

INDUSTRY STUDY

Mapping Global Production in New York City's Garment Industry: The Role of Sunset Park, Brooklyn's Immigrant Economy

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As a key production site in New York City's garment industry, Brooklyn's Sunset Park neighborhood is increasingly made up of small Asian and Latino immigrant-owned firms. Market conditions created by the globalization of garment production and the continued influx of low-skill immigrants promote a primary competitive advantage embedded in "low-road" strategies evident in the prevalence of sweatshop conditions. Reflecting a "carrot and stick" approach, Sunset Park has been a target for the federal and state departments of labor as well as the site for developing a garment manufacturers' incubator, Brooklyn Mills. This article examines the mismatch of using a conventional economic development strategy to address the conditions of Sunset Park's immigrant economy. Brooklyn Mills illustrates how immigrant firms feel the stick but benefit little in terms of innovative policy intervention, that is, carrots, to stimulate equitable development in a sweatshop economy.

Keywords: *garment industry; immigrant economy; business incubator; community economic development*

The prospects for New York City's garment industry, particularly for Asian and Latino immigrants laboring in small manufacturing shops, are increasingly bleak.¹ A competitive real estate market, increased imports, improved quality of offshore production, and retailer consolidation continue to pose seemingly insurmountable challenges to domestic apparel production. As a local manufacturer noted, "We are dying a slow death" (M. Landman, personal communication, September 26, 2000). Despite these harsh realities coupled by decades of steady decline, the apparel industry remains one of New York City's largest manufacturing industries, employing approximately 56,000 production workers (New York Industrial Retention Network, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Although imports and production outsourcing have created conditions of fierce competition and downgraded manufacturing, evidenced by the reemergence of sweatshops, key competitive advantages based on proximity to customers and suppliers; agglomeration effects that promote

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creativity, innovation, and flexibility;² and access to a skilled and cheap labor force ensure that a segment of garment production will continue locally.

As in the past century, apparel production continues to absorb thousands of immigrants as risk-taking entrepreneurs and low-skill workers who increasingly labor under conditions paralleling those of their counterparts in Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The reemergence of sweatshop conditions underscores the need for an industrial policy to ensure the future viability of New York City's garment industry by pursuing innovative "high-road" development strategies rather than "low-road" cost savings. Promoting investment in skill development, capital improvements, and product innovation and quality is a principal high-road development strategy. In contrast, low-road practices are premised on minimizing production costs through low wages, few benefits, and high turnover (AFL-CIO Working for America Institute, 2002; Herman, 2001).

The collective efforts to sustain New York City's garment industry undertaken by government agencies, including the federal and state departments of labor, the garment workers union—United Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE)—and other institutions, namely, the tripartite labor, government, and industry organization Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC), represent a two-pronged policy and programmatic strategy of carrots and sticks.³ The carrots, in the form of technical assistance, public subsidies, and tax incentives, seek to promote high-road development in quick-response technologies, just-in-time production methods, worker and management skill upgrades, and new production arrangements including modular production to improve productivity and competitiveness in a highly volatile industry (Conway & Loker, 1999). The stick regulates the sweatshop economy by maintaining a floor on the rising prevalence of worker exploitation. By monitoring sweatshops and enforcing standard labor practices through penalties and fines, the key stick-wielding institutions—understaffed federal and state departments of labor—seek to contain the "race to the bottom" by punishing the industry's worst perpetrators.⁴

Brooklyn's Sunset Park, which has emerged as a key apparel production site, represents a juxtaposition of the high- and low-road strategies for sustaining New York City's garment industry. A growing segment of Sunset Park's neighborhood economy is fueled by small Asian and Latino immigrant-owned garment factories and an ethnic labor force made up primarily of immigrant women. Representing 40% of Brooklyn's apparel manufacturing base, 384 garment shops are located in the Sunset Park neighborhood (New York State Department of Labor, 2001). These shops employ a labor force of more than 10,000 workers, primarily Chinese, Dominican, and Mexican immigrant women. Targeted by the New York State Department of Labor and Brooklyn District Attorney in a series of factory raids in the summer of 1996, Sunset Park is also the site of a high-road development project sponsored by the Brooklyn Borough President's Office, the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, and the New York State Economic Development Corporation. The project has centered on the development of a garment manufacturers' incubator, Brooklyn Mills, which opened in September 1999 (Curan, 1999; Santiago, 1999).

