Immigration is again center stage in this country's political debates. In an ever more globalized economy, large inflows of newcomers from abroad inevitably spawn multiple challenges and opportunities that can't be fully understood without a solid economic and historical perspective. This is nowhere more apparent today than in Brooklyn's fast-changing Sunset Park neighborhood.

In her new book, Making A Global Immigrant Neighborhood: Brooklyn’s Sunset Park, Tarry Hum focuses on an urbanologist’s lens on the streets where she herself grew up, viewing the area as a perfect test case of how immigration has reshaped large swaths of the city.

CUNY Graduate Center, organizes this study into six core chapters: first, she explains how global economic integration and neoliberal policies shape immigrant communities while intensifying urban inequalities. The second chapter analyzes the history and evolution of Sunset Park from a white industrial working-class neighborhood to a vibrant and diverse community bustling with new immigrant businesses. The third chapter focuses on the decline of Sunset Park’s manufacturing and port industries and the consequences for immigrant workers and local development. Then the author turns to closely examine the area’s seemingly paradoxical pattern of attracting high volumes of capital and bank investment yet remaining a largely working- poor community. The fifth chapter documents the community’s concerns over gentrification and local people’s largely frustrated attempts to seriously influence these policies. Hum’s concluding chapter considers the prospects for a postindustrial urban revival in Sunset Park.

Hum criticizes the effect of neoliberal policies on this evolving job market. She believes that deregulation and de-unionization has led to more degraded working conditions in which mostly low-income immigrant workers must contend with underpaid, benefit-free and often unsafe jobs. I believe that this argument deserves special close attention, since most people today seem to think of globalization as a largely positive result of capitalism. However, this may not be the case as it could be one of the causes of our economic problems and inequality.

Chapter four addresses the seeming paradox today of large capital investment flowing into Brooklyn’s Sunset Park, without much evident impacts on its high level of local poverty. Hum usefully spotlights the effects of ethnic banks in explaining this. An ethnic bank is one created by a foreign entity – in Sunset Park mostly by Chinese and Puerto Rican investors – who can better connect with the co-ethnic immigrants here who have limited English-language fluency. These banks advertise that they are there to help the community and emphasize that they speak their language and language fluency. These banks are more personal. Tarry Hum argues that the banks are not truly there to help, but to working class families in search of their first homes. This is driving on the streets where she herself grew up, viewing the area as a perfect test case of how immigration has reshaped large swaths of the city.

In the following chapter, Hum focuses on the garment industry in Brooklyn’s Sunset Park and why it is now on the decline. She argues that in the age of globalization, companies no longer have incentives to keep manufacturing of garment production in the U.S. because of the our labor and environmental standards. Instead, companies send manufacturing to countries in which they pass the blame for unsafe working conditions onto the foreign companies. This creates competitive pressures to a drop work standards of American garment manufacturing, as well as to cut pay and benefits. This further deepening the city’s inequality as Asian immigrants have come to dominate lower skilled jobs in the garment industry. New York’s surviving garment industry is transitioning into a bimodal job structure: a small number of highly skilled designers at the top, below which are predominantly low-skill service and retail employees. Garments are mostly assembled overseas and transferred to the city to be sold in various locations. The net result is mostly less productive and lower income jobs, and growing inequality.

Proponents of this “new” Sunset Park defend this process as being the area up to a higher standard as a postindustrial zone, appropriate to the age of globalization. Chapter 6 examines what a postindustrial Sunset Park could or should be. The author begins by focusing on two industries, power plants and trash disposal, which are negatively affecting the local environment. She argues that as much of New York City’s trash is deposited in Sunset Park, it threatens to harm the environment and hinder progress toward its revitalization. The issue is that New York City is a densely populated urban area and requires these services. People in areas like Sunset Park offer cheap labor and limited political power to fend off development locally of such potentially hazardous facilities.

In the book opens with a history of how globalization has created and reshaped immigrant communities. Up through the 1950s, manufacturing and related port businesses still dominated New York City’s labor market. The city boasted nearly a million jobs in the garment trades, printing, food production, longshore and the like, more than any other place in the country. And it was through these jobs and their strong unions that the largely White-European immigrant working class of the time earned the higher wages and benefits that dramatically lowered postwar inequality. However, in the 1960s the U.S. economy began the historic industrial shift from manufacturing to services. As global competition intensified, our businesses began to offshore jobs to other countries with cheaper labor cost. According to Hum, this was the most important force behind the rise of immigrant neighborhoods and the worsening of the city’s economic inequalities. The postwar rise of Puerto Rican migration happened to coincide with the shrinkage of manufacturing job vacancies. Unable to move into the vanishing blue-collar jobs of retiring European immigrants and without the language or educational skills required for middle-income public or private sector service jobs, most Puerto Ricans were left with only low-wage, low-skill service job options.

This commercial real estate is creating a boom for better-positioned properties. By the end of Making A Global Immigrant Neighborhood, its tight focus on a single neighborhood in western Brooklyn makes a reader far more aware of the wide-ranging forces shaping current immigration and urban development. The book raises troubling questions about the ongoing impacts of globalization and neo-liberal economic policies that disadvantage low-income immigrant communities. She shows how the forces sweeping through communities like Sunset Park are widening already large income gaps between rich, middle income and poor residents. How such affected communities respond to these mounting pressures will determine the contours of 21st Century urban development.

**Book Review**

*Making A Global Immigrant Neighborhood: Brooklyn’s Sunset Park, by Tarry Hum*


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