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Persistent Polarization in New York's Workforce: New Findings of Segmentation by Race, Gender and Nativity

by Tarry Hum

The current economic recession has been marked by rising poverty, long-term joblessness, and numerous challenges for economic development policy. A December 2010 Community Service Society Policy Brief, “Unemployment In New York City during the Recession and Early Recovery” provides compelling evidence that young Black men ages 16-24 have endured exceptionally high unemployment rates, exacerbating an alarming level of detachment from the formal labor market. On the other hand, New York City is purported to lead the state and the nation in economic recovery as the private sector has steadily added jobs. In his 2011 *State of the City* address, Mayor Michael Bloomberg touted New York City's addition of 51,000 private sector jobs in the past year, in industries with average annual earnings of \$35,000 to \$92,000.¹ New York City represents one of the country's largest urban labor markets but the economic fortunes of New Yorkers are still sharply divided by race, gender, and nativity.

This paper examines recent Census Bureau data on the New York City private sector labor force to

provide a profile of labor force participation rates, industry and occupational niches, and average earnings by race, gender, and nativity. While the historic sociospatial divide between urban and suburban is slowly eroding due to immigrant settlement near employment opportunities,² labor market segmentation by race and nativity persists in New York City and anchors heightening patterns of income and wealth inequality (Parrott 2011). As the most economically polarized city in the United States, New York City's urban labor market is defined by stark patterns in industry and occupational niches. The persistence of a racially segmented labor market should inform policy strategies for economic recovery and growth that advance fairness and equity for all New Yorkers.

Profile of the City's Current Labor Force

In order to provide a detailed profile of New York City's labor force by race, gender, and nativity groups, this paper utilizes the 2006--2008 American Community Survey data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. The ACS replaces the “long form” portion of the decennial census and is conducted annually based on a nationwide sample size of one

in 40 American households. The ACS provides 1, 3, and 5 year period estimates which represent the average population and housing characteristics over the data collection period. The analysis presented in this paper is based on the 2006-2008 ACS and represents data averages for the period January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2008.

Race and nativity are important qualities that distinguish New York City's urban labor force. New York City's urban labor force is racially diverse with a majority 60% who are non-White and heavily immigrant as nearly one in two (47%) workers is foreign-born. Reflecting immigration trends, 59% of Latino New Yorkers and an astounding 87% of Asian New Yorkers in the labor force is foreign-born. Moreover, virtually one in every two Black New Yorkers (47%) in the labor force is also an immigrant. While it is not surprising that immigration drives labor force participation patterns among Asians, Latinos, and Blacks, it is notable that a full 25% of Non-Hispanic White New Yorkers in the labor force is also foreign-born.

Labor Force Participation and Employment Sectors

There is significant variation in the labor force participation rates of New Yorkers based on race, nativity, and gender. Immigrant Blacks and Latinos participate in the labor market at a much higher rate than any other race and nativity group. In fact, the differential labor force participation rates for

immigrants relative to native-born compatriots are striking among Black and Latino New Yorkers. While the labor force participation rates for immigrant Latinos and Blacks in particular are high at 68% and 71% respectively, their native-born compatriots participate in the urban labor market at a rate well below the city average. While there is virtually no difference in the labor force participation rates of Asians based on nativity, this was not the case for non-Hispanic Whites whose immigrant population participates at a notably lower rate than their native-born compatriots.

The double-digit unemployment rates for native-born Blacks and Latinos show that even before the full impact of the 2008 economic recession; joblessness was reaching a crisis level in these communities. The average citywide unemployment rate for 2006-2008 stood at 7%; however, it is notable how racial-nativity groups deviate from this average. While the unemployment rate for non-Hispanic Whites was slightly lower, Asians, particularly those who are native born, had a slightly higher unemployment rate at 8%. Recent media coverage of the longer duration of unemployment for Asian Americans relative to other racial groups suggests that long held assumptions of Asian economic success need further investigation.³

Two-thirds of employed New Yorkers work in the private sector. Asians regardless of nativity status and immigrant Latinos are relatively more

concentrated in the private sector. While 15% of New Yorkers are employed in the public or governmental sector, the share of Blacks especially native-born Blacks is nearly double at 29%. Interestingly, the public sector is also an important source of employment for Black immigrants but this is less so for Asian and Latino immigrant groups. A compelling aspect of New York City's economy is immigrant entrepreneurship and this profile does indicate high rates of self-employment for immigrant Asians (12%) and Latinos (10%) compared to their native-born compatriots.⁴ The group with the highest self-employment rate is non-Hispanic Whites, in particular, immigrant non-Hispanic Whites with a self-employment rate of 16%.