Brooklyn Mills represents a collaborative institutional effort to improve the efficiency, competitiveness, and viability of "legitimate" firms to succeed in a short-cycle flexible manufacturing environment. Providing affordable manufacturing space, low-cost energy, tax incentives, and business support services, Brooklyn Mills is a prototype of future reindustrialization as envisioned by state and local officials. Rather than competing with low-priced imports, Brooklyn Mills supports firms to create high-end niche products, build and improve business networks, and integrate new production technology (Golden, 1999; J. Williams, Director of Economic Development, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, November 21, 2000). In addition to seven manufacturing tenants, Brooklyn Mills houses the Quick Sew Center operated by the GIDC to provide technical assistance and worker training to local area garment firms.

Although the strategy to nurture garment manufacturers with high value-added products represents a sound industrial policy, the integral role of Sunset Park's immigrant economy in garment production presents a challenge to conventional economic development strategies. The globalized nature of the U.S. garment industry promotes a competitive advantage embedded in low-road strategies with direct and specific consequences for Asian and Latino immigrants. Brooklyn Mills represents a missed opportunity to coordinate and target public resources to counter the current

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TABLE 1
U.S. and New York City Employment in Women's Outerwear^a

Year	<i>All Employees (1000s)</i>		
	<i>United States</i>	<i>New York City</i>	<i>New York City Employment as a Percentage of U.S. Employment</i>
1947	310.6	139.5	45%
1961	336.8	108.7	32%
1971	416.3	87.4	21%
1982	374	67.3	18%
1992	306.3	51.1	17%
1997	232.8	43.8	19%
2000	223.7	42.6	19%

SOURCE: Abeles, Schwartz, Haecckel, & Silverblatt, Inc. (1983); U.S. Census Bureau (1992, 1997, 2000).

a. The employment figures before 1998 are based on Standard Industrial Classification Code 233. The 2000 figures are based on the newly adopted North American Industry Classification System codes and represent Sectors 31523 and 315212, which are comparable to Standard Industrial Classification 233.

pressures and worsening conditions of garment manufacturing. This mismatch illustrates how immigrants certainly feel the stick but benefit little in terms of innovative policy incentives, that is, carrots, to promote equitable development in the garment industry. Moreover, Brooklyn Mills demonstrates that high-road strategies in New York City's garment industry are not high road at all because they do not support innovation or improved business practices. They merely serve to hold on to the garment sector through subsidized rents.

This article is organized into three sections. The first section briefly reviews the empirical evidence for New York City's declining garment industry and the concentration of immigrant Asians and Latinos as contractors and workers. The second section documents the growing importance of immigrant neighborhoods in the outer boroughs, in particular, Brooklyn's Sunset Park, as production sites largely dependent on sweatshops. The 1998 Street Beat Sportswear incident, discussed later in this article, illustrates how intimidation characterizes employer-employee relations in the immigrant garment sector. The third section synthesizes extensive interviews with industry leaders, community advocates, and representatives of the GIDC, UNITE, the Brooklyn Borough President's Office, the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, and the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation to document the development process of Brooklyn Mills and how this garment manufacturers' incubator ultimately failed to change the practices of a sweatshop industry. This article concludes with a recommendation: Improving and sustaining a viable garment industry will require meaningful carrots that integrate immigrant economies and reinvigorate community and labor alliances. These actions are necessary to ensure equitable economic development.

