform most jobs on the assembly line. However, Section 12 was clearly segmented along gender lines. The introduction of Hispanic females not only meant that black females had to deal with Hispanic female workers in their groups, but they also had to lose some control of their areas. Black and white females were also expected to train their Hispanic counterparts but refused to do it. They often complained about them not being able to speak English, they delegated cleaning to Hispanic females and obstructed their work to make them fall behind (i.e. leaving wires tangled). Adding to their discomfort, Hispanic females learned the jobs easily and gracefully complied with most demands imposed on them. Black males not only eagerly welcomed Hispanic females but they also befriended them and even engaged in flirtatious behaviors with them. Consequently, as the size of the Hispanic female enclave increased, the number of African American females in the plant

began to decrease. Thus, given their ranking of this job relative to the alternatives available to them, African American women and Hispanic immigrant men were most easily driven out of this labor market.

To conclude, equilibrium was reached as the employers' labor queue aligned with the job queues of black males and Hispanic females. Employers wanted Hispanic males to fill these jobs but these workers were either not available or were pushed out of the market by the dynamics of the workplace and their own expectations. Hispanic females were eager to take these jobs, as they were more limited in their alternatives. To be sure, Hispanic females did not have access to opportunities in higher paying jobs (i.e. construction) and could not risk leaving a "good paying job" once found. Additionally, they enjoyed a positive response from African American men. Therefore, Hispanic females moved higher up in the labor queue as jobs for Hispanics became available, pushing African American females out of the market in the process. Finally, as the size of the Hispanic female group increased and the size of the African American group decreased, this job ranked high in Hispanic females' job queue.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A primary concern of this paper is to address whether immigrant workers are taking jobs away from native-born workers, particularly from African Americans. Undoubtedly, this study provides evidence of a case in which immigrant workers were systematically introduced to replace uneducated African Americans in jobs at the bottom of the labor market, thus changing the ethnic composition of the labor force. As the data suggests, this large factory went from having "only two Hispanic men," more than a decade ago, to becoming more than one third in the course of a year. Specifically, the context from which most observational and interview data for this paper are drawn (Section 12) changed from 80 percent African American and 20 percent

white to 50 percent African American, 40 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent white in the course of seven months. Of note is that Hispanic immigrant workers were not a significant segment of the population in the region prior to employers' recruitment efforts (Dalla and Christensen 2005). Furthermore, finding that immigrants replace African Americans in internal labor markets is particularly relevant because the process of replacing one ethnic group with another has been difficult to document in the academic literature. Yet leaving this discussion as such limits our ability to explain how unskilled, uneducated immigrants appear to be more successful in labor markets than native-born workers in post-industrial societies. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to highlight some of the central mechanisms that contribute to explaining the higher labor force participation of uneducated, unskilled immigrants vis-à-vis relatively more educated native-born African American workers.

In this paper, I make the case that labor and job queues are central in explaining ethnic replacement processes in new immigrant gateways historically organized along black and white racial lines. I suggest that social processes heavily influence the ranking of workers and jobs. I provide evidence of how labor queues are influenced by race and the tenuous legal status of immigrant workers, and how job queues are influenced by the interplay of race, gender and the alternatives available to workers. Workers at the bottom of the labor queue (uneducated, unskilled African Americans) tend to be more negatively impacted by employers' more favorable perception of immigrant workers. The data suggest that some of these perceptions are rooted in stereotypes and prejudgments of different racial/ethnic groups. Employers' notions of preferred workers attributes mask their preference for "subjective" attributes such as being acquiescent, enthusiastic, and eager to work. As noted in this analysis, these perceptions can

drive employers actions to strategically hire immigrant workers as replacements for African American workers.

Additionally, black and white workers also shared perceptions of immigrants as hard working and enthusiastic, yet their response was not homogeneous. Social dynamics in the workplace played in such a way that selected out black females and Hispanic male workers. The remaining workers at the bottom of the labor queue were black males and Hispanic females. These two groups found themselves in bad jobs due to constraints in their ability to secure better jobs elsewhere. I argue that many black males in this context held on to their jobs because a criminal background and limited education and skills prevented them from accessing better jobs –with higher pay and improved working conditions. Hispanic females held their jobs because their tenuous legal status, combined with the gendered nature of higher paid immigrant jobs (i.e. construction), prevented them from taking the risk of leaving an already secured position.

The findings in this study have important implications. For just as employers rank workers, workers themselves rank those with whom they want to work. Inattention to this aspect of internal labor markets ignores critical social dynamics that influence how workers are matched with jobs and, consequently, how the labor force changes. As described in this analysis, when workers at the bottom of the labor queue face the pressure to save their jobs, they do their part to promote the exit of the stronger competitors they are evaluated against. In turn, their actions lead to better opportunities for the strongest incumbents in queues at the bottom of the labor market –possibly promoting human capital development. Further, those who survived the replacement were able to stay in these jobs because they did not represent a threat to one another. Thus, equilibrium of labor and job queues was reached using gender as the organizing principle.

Taking into account notions of inequality, however, this story may not be as victorious as it seems. It is true that many native-born workers, primarily black males and black females, lost their jobs. It is also true that some workers at the bottom of the labor queue (black males) were able to keep their jobs and some of the replaced workers went on to better opportunities. For example, Hispanic males typically moved on to better-paid jobs and some native-born females either went back to school or to care for their children. Yet we need to keep in mind that, while well paid, the jobs at the bottom of the labor queue are difficult, dangerous, and have no mobility ladders. Consequently, reaching equilibrium with incumbents ranked at the bottom of the labor queue implies that the uneducated and unskilled continue to stay trapped in jobs at the bottom of the labor market. Additionally, adding gender, nativity, and legal status to the already hierarchical racial structure of labor queues can only have negative consequences on the rate of participation of uneducated African Americans in labor markets. Specifically, stretching labor queues vertically by adding more incumbents and categories to the top of the queue pressures those at the bottom even further. Thus, it seems from this application of the labor queue notion that introducing immigrants as replacements has the consequence of widening the distance that uneducated, unskilled African American males and Hispanic females have to traverse to gain access to improved employment opportunities.

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