Industry and Occupation Niches

New Yorkers employed in the private sector are concentrated in one of five industries – professional or financial services, retail, medical services, and entertainment (which includes some food services as well as arts institutions and recreational activities). These five industry sectors collectively employ 64% of New York City's private sector workforce. On average, private sector workers earn \$50,000 but there are significant earnings differentials by industry lending evidence to a bifurcated service economy. While those employed in professional and financial services have average earnings that exceed the city-wide average, workers

employed in retail, medical services, and food, accommodations and recreation have earnings that range from \$28,000 to \$39,000 – well below the city-wide average. Moreover, these industries are differentiated by race and nativity.

Among New Yorkers employed in the private sector, race is a key differentiating factor in their industry location. This is evident upon an examination of the racial composition of the top five industries where New York City private sectors are concentrated. Approximately one in two New Yorkers employed in professional (48%) and financial (51%) services is Non-Hispanic White, while New Yorkers heavily concentrated in low-income industry sectors such as retail, food, accommodations, and recreation, and medical services are majority workers of color.

Race and nativity are also important qualities that define the occupational niches of New York City workers. For non-Hispanic White New Yorkers employed in the private sector, immigrant status does not factor into the type of job one is likely to have. Office, sales, and management-related employment are key occupations regardless of nativity status for non-Hispanic Whites. In contrast, nativity status is quite significant in differentiating the occupational categories of Black, Asian, and Latino private sector workers. For Black New Yorkers, nearly one in five (16%) immigrant workers is employed in a healthcare related occupation where nearly all are home health aides

while native-born Blacks are more likely to hold office or sales related jobs. Asians regardless of nativity status are concentrated in sales and office related occupations however immigrant Asians are also concentrated in food services and industrial production jobs while their native-born compatriots are more likely to hold a finance or management related job. The occupational patterns of Latino New Yorkers, however, suggest the starkest level of occupational segregation. Aside from transportation jobs (e.g., bus drivers, truck drivers, taxi drivers and chauffeurs), immigrant Latinos are located in different occupational niches than their native-born compatriots. Like many New Yorkers in the private sector, office and retail sales jobs are common sources of employment for native-born Latinos. Immigrant Latinos, on the other hand, stand out as their occupational niches are in food, building services, construction, and industrial production jobs. In fact, these occupations account for nearly half (48%) of the jobs held by immigrant Latinos.

The relative importance of manufacturing as a source of employment, particularly for Asian and Latino immigrant New Yorkers, is quite notable in light of its diminishing presence in the local economic landscape. As of 2008 among immigrant Asians and Latinos, approximately 1 in 10 workers were employed in production-related manufacturing jobs. This finding underscores the urgency of strengthening industrial retention policies and programs in New York City (Crean 2011).

Gender matters in labor market outcomes. Women are concentrated in non-managerial office occupations where the most common jobs are as secretaries and administrative assistants, customer service representatives, receptionists, and bookkeepers. While sales jobs are an important occupational niche for both men and women, 56% of women in sales occupations work as a cashier or retail salespersons. Men employed in sales, on the other hand, are concentrated as supervisors or in securities, commodities and financial services sales. These differential niches may be a factor in the significant difference in the average earnings for men and women in sales occupations. While transportation and construction occupations figure prominently for men, healthcare support and personal services are important sources of employment for women, and are consistent with a gendered division of labor.