THE ORGANIZATION AND CONDITIONS OF NEW YORK CITY'S GARMENT INDUSTRY

New York City's garment industry captures the extreme realities of a glamorous fashion walkway and brutal historic sweatshops.⁵ The following discussion of the organization and conditions of the garment industry underscores several important trends: New York City's niche in fashion-sensitive products will maintain a local garment production sector posing both opportunities and challenges; the premium of Manhattan real estate continues to push garment production to the outer boroughs, where it anchors immigrant enclave economies in Brooklyn and Queens; and New York City's garment industry remains viable largely by exploiting an immigrant workforce.

Nationwide, garment industry employment peaked in 1973 with 1.4 million jobs. By 1999, the number of jobs in apparel production fell by 53% to 660,000. This decline is expected to continue

TABLE 2
Occupations in New York City's Apparel Industry

	1980 (%)	1990 (%)
Managerial, professional, and specialties	8	13
Non-Hispanic White	79	62
Latino	10	17
Asian	5	13
African American	6	9
Technical, sales, and support	16	15
Non-Hispanic White	63	50
Latino	17	24
Asian	2	8
African American	17	18
Precision production and craft	11	10
Non-Hispanic White	51	34
Latino	30	34
Asian	6	17
African American	11	15
Operators, laborers, and fabricators	64	60
Non-Hispanic White	32	13
Latino	39	40
Asian	18	39
African American	10	8
Total apparel workforce	143,020	87,196

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (1980b, 1990).

(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). Paralleling national trends, the share of apparel manufacturing jobs in New York City now numbers about 56,000, representing a decline of 62% since 1980. New York City, however, remains a key production center in the U.S. garment industry, and its share of national employment in apparel production, particularly in women's outerwear, has steadied and even grown slightly since the early 1980s (see Table 1).

New York City's garment industry is concentrated in the most fashion-sensitive and volatile sector—women's outerwear—with rapidly changing consumer tastes and styles. Nearly three quarters (73%) of New York City apparel firms and garment workers produce women's outerwear (New York State Department of Labor, 1999-2000). The key advantage of local garment production relative to offshore production is the proximity of designers, showrooms, retailers, manufacturers, fabric suppliers, and sewing contractors who can respond quickly to changing styles (A. Hall, Manager for Social Responsibility, Eileen Fisher Company, personal communication, May 1, 2002). Although this locational advantage may not be sufficient to restore the garment industry to its historic employment levels, the demand for short turnaround times, quick delivery, quality control, and small batch orders may be sufficient to create a unique niche or a "spot market" for New York City manufacturers and contractors in the context of a globalized industry (Chapple, 1999). Moreover, relative to other centers of domestic production such as Los Angeles, which rivals it in employment size, New York City is unique in its historic and symbolic position as a fashion and garment center.

The majority of garment manufacturers in New York City are small contractors employing fewer than 10 workers (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Fewer than one in four garment contracting shops in New York City is unionized (T. Lai, General Manager, Greater Blouse, Skirt & Undergarment Association, Inc., personal communication, November 4, 2000). Because capital and skill requirements for setting up a shop are minimal, New York City's garment industry tells the quintessential story of immigrant succession (Proper, 1997; Waldinger, 1986). The key competitive advantage of immigrant contractors is access to cheap ethnic labor. The latest available statistics indicate that Asian and Latino immigrants own about 2,000 contracting firms, and it is in these

small shops that a majority of garment workers are employed (Teddy Lai, General Manager, Greater Blouse, Skirt & Underwear Garment Association, personal communication, November 4, 2000).

New York City's garment industry remains a key labor market entry point for immigrant workers, especially women, with little English-language ability or formal skills. The nature of fabrics makes it difficult to mechanize clothing assembly; hence, apparel production continues to be a labor-intensive process. Similar to more than a century ago, garment production relies on eye-and-hand coordination and the physical strength of sewing machine operators. Operator and laborer occupations made up 60% of apparel industry employment in 1990 (see Table 2). The bulk of these jobs were sewing machine operators, with a small share of pressing machine operators and laborers.⁶ The overwhelming majority of the more than 50,000 sewing machine operators who make up New York City's garment production workforce are Latina (40%) or Asian (39%) women (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Skills training is minimal and typically gained on the job. New York City's spot market advantage based on quick turnaround and small batch production means that workers must go through a "learning curve" with each new style and as a result, rarely have the time to achieve peak productivity and earnings (Proper, 1997).

