

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 of *how* employer preference translates into changes in the ethnic composition of the labor force. This paper addresses some of the mechanisms that account for these changes and their effects on race and ethnic relations. Using 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 strategy stabilizes the labor queue where workers ranked at the bottom remain trapped in jobs at the bottom of the job queue.

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In spite of the overwhelming focus on employers' economic motivation, the drive to acquire low-cost labor has not alone driven changes in the ethnic composition of the workforce. Social factors such as race and gender stereotypes as well as social networks have been found to influence the hiring of members of one minority group over members of other groups. Wilson (1999), for example, using a representative sample of employers in the Chicago metropolitan area, finds that employers hold negative views about African American inner-city workers and are reluctant to hire them for entry-level jobs. In contrast, Waldinger (1997) shows that positive stereotypes about immigrants give this group an advantage in being selected for entry-level jobs. Other studies underscore the influence of social networks in the changing makeup of the labor force. Waters (1999) suggests that, in addition to stereotypical beliefs, network hiring mechanisms have driven hiring practices in the New York food industry, changing the composition of the workforce from primarily black American men and women and older white women to primarily foreign-born blacks.

While studies show that employers favor immigrant workers over native-born workers and that social networks influence changes in the ethno-racial and gender makeup of the workforce (Wilson 1999, Waters 1999, Waldinger 1997), these relationships have been difficult to document empirically. Documenting labor replacement processes has been problematic in part because 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.

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.

Using an ethnographic approach, I am able to uncover some of the mechanisms that account for changes in the ethnic and gender composition of the labor force. Working as a supervisor at a large manufacturing company for a period of seven months, I was able to unobtrusively and systematically observe the everyday social dynamics that influence how employers favor a specific group. In particular, I observed not only how employers translate racial and gender beliefs into actions but also how workers respond to managerial actions. This research strategy allows me to examine an important, yet unsettled, question in the sociological literature: What are the mechanisms that explain immigrant socioeconomic incorporation in “new immigrant destinations” —regions with little post-1965 immigration experience?

I argue that native-born workers can be replaced by immigrant workers through deliberate efforts by employers, rather than exclusively through market mechanisms. Furthermore, I show how a systematic managerial strategy to replace low-skilled black workers with "enclaves" of unauthorized Mexican immigrants dramatically changed the ethnic composition of a major manufacturing facility. This systematic replacement of black workers with unauthorized immigrants at the factory was, I argue, driven by the interplay of complex mechanisms involving gender and racial beliefs of employers, and was complicated by legal dynamics. These processes, in turn, determine the degree to which the ethnic composition of internal labor markets comes to favor a particular group.

This study contributes to the literature in two different ways. First, it provides concrete evidence concerning how employers’ attitudes and behaviors favoring one ethnic group over another in non-unionized new immigrant destinations contribute to the low employment participation rate of black male workers. Second, this study highlights the ways in which a particular industry transforms from being primarily black and white to becoming black-white-

Latino in the course of a few months. In this way, this research systematically examines the processes that underpin ethno-racial and gender succession and thus provides valuable insights into the future of race and ethnic work relations in “new immigrant destinations.”

THEORY AND RELATED LITERATURE

The literature on hiring practices has focused 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’ rankings 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 for labor market segregation (Waldinger and Lichter 2003, Waters 1999).

Although studies have made important contributions by uncovering some of the factors that drive employers’ preferences and the ethnic composition of the labor force, few studies have examined how workers are sorted into hiring queues at the pre-hire stage (Fernandez and Mors 2008). Using participant observation research I examine how preferred workers are selected prior to hiring and how others are driven out of their jobs based on the strategic actions of employers. Moreover, most studies focus on employers’ preferences and the rankings of workers based on these preferences (“labor queues”) and do not take into account workers’ attitudes and behaviors (“job queues”). I examine both *labor* and *job* queues as they are shaped in the course of daily interactions. The labor market, I argue, is not only driven by labor queues (employers’ rankings of workers) and job queues (workers’ rankings of jobs) but also by the daily actions and

interactions of workers and employers. Any analysis that excludes the influence of these forces is incomplete.