Table 5 lists the top ten occupational categories by race and gender groups. Across racial groups, approximately one in five women employed in the private sector holds a non-managerial office-related occupation. While sales is the next largest female occupational category, this is not the case for Black women who are more likely to be employed as a home health aide. Notably, industrial production employment follows office and sales as a key occupational category for Asian women. Among men, race is a significant factor in differentiating occupational niches. Non-Hispanic White men are the only race-gender group concentrated in

managerial jobs. Food related and transportation occupations are particularly significant for Asian and Latino men who are also heavily concentrated in construction and building services. Similar to female New Yorkers in the private sector, key niches for Black men are non-managerial office and sales occupations in addition to transportation and construction.

By further disaggregating occupational niches by nativity, we find the occupational profile of native-born Asian women is similar to that of their non-Hispanic White peers. In contrast, immigrant Asian women share sizable occupational niches with immigrant Latinas and Black women in personal services and manufacturing jobs. Gendered service employment as caregivers to children, the elderly and sick are especially pronounced for Black immigrant women while many immigrant Latinas labor with their male compatriots in building services as janitors and building cleaners or as maids and housekeeping cleaners.

In addition to race, gender, and nativity, occupational patterns are further differentiated by ethnicity. By disaggregating the occupational categories for NYC's three largest Latino groups – Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans – distinct patterns are evident. Mexicans are heavily concentrated in a handful of occupations related to building services, transportation, food, and construction. These occupational categories account for 61% of Mexican workers in NYC's private

sector labor force. Dominicans are similarly concentrated in building services and transportation related employment but office, sales, and personal services are also important occupational niches. In contrast, office employment is the only concentrated niche for Puerto Ricans with 23% of those employed in the private sector. Otherwise, Puerto Ricans are employed in a fairly wide range of occupations.

The occupational profile of Asian New Yorkers is also differentiated by distinct niches based on ethnicity. Moreover, these niches suggest a bifurcated occupational profile. Chinese are the largest Asian ethnic group and about one-half of Chinese workers are employed in NYC's private sector economy either in office and sales or food and production related jobs. Asian Indians, NYC's next largest Asian ethnic group is similarly concentrated in management, office, and sales employment or in transportation. Three occupational categories account for nearly one in two Korean employees in the private sector – sales, management and personal services.

English Language Ability and Education

In light of New York City's heavily non-White and immigrant labor force, it is not surprising that a mere 49% of New Yorkers employed in the private sector are English speakers only. The lack of English proficiency is highest among Asian and Latino immigrant workers. In fact, over half (51%)

of immigrant Latino private sector employees do not speak English well or at all. Nearly one in five (37%) Asian immigrant employees are similarly limited in English language ability compared to only 15% of Black and non-Hispanic White immigrant private sector employees. Clearly, linguistic isolation is a reality for a significant segment of New York City's labor force, and may reference the preponderance of economic enclave employment for Asian and Latino immigrants.

In addition to English language ability, educational attainment is another human capital asset that differentiates New York City's private sector employees by race and nativity. A significant majority of non-Hispanic Whites regardless of nativity status and native-born Asians are highly educated having completed college and/or professional or graduate schools. Even when compared to non-Hispanic Whites, native-born Asians stand out as a full two-thirds (66%) of those employed in the private sector have earned a college or higher degree. In contrast to other racial groups, nativity status is a key differentiating characteristic in educational attainment for Asians. While a majority native-born is highly educated, educational attainment is bifurcated among immigrant Asians with 47% on the lower end having completed high school at most, and 39% on the other end of the educational attainment spectrum with a college degree or more.

As noted, nativity is not significant in differentiating the educational attainment levels of non-Hispanic Whites, Blacks, or Latinos employed in the private sector. Whereas non-Hispanic Whites are likely to have earned a Bachelor's degree or more, the opposite is true for Blacks and Latinos who are concentrated among those having completed some high school or have earned a high school diploma as the highest level of educational attainment. The low level of human capital is particularly alarming for immigrant Latinos as nearly one in five (39%) have not completed a high school education.