The degradation of worker conditions in New York City's garment industry is well documented (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 1999; Lii, 1995). The state Department of Labor's Apparel Industry Task Force estimates there are about 2,500 garment "sweatshops" in New York City.⁷ Most alarming is the increasing practice of withholding or not paying wages.⁸ Compliance reports prepared by the U.S. Department of Labor found that in 1999, about two thirds of New York City's garment shops violated standard wage and hour laws.⁹ In addition, dangerous work conditions, such as locked fire exits, as well as industrial homework that harkens to sweatshops at the turn of the century were pervasive.

Historically, constraints on land use patterns contributed to the decentralization of manufacturing in key industries such as garment making, printing and publishing, and food processing. This spatial dispersion led historian Joshua Freeman (2000) to describe New York City as a "non-Fordist city in the age of Ford" (p. 15). Nonetheless, the competitive advantages of agglomeration contributed to the formation of industrial districts as designers, manufacturers, jobbers, and contractors sought to locate near one another for quality control, business networks, and quick response to production snags (Freeman, 2000; Soyer, 1999). In New York City, garment production centered in two distinct clusters—a Midtown garment center located between Sixth and Ninth Avenues from 34th to 40th Streets and Manhattan Chinatown, which emerged as a key production center in the 1970s resulting from a supply of inexpensive loft space and the mass influx of post-1965 immigrants (Kwong, 1987).

New York City's recent real estate boom evident in rising rents and expanding corporate real estate development is forcing the relocation of garment manufacturers from these historic production districts (Bagli, 1998; Bowles, 2000). A key study of Chinatown's garment district conducted in 1983 had already signaled the lack of affordable industrial space and encroaching gentrification as an imminent threat to garment production (Abeles, Schwartz, Haeckel, & Silverblatt, 1983). A recent study of the Midtown garment center found that 60% of the leases held by garment companies in the Garment Center Preservation Area were to expire by the end of 2002 (New York Industrial Retention Network, 2001). The tenor of a real estate study conducted for the Fashion Center Business Improvement District indicated resignation to market trends as it emphasized the retail potential generated by the surrounding upscale redevelopment of Times Square, Herald Square, and the Port Authority (Fashion Center Business Improvement District, 2000). Numerous newspaper articles track the movement of high-tech and dot.com companies into Chinatown and the conversion of factory lofts to office and high-end residential units (Casimir, 2000; Chang, 2002; Lobbia, 2001). The encroachment of "Silicon Alley" forced many garment shops to relocate to immigrant neighborhoods in the outer boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn, including Flushing, Long Island City, Ridgewood in Queens, and Sunset Park in Brooklyn.

Although Manhattan continues to be a center for garment production, its concentration has declined dramatically since 1980 when 74% of New York City's garment firms and workers were located there.¹⁰ Within the past two decades, the size of Manhattan's garment workforce has shrunk by more than two thirds (see Table 3). The outer boroughs are increasingly important production

TABLE 3
New York City Apparel Production Firms and
Employees in 1980 and 1999 by Borough

	1980				1999				Percentage Change From 1980 to 1999	
	Firms	Firms (%)	Employees	Employees (%)	Firms	Firms (%)	Employees	Employees (%)	Firms	Employees
New York City	5,404	100	148,894	100	3,183	100	56,345	100	-41	-62
Manhattan	4,024	74	104,698	70	1,867	59	32,869	58	-54	-69
Brooklyn	810	15	25,332	17	748	23	12,205	22	-8	-52
Queens	350	6	12,330	8	497	16	9,825	17	42	-20
Bronx	196	4	5,557	4	64	2	1,200	2	-67	-78
Staten Island	24	0	977	1	7	0	246	0	-71	-75