I draw from Reskin and Roos' notion that the labor market involves not only labor queues but also job queues. Their 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). Identifying how employers order workers and how workers rank occupations tells one part of the story of how jobs traditionally held by less-skilled native-born workers become immigrant jobs. The concept of hiring queues/job queues is of particularly important if we take into account how labor and job queues change to provide some groups with jobs while excluding others in the process. This change, I argue, can only be explained by understanding the interaction of hiring and job queues.

THE GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF ETHNO-RACIAL CHANGE

I focus here on the process of labor replacement based on the ethnic and racial characteristics of workers in a manufacturing company in South Carolina, the state with the fastest growth of the immigrant population during the first decade of the 21st century (U.S. Census Bureau 2000 and 2008 estimates). Specifically, I focus on the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson (GSA) region because this region had not experienced much immigration since the 19th century, but is now experiencing growing numbers of Latino immigrants. The growth of the Latino population, primarily from Mexico and Central America, has been dramatic in relation to the growth of the black and white populations in the region. The black and white populations grew by 25 and 15 percent respectively between 1990 and 2006, while the Latino population

grew by 686 percent (from 5,238 to 41,108) during the same period (U.S. Census Bureau 1990, American Community Survey 2006). The growth of the Latino population in South Carolina, a “new immigrant destination,” is important because the region had historically maintained a primarily black and white racial structure but it is now undergoing a process of ethno-racial transformation from a two group to a three group racial structure. Employment is one of the key contexts for this ethno-racial transformation (Kochhar, Suro and Tafoya 2005).

The ethno-racial transformation of many contexts in the South has been tied to processes of economic restructuring and globalization. In the early 1990s, South Carolina followed other regions on the path toward reindustrialization (Odem and Lacy, 2009). Along with heavy manufacturing enterprises, such as Michelin, General Electric and BMW, a lesser-known cadre of parallel industries emerged near the I-85 industrial corridor. Industries such as poultry processing, light industrial manufacturing and construction joined their more prestigious counterparts to capitalize on the low wages and tax incentives characteristic of the region. This reindustrialization of the region together with the weakening of labor unions resulted in an increasingly segmented labor market with skilled professionals at the top and flexible, low-wage, workers at the bottom. Initially, workers in low-skilled jobs were poor whites and blacks, but Latino immigrants have become an attractive source of labor in the South since the early 1990s -- often competing with African Americans and poor whites for jobs (Donato, 2008).

A VIEW FROM THE SHOP-FLOOR

To understand more fully the nature of these ethno-racial changes I conducted participant observations to unobtrusively observe and document the processes and mechanisms involved in the social phenomena of interest (Emerson et al. 1995, Lofland et al. 2006). However, processes

and mechanisms are difficult to unveil using survey research. One reason why this is the case is because newcomer attitudes and behaviors change over time –often without actors even perceiving such changes. In addition, attitudes and behaviors are difficult to survey as they are situational and context specific, thus hard to capture in questionnaires. Participant observation enabled me to document specific attitudes and behaviors, in a more naturalistic manner, as they were expressed or exhibited in specific situations over a relatively sustained period of time.

Crosby, Bromley and Saxe (1980) note that if people do not know they are being observed or measured, they are more likely to behave in accordance with their attitudes. For this reason, I used targeted participant observation, a method 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 sized communities in the South. The sensitive nature of studying race and ethnic relations precluded me from revealing the actual 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's perspective as many Latinos do move from other parts of the United States to medium-sized Southern cities to capitalize on their bilingual skills in rapidly growing Latino markets. Not fully disclosing my

identity as an observer to casual acquaintances allowed me to document the subtleties of participants' attitudes.

At the conclusion of the ethnographic phase of my research, I conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with a sample of approximately 120 Latino immigrant workers and black and white "key native informants." The interviews allowed me to talk to people about the behaviors I had observed during the ethnographic phase of my research. The average interview lasted an hour and twenty minutes.³

For this article, I draw primarily from sustained participant observations obtained while working as a production supervisor at a manufacturing facility producing industrial equipment, which participants referred to as "the plant." I found an 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. On my first day on the job, 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, five days a week at this plant. My job was to train workers and also to cover for them on the assembly line while they were on breaks, during periods of exhaustion, or emergencies.