Household and Per Capita Earnings

The ACS data provides compelling evidence of income disparity among New York City households by race and nativity groups. In addition to significant differences in average annual household incomes, the breakdown of households by income categories underscores concern about the economic sustainability of Latino and native-born Black households since one in two households earn less than \$35,000. Correspondingly, these same households experience high poverty rates. The per capita income reinforces a narrative of economic hardship particularly for Latinos, Blacks, and immigrant Asians. The per capita income for Latinos, regardless of nativity status, hovers around a mere \$18,600. While this per capita income is comparable for native-born Blacks, the per capita

income for immigrant Blacks and Asians is in the mid \$20,000.

Following native born non-Hispanic White households, native born Asian households have the highest average household income at \$105,348. However, the per capita income for native-born Asians at \$39,369 is significantly less than their non-Hispanic White counterparts. The finding that a higher percentage of Asian families have three or more workers may be an explanatory factor in the difference in average household income. Across all racial groups, immigrant households are more likely to have three or more workers.

Conclusion

This descriptive profile of New York City private sector employees based on ACS 2006-2008 data underscores the mixed fates of a large urban workforce and the persistence of a racially segmented labor market. With the exception of Non-Hispanic Whites, immigrant status typically means economic hardship. While immigrant labor is central to New York City's economy, their labor market positions concentrated in labor-intensive low-wage industry and occupational niches are cause for concern. The problems of labor force detachment and long-term joblessness is reaching a critical level for Black and Latino native-born New Yorkers. On the other hand, their immigrant compatriots have the highest labor force participation rates but average household incomes

and poverty levels are troubling indicators of sharp economic disparity. In contrast to a generalized perception of Asian economic integration and success, Asians in New York City's urban labor force are overwhelmingly immigrant with a highly bifurcated profile in human capital and labor market position and outcomes.

A profile of New York City's urban labor force underscores the complex and continuing significance of race, gender, and nativity in shaping the economic fortunes of private sector employees. Advancing New York City's economy "into a more diverse, more dynamic, and more durable engine of growth"⁵ will require policy strategies and resources that strengthen and improve the labor market positions and outcomes for all New Yorkers through labor advocacy, workforce development, living wage policies, and promoting equitable development that includes substantive and enforceable community benefits agreements.

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TABLE 1									
Labor Force Participation Rates by Race and Nativity Groups, 2006-2008									
New Yorkers 16 years and older									
	NHW Native Born	NHW Immigrant	Black Native Born	Black Immigrant	Asian Native Born	Immigrant Asian	Latino Native Born	Immigrant Latino	Total
Employed	1,070,445	357,400	425,126	378,671	62,406	398,772	387,109	558,496	3,715,344
With Job, not at Work	28,159	12,010	14,882	13,508	1,437	10,884	12,928	16,752	113,140
Unemployed	53,877	19,042	68,324	31,727	5,318	24,623	53,331	41,851	305,874
Labor Force	1,152,481	388,452	508,332	423,906	69,161	434,279	453,368	617,099	4,134,358
Unemployment Rate	5%	5%	13%	7%	8%	6%	12%	7%	7%
LF Participation Rate	64%	58%	56%	71%	65%	64%	56%	68%	63%
Not in Labor Force	643,416	279,002	405,056	173,426	36,230	240,377	358,273	288,919	2,473,171
	36%	42%	44%	29%	34%	36%	44%	32%	37%
Total (16 and older)	1,796,557	667,468	913,800	597,612	105,623	674,764	812,430	906,375	6,610,460

Source: 3 year American Community Survey, 2006-2008

TABLE 2

Average Income by Industry for NYC Private Sector Employees

2006-2008

Industry Sector	Average Earnings	Percent of Private Sector Employees
Professional Services	\$68,160	14%
Financial	\$98,279	14%
Retail	\$31,927	13%
Medical Services	\$39,271	12%
Entertainment	\$27,751	11%
Construction	\$38,526	6%
Manufacturing	\$43,103	6%
Transportation	\$33,480	5%
Information	\$76,036	5%
Personal Service	\$23,449	4%
Wholesale	\$49,330	4%
Education	\$35,709	3%
Community Service	\$24,876	2%
Other	----	1%
Total	\$50,407	2,522,402