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (1980b, 1990, 1999).

sites; nearly one quarter of New York City's garment manufacturing shops and workers are now in Brooklyn. Brooklyn's locational advantages continue to attract firms seeking refuge from rising rents and a unionized work force (Bowles, 2000; M. Chen, Vice President, UNITE Local 23-25, personal communication, October 26, 2000). In particular, Sunset Park's abundant industrial space, relatively inexpensive rents, and available workforce has led one researcher to declare it "Brooklyn's fastest-growing mecca for apparel firms" (Bowles, 2000, p. 3).

SUNSET PARK'S IMMIGRANT ECONOMY AND GLOBAL PRODUCTION

Sunset Park is prototypical of urban neighborhoods undergoing both demographic and economic transformations driven by renewed international migration and the local effects of global restructuring. Whereas earlier Scandinavian and European immigrants settled in Sunset Park during a period of industrial and urban growth, Latinos and Asians fill a marginal economic position that is steadily worsening. Although it was once a vibrant industrial waterfront neighborhood providing thousands of entry-level jobs in the American Can Company, Bethlehem Steel, and numerous manufacturing firms as well as maritime-related occupations, several factors have coalesced to facilitate Sunset Park's economic decline.

The construction of the Gowanus Expressway and its expansion in the 1960s created a physical barrier that severed the waterfront from the rest of the neighborhood (Caro, 1974). The introduction of new shipping technologies, such as containerization, and the declining international competitiveness of domestic manufacturing led to a massive deindustrialization that altered the economic landscape of Sunset Park. The shrinking employment base coupled with a growing Puerto Rican population facilitated Sunset Park's racial transformation as White ethnic groups fled to surrounding suburbs (Sullivan, 1993; Winnick, 1990). The subsequent "White flight," industrial decline, and urban disinvestment culminated in Sunset Park's designation as a federal poverty area in the 1970s.

Offering a vast affordable housing stock, a convenient public transportation line to Manhattan, and weak organized resistance to newcomers, notable numbers of Asian and Latino immigrants settled in Sunset Park starting in the mid-1980s (Browning, 1994; Dallas, 1991; Howe, 1987). Today, non-Hispanic Whites constitute only 17% of Sunset Park residents; more than half (51%) are Latino, and nearly 25% are Asian. Sunset Park remains a top destination neighborhood for immigrants. In the past decade, more than 16,700 new immigrants have settled in the neighborhood, with nearly one in two coming from the People's Republic of China or the Dominican Republic.¹¹ These newcomers are largely unskilled, working-age adults. Among the new immigrants age 16 and older, approximately half held a job before immigrating. Most were laborers,

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TABLE 4
New York City Industry and Employment Composition, 2000

Industry	Units	Employment	Units (%)	Workers (%)	Weekly Wages (\$)
New York City	209,475	3,605,978	100	100	1,136.59
Services	84,746	1,389,582	40	39	891.91
Government	374	549,119	0.2	15	873.93
Financial, real estate, and insurance	29,670	484,395	14	13	2,821.53
Retail trade	40,859	424,683	20	12	471.53
Manufacturing	10,016	239,791	5	7	1,120.58
Transportation and public utilities	7,540	206,060	4	6	1,037.50
Wholesale trade	20,584	181,156	10	5	1,130.57
Construction	10,665	117,479	5	3	992.83
Agriculture, mining, and other	5,021	13,709	2	0.4	606.54
Sunset Park, Brooklyn	2,435	34,502	100	100	484.00
Services	461	11,928	19	35	450.54
Manufacturing	450	9,407	18	27	335.42
Retail trade	566	4,262	23	12	501.78
Wholesale trade	384	4,110	16	12	569.74
Construction	240	2,390	10	7	714.06
Transportation and public utilities	93	1,338	4	4	708.54
Financial, real estate, and insurance	171	920	7	3	620.65
Agriculture, mining, and other	70	147	3	0.4	277.92

SOURCE: New York State Department of Labor (1999-2000).

sales and service workers, and agricultural workers.¹² Sunset Park's demographic transformation underscores the continued influx of low-skilled, non-English-proficient immigrants in search of economic opportunities. However, in contrast to earlier periods, it is questionable whether the neighborhood's opportunity structures provide meaningful avenues for economic mobility.