THE DYNAMICS OF LABOR REPLACEMENT

In this section, I provide a general overview of the process of labor replacement as it unfolded during the course of seven months in which I worked as a supervisor at "the plant." I follow with an analysis of labor queues and job queues in relation to the dynamics and situations

³ Following Stanford's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, prior to the beginning of each interview I asked participants for consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded. 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 identities of the respondents and names of places in their responses.

I observed on the shop floor. I make the case that these dynamics ultimately shape labor hierarchies and the composition of the labor force.

“The Project”

Changes in the ethnic composition of the workforce resulted from a strategic plan devised by management⁴ to replace existing temporary workers, primarily African Americans, with Latino immigrant workers. The process of replacing black workers with immigrant workers began with 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, “Ready Hands,”⁵ handled the recruiting and hiring of the Hispanic workers for the replacement project. This is not surprising given that, with the exception of the Latino supervisors, most of the Hispanic at this plant were unauthorized workers. These workers were not considered “plant” employees but rather *Ready Hands*’ employees, diverting the risk of 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.

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

⁵ “Ready Hands” is a pseudonym for this temporary agency.

In spite of the difficulty finding workers with “good” papers, the graveyard shift remarkably changed from being 60 percent black and 40 percent white to nearly 70 percent Latino, 20 percent black and 10 percent white over a two-month period. The day shift was the last and the most difficult to change because, according to participants, “the 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. In addition, while workers on graveyard and swing shifts are not under the constant surveillance of managers, engineers, and supervisors, workers on the day shift were under constant supervision from the top managerial levels. Consequently, day shift workers were 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 unwilling to comply with increasing workloads in the same work schedule. Many of the workers knew the production process in their areas better than the managers and engineers did, 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 toward these workers, making them ideal targets for replacement –workers that were too powerful because of their experience and skills represented a threat to employers. Although employers recurrently emphasized that they were “not targeting anybody,” they maintained that they were only “weeding out the bad workers,” workers with “the wrong attitudes” or recurrent absentees or only temporary workers.

Using a temporary hiring agency, *Ready Hands*, employers hired immigrant workers as replacements for the 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.” This 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,”⁶ and to provide training for him. “Sarah,” a white supervisor running the production line in this area, was tasked with training her replacement, Roberto, to understand 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.

Section 24 was primarily 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 degree to which the labor force changed. Because this area was under the control of white supervisors, replacing 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

⁶ In order to protect the identity of people in this study, all names are pseudonyms.

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 the 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. 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” – 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. I now turn to the mechanisms that contributed to the observed changes in the racial and gender composition of the labor force at this plant.

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, Lieberman 1980). These studies also 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' 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 distinguished based on nativity status. Foreign-born Hispanics were preferred to native-born Hispanics. And Hispanics with undocumented legal status were the most favored of all Hispanic immigrants. Following preconceived notions 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 is supported by 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 the case addressed in this paper employers wanted to maximize productivity, objective differences in

skill levels favored non-immigrant workers yet excluded them from this internal labor market. Immigrant workers had little or no experience in manufacturing and, with the exception of supervisors, spoke no English. Attributes such as vulnerability, compliance and disposition to submit to managerial control made workers more attractive as replacements. A Hispanic recruiter at *ReadyHands* 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 the unreasonable and increasing 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 a time.” Employers explicit instructions for building a “Mexican enclave” were: “you decide if you want to bring one person at a 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 be “terminated” 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 hundreds” 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. A typical example was a job that involved cleaning with concentrated alcohol. The alcohol fumes made workers nauseated 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 called their responses, about the increased demands placed on them. Immigrant workers, on the other hand, did not express complaints about the added work. A Mexican immigrant worker commented on

prospects for changes: “It can be done, but with ‘them’ [black workers], it’s very hard. They drop the parts on the floor and make a mess in the machines.” 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 these claims. They specifically instructed Hispanic supervisors⁷ to hire Hispanic workers as replacements for workers that were being “terminated,” “weeded out” or driven out of their jobs. 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’ preferences for having Hispanics in their workforce. Social characteristics such as the tenuous legal status of many members of this group also played a central role in how immigrant workers positioned themselves over black workers in the labor queue. A Hispanic supervisor reported:

Carla [the bilingual recruiter at *Ready Hands*] 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.