Source: 3 year American Community Survey, 2006-2008

TABLE 3

Occupational Niches for New York City Private Sector Employees by Race and Nativity Groups
2006-2008

Non Hispanic White Native Born		Non Hispanic White Immigrant	
Office & Admin. Support	17%	Office & Admin. Support	12%
Sales	16%	Sales	12%
Management	15%	Management	12%
Art, Designers, Editors	9%	Construction	8%
Financial Services	5%	Building Services	5%
Legal	5%	Food	5%
Medical Professionals	4%	Personal Services	5%
Food	4%	Medical Professionals	5%
Business Services	4%	Transportation	5%
Construction	3%	Financial Services	4%
Others	20%	Others	29%
Total	660,227	Total	246,284
Latino Native Born		Latino Immigrant	
Office & Admin. Support	24%	Food	15%
Sales	14%	Building Services	11%
Transportation	7%	Transportation	11%
Management	7%	Construction	11%
Building Services	6%	Production	10%
Food	5%	Office & Admin. Support	9%
Construction	4%	Sales	9%
Personal Services	4%	Personal Services	6%
Healthcare Support	4%	Healthcare Support	5%
Production	4%	Management	3%
Others	22%	Others	10%
Total	263,290	Total	447,088
Black Native Born		Black Immigrant	
Office & Admin. Support	23%	Healthcare Support	16%
Sales	15%	Office & Admin. Support	14%
Healthcare Support	6%	Sales	10%
Transportation	6%	Transportation	7%
Management	6%	Personal Services	7%
Protective	5%	Construction	6%
Food	4%	Medical Professionals	6%
Personal Services	4%	Building Services	6%
Medical Professionals	4%	Protective	4%
Building Services	3%	Food	4%
Others	23%	Others	18%
Total	246,485	Total	258,148
Asian Native Born		Asian Immigrant	
Office & Admin. Support	17%	Sales	14%
Sales	14%	Food	13%
Financial Services	12%	Office & Admin. Support	12%
Management	11%	Production	9%
Computer	7%	Management	7%
Art, Designers, Editors	7%	Transportation	7%
Medical Professionals	6%	Personal Services	5%
Legal	3%	Medical Professionals	5%
Business Services	3%	Financial Services	5%
Food	3%	Construction	4%
Others	16%	Others	20%
Total	45,014	Total	302,084

Source: 3 year American Community Survey, 2006-2008

TABLE 4

Average Earnings for New York City Private Sector Employees by Occupation and Gender
2006-2008

Occupational Category	All Men	Average Earnings	Occupational Category	All Women	Average Earnings
Sales	12%	\$72,336	Office & Admin. Support	22%	\$33,486
Transportation	10%	\$28,055	Sales	14%	\$38,432
Construction	10%	\$35,797	Health Support	9%	\$23,530
Office & Admin. Support	10%	\$34,782	Management	8%	\$90,019
Management	9%	\$123,677	Personal Services	7%	\$19,621
Food	9%	\$23,122	Medical Professional	6%	\$59,097
Production	5%	\$30,377	Food	5%	\$17,143
Building Services	5%	\$28,012	Building Services	4%	\$20,779
Repair	4%	\$40,331	Art, Designers, Editors	4%	\$64,008
Art, Designers, Editors	4%	\$72,766	Production	4%	\$21,786
Other Occupation	21%	---	Other Occupation	17%	---

Source: 3 year American Community Survey, 2006-2008

TABLE 5

Occupational Niches for New York City Private Sector Employees by Race and Gender, 2006-2008