In both the scholarly and popular press, Sunset Park, Brooklyn, has been touted as an example of immigrant-driven neighborhood revitalization (Kadet, 2000; Oser, 1996; Robaton, 1996; Waldinger, 1990). The primary engine for Sunset Park's renewal is the ethnic economy comprising numerous small immigrant-owned retail and manufacturing firms and their "co-ethnic" labor force (i.e., workers of the same ethnicity as their employers). Although immigrant activity is central to the reversal of Sunset Park's economic decline, this new prosperity is countered by uneven growth characteristics of ethnic enclave economies. Immigrant working and jobless poverty, the expansion of an informal and sweatshop economy, and the casualization of employment relations are also part of the economic life of Sunset Park.

Downgraded manufacturing, noted in the growing numbers of immigrant garment contractors, is a prominent aspect of Sunset Park's reindustrialization. The majority of manufacturing firms in Sunset Park are garment manufacturers or contractors (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). In addition to cheap rents—average rents for industrial space in Sunset Park are between \$4.50 and \$5.50 per square foot compared with \$8 to \$10 in Manhattan Chinatown and up to \$20 per square foot in the Midtown garment center—access to a largely nonunionized and increasingly undocumented workforce are factors in Sunset Park's emergence as a key garment production site (M. Chen, Vice President, UNITE Local 23-25, personal communication, October 26, 2000; Kwong, 1996). The New York State Department of Labor (1999-2000) ES-202 data verify Sunset Park's greater reliance on manufacturing jobs relative to New York City (see Table 4). Fewer than 1 in 10 New York City workers is employed in manufacturing compared with nearly 30% of Sunset Park employees. Moreover, the significant wage differential for manufacturing employees in New York City at large relative to those in Sunset Park further substantiates the neighborhood's economic base in working-poor jobs.

Although the economic livelihood of Sunset Park is clearly tied to the garment industry, a series of factory raids conducted in 1996 by the federal and state departments of labor and the Brooklyn

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District Attorney exposed the prevalence of hazardous environments and worker abuses, including the withholding of wages. These sweatshop conditions have not abated, and in 1999, the U.S. Department of Labor found that 8 of 11 investigated Sunset Park shops were in violation of overtime requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act. These firms were required to pay \$104,350 in back wages to more than 200 workers. Community rallies have also shed much public attention on the extent of worker exploitation in Sunset Park's garment industry (Buford, 1999; Lin, 1998; Sandberg, 1997).

Institutional responses included the formation of new organizations, such as the local Community Board 7's Apparel Industry Task Force and the Kings County Apparel Association created in 1996 to represent Sunset Park's largely Chinese garment contractors.¹³ The garment workers union and worker advocacy organizations have set up branch offices in Sunset Park to organize immigrant Asian and Latina workers, especially undocumented ones. The Chinese and Staff Workers Association (CSWA) opened a satellite office in 1996, and UNITE opened a Garment Workers Center in 1997 (Sandberg, 1997).¹⁴

Elected public officials, including U.S. Representative Nydia Velasquez, former City Councilor Angel Rodriguez, and State Assemblyman Felix Ortiz, have also taken on the issue of a sweatshop economy in Sunset Park and its impact on the community's quality of life. In his capacity as chairman of the New York State Assembly Subcommittee on Sweatshops, Ortiz sponsored two public hearings on Sunset Park's garment industry and published the testimonials in two monographs. *Behind Closed Doors: A Look Into the Underground Sweatshop Industry* was released in 1997, and a follow-up, *Behind Closed Doors II* came out in 1999 (New York State Assembly Sub-Committee on Sweatshops, 1997, 1999).

