

## Job Growth and Displacement in Immigrant Brooklyn

*Making A Global Immigrant Neighborhood: Brooklyn's Sunset Park*, by Tarry Hum  
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.

Reviewed by Anthony Ferrufino

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 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.

The author, a professor of Urban Studies at Queen's College and the 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 rezoning 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.

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, longshoring 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.

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 demands especially 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.

In chapter two, Hum lays out the historical context of the shift from European immigrant labor to Latin American immigrant labor. She argues that the peak turn-of-the-century immigration from southern and eastern Europe created a surplus of labor, sparking the ethnocentric campaign that passed the 1924 National Origins Act. Its origin country quotas that sharply limited admissions to the U.S. from all parts of the world except northern and western Europe. After World War II, a new impetus to emigration from Puerto Rico was created when mainland companies took advantage of federal tax incentives to outsource more jobs to Puerto Rico for cheap labor and import "duty-free." This began the commonwealth's transformation from an agricultural to a manufacturing economy. Those who could not find jobs on the island flocked to the United States for work. Puerto Ricans had the advantages of being U.S. citizens and living relatively close by, as affordable air travel became available between the Island and New York. But unlike earlier immigrants who arrived at a time when there was urban expansion and ample factory job vacancies, Puerto Ricans arrived in a time of transition when far fewer manufacturing jobs were available and there were growing gaps between the high skilled jobs and low-income jobs. I believe that this is the reason why we see that Europeans who came here earlier as immigrants are not marginalized as much as Latin Americans.

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 is 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.

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 are more personal. Tarry Hum argues that the banks are not truly in Sunset Park to help the broader community to afford homes or foster community growth. Instead these banks are focusing on commercial loans and high-end real estate. City Hall's policies aiding new investment reflect the trickle-down economic approach that have not worked in the past. This is because, even if there are high capital investments in these low income neighborhoods, the capital is mainly going to the wealthy people who can afford to build large commercial buildings and luxury residences rather than to working class families in search of their first homes.

This commercial real estate is creating a boom for better-positioned segments of the community but is leaving the low-income people behind. Chapter 5 argues against this process of gentrification,

in which communities are being built up and people are being displaced. The issue is not that gentrification is occurring but rather that it is occurring without the consent of most community members. In Sunset Park the government is allowing gentrification without adjusting for displacement of people who can no longer afford to live in the newer up scale neighborhood. This is driving out people from affordable housing to lower-income areas that they can afford.

Proponents of this "new" Sunset Park defend this process as bringing 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 placement locally of such potentially hazardous facilities.

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 neoliberal 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.

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