Non Hispanic White Men		Black or African American Men		Asian Men		Latino Men	
Management	15%	Office & Admin. Support	14%	Food	16%	Transportation	14%
Sales	15%	Transportation	13%	Sales	14%	Construction	14%
Office & Admin. Support	9%	Sales	11%	Transportation	10%	Food	14%
Construction	8%	Construction	10%	Management	9%	Building Services	9%
Art, Designers, Editors	7%	Protective Services	7%	Office & Admin. Support	8%	Office & Admin. Support	9%
Financial Services	6%	Building Services	6%	Production	7%	Sales	8%
Transportation	5%	Repair	6%	Construction	6%	Production	8%
Computer	5%	Food	5%	Computer	6%	Repair	5%
Food	4%	Production	5%	Financial Services	5%	Management	5%
Legal Services	4%	Management	4%	Repair	3%	Personal Services	3%
Other Occupations	22%	Other Occupations	18%	Other Occupations	16%	Other Occupations	10%
Total	490,634	Total	233,222	Total	193,283	Total	417,949
Non Hispanic White Women		Black or African American Women		Asian Women		Latino Women	
Office & Admin. Support	23%	Office & Admin. Support	22%	Office & Admin. Support	18%	Office & Admin. Support	22%
Sales	14%	Healthcare Support	19%	Sales	15%	Sales	14%
Management	12%	Sales	14%	Production	9%	Healthcare Support	11%
Art, Designers, Editors	8%	Personal Services	9%	Personal Services	8%	Management	5%
Medical Professionals	6%	Medical Professionals	7%	Medical Professionals	8%	Personal Services	9%
Financial Services	4%	Management	4%	Financial Services	7%	Medical Professionals	3%
Business Services	4%	Building Services	4%	Management	7%	Food	7%
Educators	4%	Food	3%	Food	6%	Building Services	9%
Personal Services	4%	Educators	3%	Healthcare Support	6%	Art, Designers, Editors	2%
Legal Services	4%	Financial Services	2%	Art, Designers, Editors	4%	Production	7%
Other Occupations	16%	Other Occupations	12%	Other Occupations	14%	Other Occupations	12%
Total	415,877	Total	271,411	Total	153,815	Total	292,429

Source: 3 year American Community Survey, 2006-2008

	NHW Native Born	Immigrant NHW	Black Native Born	Immigrant Black	Asian Native Born	Immigrant Asian	Latino Native Born	Immigrant Latino
Less than High School	3%	10%	12%	17%	4%	22%	19%	39%
HS Grad	17%	23%	32%	39%	9%	25%	32%	32%
Some College	16%	12%	26%	19%	16%	9%	23%	13%
Associate	5%	8%	9%	10%	6%	6%	9%	5%
BA	39%	27%	16%	13%	48%	27%	14%	9%
Graduate/Prof. Degree	20%	20%	5%	3%	18%	11%	4%	3%
TOTAL EMPLOYEES	660,227	246,284	246,485	258,148	45,014	302,084	263,290	447,088

Source: 3 year American Community Survey, 2006-2008

	NHW Native Born	NHW Immigrant	Black Native Born	Black Immigrant	Asian Native Born	Immigrant Asian	Latino Native Born	Immigrant Latino
Number of HHs	950,047	341,141	399,369	272,774	33,663	264,338	334,847	379,372
Mean HH Income	\$111,818	\$78,811	\$45,855	\$56,941	\$105,348	\$68,326	\$46,964	\$44,939
HHs by Income Category								
Less than \$34,999	25%	38%	50%	37%	22%	37%	52%	51%
\$35,000 to \$99,999	40%	38%	40%	48%	44%	42%	37%	41%
\$100,000 or more	36%	24%	10%	15%	34%	21%	11%	8%
% Families with 3 or more workers	8%	10%	8%	16%	11%	17%	7%	17%
Per Capita Income	\$50,135	\$35,307	\$18,894	\$24,596	\$39,369	\$26,092	\$18,665	\$18,176
Poverty Rate	10%	15%	25%	14%	17%	18%	30%	23%