Employers and supervisors used the undocumented status of immigrant workers to gain more control over Hispanic immigrant workers and over the labor process.

⁷ 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 the recruiting and hiring of temporary workers.

Job Queues

Just as the ranking of workers shaped labor queues in bottom jobs at this plant, how workers ranked jobs also shaped queues. Different elements contribute to these conceptually distinct queues. While labor queues were influenced by race, nativity and legal status of workers, job queues were heavily influenced by the interplay of race and gender. The introduction of Hispanic immigrants into the plant without creating new jobs had to result in some groups of workers losing their jobs to the newcomers. My data suggest that the interplay of gender and racial dynamics plays a central role in who stays and who leaves when replacement workers are first introduced into an organization. At this plant, 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 were informed about the replacement processes going on for the graveyard and swing shifts that had heavily impacted black males. Further, black male workers were often the source of complaints to supervisors. 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. 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.

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. 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 South meant that a job as a full-time assembly worker at the factory allowed people to make ends meet. During informal interviews, I found that black male workers had fewer 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 also felt limited in their skills and education and often reiterated: "I don't know anything else to do."

Facing few alternatives, 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 parts 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 such claims Hispanic males typically responded: “I am going back to my station 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 with black workers for training, Hispanic males often suffered mild injuries such as the time when a black co-worker “accidentally” dropped a heavy tool 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’ decisions 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 on.” 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 schools, etc.). 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 wife 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 resented the arrival of Hispanic females to the shop floor. 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, they also had to lose some control of their areas. Black and white females were 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., dropping parts on the floor and tinkering with the machines). Adding to their discomfort, Hispanic females learned the jobs and 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, employers' preferences resulted in keeping workers with fewer alternatives in jobs at the bottom of the labor market. 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 available to take these jobs, as they were more limited in their alternatives. 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. In addition, they felt supported by the 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

Undoubtedly, this research provides evidence of a case in which employers' systematically introduced immigrant workers to replace low-skilled African Americans in jobs at the bottom of the labor market, thus changing the ethnic composition of the labor force. As the data show, this large factory went from having only two Hispanic workers more than a decade ago, to having one-third of its labor force being Hispanic 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 the 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. In the past, our ability to explain how less-skilled immigrants are more successful in labor markets than native-born workers in post-industrial societies has been limited. 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 immigrants vis-à-vis relatively more skilled native-born African American workers.

I make the case that the social dynamics that shape 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 such as racial and gender relations heavily influence the ranking of workers and jobs. I provide evidence concerning how labor queues are influenced by race, the undocumented status of immigrant workers as well as the criminalization of black 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 (less-skilled African Americans) tend to be more negatively affected by employers' more favorable perceptions of immigrant workers.

Black and white workers also shared perceptions of immigrants as hard working and enthusiastic, yet their responses were not homogeneous. Black females and Hispanic male workers were eliminated over time, leaving black males and Hispanic females at the bottom. These two groups found themselves locked into undesirable jobs due to constraints on their ability to secure better jobs elsewhere. I found that many black males in this context held on to their jobs because of issues such as possessing a criminal background, having low levels of formal education and skills which prevented them from accessing better jobs –with higher pay

and improved working conditions. Hispanic females held onto 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 secure position.

The findings from my research have important implications. 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 workplace 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 against which they are evaluated. 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 process were able to stay in these jobs because they did not represent a threat to one another.

Taking into account notions of inequality, this story is even more daunting. 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 to better-paid jobs and some native-born females either went back to school or stayed home 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 an equilibrium with incumbents ranked at the bottom of the labor queue implies that workers with lower levels of education continue to stay trapped in jobs at the bottom of the labor market. Adding gender, nativity, and legal status to the already hierarchical racial

structure of labor queues can only have negative consequences for the rate of participation of less-skilled African Americans in such 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 more. Thus, it seems that strategically introducing immigrants as replacements has the consequence of widening the distance that African American males and Hispanic females have to traverse to gain access to improved employment opportunities and eventually better access to resources and paths to mobility.

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