One characteristic of a low-road strategy in the garment industry is the prevalence of employer intimidation and threats. A particularly scandalous example of how "low" sweatshop abuses have become involved the Street Beat Sportswear manufacturer and its contractor, Hua Great Procetech, which was located in Sunset Park. In May 1998, Hua Great Procetech employers Jian Wen Liang and Feng Chen and about 40 others, including purported On Leung gang member Peter Yan, stormed the CSWA office and assaulted several garment workers and staff members who were attending an organizing meeting to protest months of labor law violations (Biederman, 1998; Rohde, 1998). During this confrontation, a CSWA organizer was sexually assaulted, and the intruders repeatedly issued death threats. The organizer released a press statement and mass e-mail stating that her "personal safety is only ensured by publicizing the incident."¹⁵

CSWA worked with the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops to bring charges against Hua Great Procetech and Street Beat Sportswear for violating minimum wage and overtime laws, illegally firing employees, and failing to pay wages (Greenhouse, 2001; Port, 2001a, 2001b). This case represented the first on the East Coast to hold both the manufacturer and contractor accountable for worker abuses (Gonzalez, 1998; K. Kimmerling, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund Legal Director, personal communication, June 17, 2002). In turn, Street Beat Sportswear filed a \$75 million lawsuit against the three organizers—CSWA, the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund—claiming that protests in front of their Midtown garment center building tarnished its relationship with retailers, Sears Roebuck and Charming Shoppes/Fashion Bug, who subsequently canceled their contracts.

The Manhattan Supreme Court dismissed Street Beat Sportswear's lawsuit on the basis that it amounted to a strategic lawsuit against public participation because it was designed to intimidate the activists from exercising their First Amendment rights (Allen, 2000; Greenhouse, 2000). About 3 years after the initial confrontation at CSWA, Hua Great Procetech owner Jian Wen Liang was fined \$10,000 and sentenced to 90 days in jail after exhausting all his appeal options. In addition, Street Beat Sportswear agreed to pay \$285,000 in back wages as well as \$85,000 in legal fees and damages.

The Street Beat Sportswear incident exposes the "chain of liability" that maintains the high level of exploitation in the daily conditions of immigrant garment workers. In this case, moving up the production chain to hold both the immigrant contractor and the manufacturer accountable was ultimately successful. However, the resolution of garment industry violations is rarely so favorable

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to workers. Moreover, this case illustrates that the stick approach is most effective when worker advocacy groups organize and leverage public attention to seek accountability and compensation for labor abuses. In some incidences, government enforcement agencies try to "pass the buck," as evidenced in another recent Brooklyn example in which similar abuses were found in a factory employing Mexican immigrant workers (Grace, 2002; Greenhouse, 2002; Port, 2002). In response to worker complaints, the federal Department of Labor initially declined to take action and advised workers to bring the case to court themselves (Port, 2002).

Because the stick is underfunded and relatively weak, an effective enforcement strategy relies on a case-by-case basis, with workers organizing as an essential component to exacting economic justice. More important, this approach is often deployed after the fact to punish the offender and secure lost worker wages instead of offering meaningful solutions to prevent the "poor business practices" endemic to the garment industry (Garment Industry Development Corporation, hereafter GIDC, 2001a). At best, the stick approach can only seek to hold the floor on degrading manufacturing work conditions for some workers some of the time. Sustaining a viable garment industry, however, requires strategies beyond mere compliance with existing labor standards. Toward this goal, Sunset Park is simultaneously a target for high-road development.

According to the 1997 Brooklyn Borough President's study, *Brooklyn Can Sew Up the Garment Industry* (Golden, 1997), garment manufacturing is integral to the area's revitalization.¹⁶ The development of Brooklyn Mills underscores the role of immigrant economies in high-road initiatives. Although the immigrant sector of Sunset Park's garment industry is central to the local neighborhood economy, Brooklyn Mills as a strategic intervention fails to provide critical economic development assistance and leadership in addressing immigrant sweatshop conditions.