Source: 3 year American Community Survey, 2006-2008

Figure 1

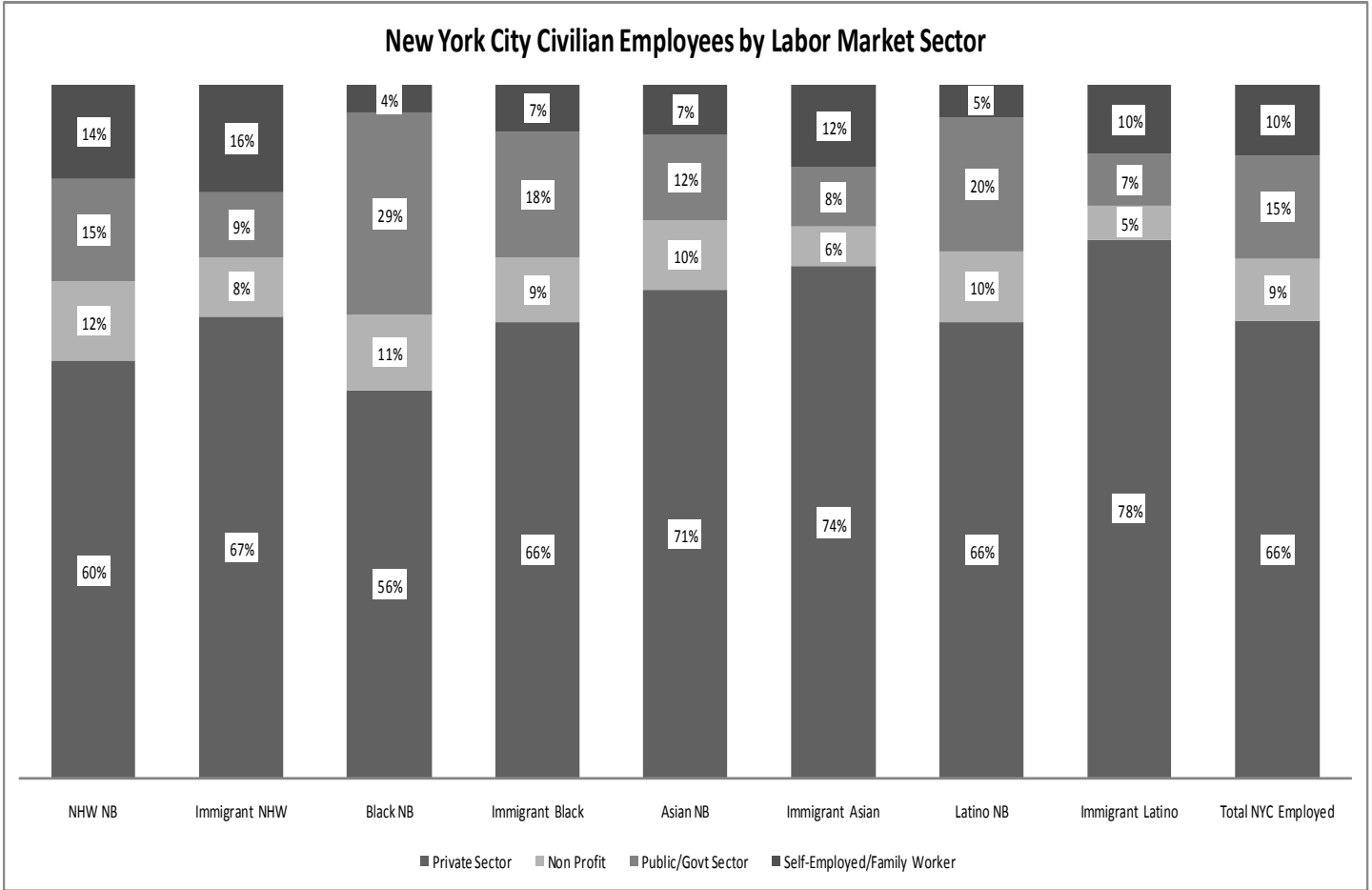
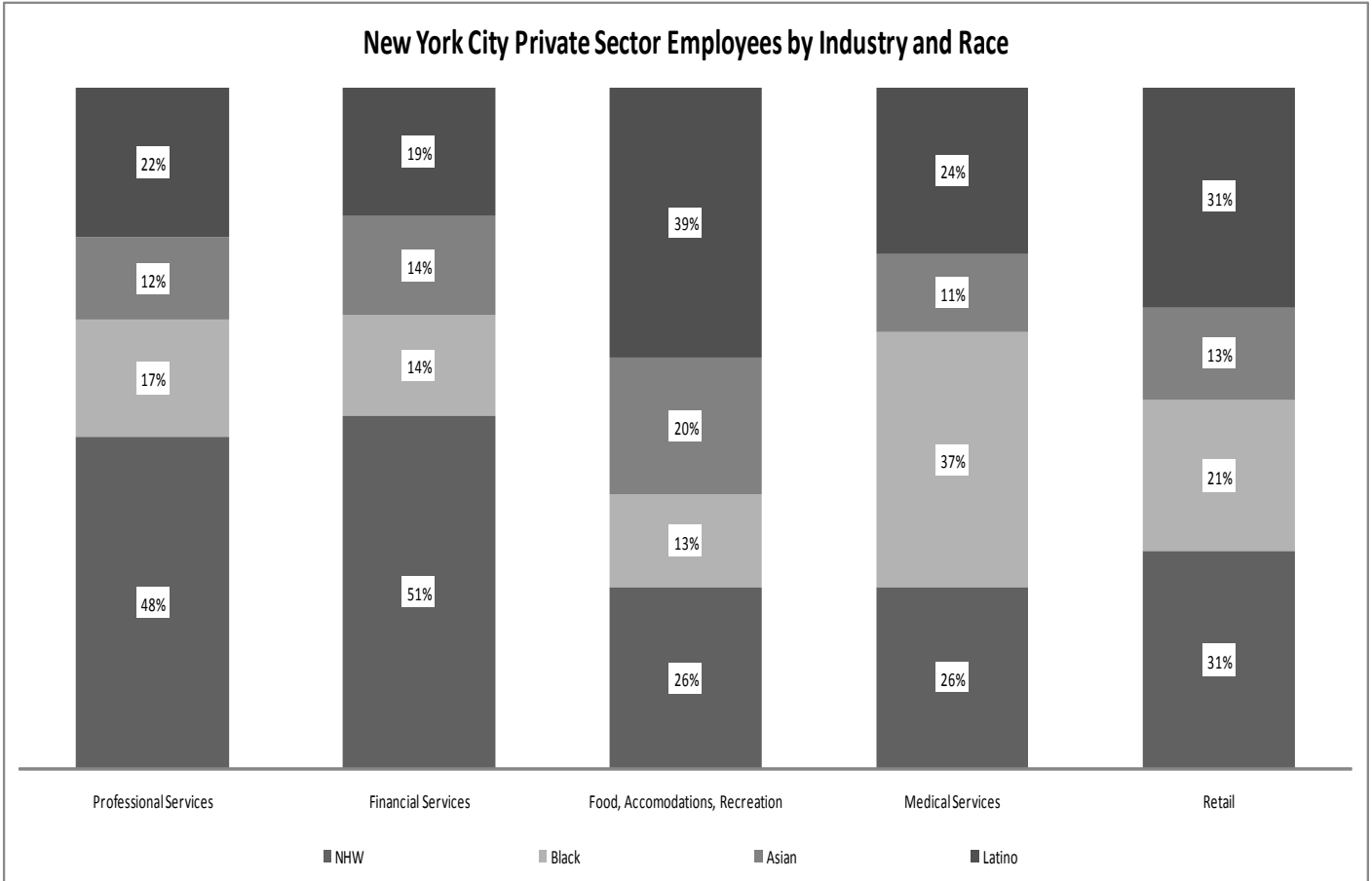


Figure 2



NOTES

¹ Text of Mayor Michael Bloomberg State of the City Speech on January 19, 2011 available online at:
<http://s3.amazonaws.com/nytdocs/docs/561/561.pdf>.

² A December 2010 New York Times article based on ACS 2005-2009 findings document the growing numbers of immigrants who bypass cities and settle in surrounding suburbs for employment opportunities in construction and food industries.

³ Refer to September 7, 2010 Los Angeles Times article, "Unemployment lasts longer for Asian Americans," by Alana Semuels and NPR coverage, "Asians Out Of Work Longest Among U.S. Minorities" by Yuki Noguchi, accessed online at:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130408243>.

⁴ Includes a small number of unpaid family workers.

⁵ Quoted from Mayor Bloomberg's 2011 State of the City Speech.