BROOKLYN MILLS: IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION IN HIGH-ROAD DEVELOPMENT?

Brooklyn Mills is a significant project because it represents a multi-institutional collaboration to reinvigorate Brooklyn's garment industry. The Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, Brooklyn borough president, state Economic Development Corporation, and the GIDC are involved in developing, financing, and operating the garment manufacturers incubator. Cited as a model project to help sustain New York City's garment industry (Bowles, 2000; Levitan, 1998), Brooklyn Mills is one phase of a reindustrialization strategy that includes creating a garment industrial park, launching a "Made in Brooklyn" campaign to promote local products in overseas markets, and confronting sweatshops through improved coordination among city, state, and federal investigative agencies (Block, 1999; Golden, 1997).

Recognizing the growth potential of Brooklyn's garment industry due to proximity to regional transportation networks; underutilized industrial space, particularly along the waterfront; and a ready labor supply, the Brooklyn Borough President's study provided the rationale for the development of a garment manufacturers' incubator.¹⁷ As a strategic response to "unfair competition" posed by sweatshops, the garment manufacturers' incubator would reduce operating costs by sharing space, utilities, machinery, equipment, and administrative support and most important, would provide access to technology, capital, technical assistance in marketing, and help in developing export capacity and other industry linkages. The goal is to nurture fairly new garment manufacturers, especially in developing in-house production capacity. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 22, 1999, Brooklyn borough president Howard Golden remarked,

I am confident that Brooklyn Mills will become a model for other such facilities around the country. This partnership between government and business has provided the competitive edge that our small firms need to keep pace in today's competitive global economy. (Golden, 1999)

Golden allocated more than \$700,000 toward the development of Brooklyn Mills. The state assembly provided \$200,000. Additional funds were secured from various foundations, including

the Independence Community Foundation, the New York Community Trust, and the Fund for the City of New York. Because Brooklyn Mills is located in Bush Terminal, a designated New York State Economic Development Zone, tenants also save on taxes when purchasing equipment or hiring new employees. Occupying 27,000 square feet of renovated industrial space, Brooklyn Mills houses seven tenant firms selected on the basis of financial viability and potential to internalize all aspects of the industry from design to small-scale production (J. Williams, Economic Development Director, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, November 21, 2000). The tenants signed a 5-year lease after which they were expected to "graduate" and create vacancies for a new round of firms. The Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce was commissioned to coordinate and manage Brooklyn Mills. The chamber has subcontracted the GIDC to develop a Quick Sew Center in Brooklyn Mills that will "serve as an information and resource center for the Southwest Brooklyn garment manufacturing community" (GIDC, 2001b, p. 1) by providing shared equipment as well as seminars and other workforce training opportunities.

Although it is too early to evaluate the success of Brooklyn Mills, some cautionary notes in the development and implementation suggest that Sunset Park's immigrant sector was marginalized. Consequently, Brooklyn Mills's contribution to ameliorating sweatshop conditions may be quite limited. On release of the Brooklyn borough president's report, Sunset Park's Apparel Industry Task Force—a committee established under the auspices of the local community board representing a tenuous but critical forum of immigrant contractors, UNITE, and community organizations—saw an opportunity to secure resources to address the outstanding needs of a neighborhood economy based on a sweatshop industry. In addition to enhancing business competitiveness and expansion, the Apparel Industry Task Force advocated a garment center that would pay

critical attention . . . to the cultural, social, and economic aspects of workers' lives to accommodate the needs of the large number of Asian and Latino employees working within the industry, many of whom are newly arrived immigrants with little understanding of English, no knowledge of local resources, and little in the way of personal support. (Community Board 7 Garment Industry Task Force Sub-Committee, n.d., p. 3)

Recognizing the integral relationship between workplace conditions and community well-being, the group's broad vision addressed the neighborhood development needs of the working poor and included health care, affordable housing options, transportation, language skill assistance, and day care. Although the Apparel Industry Task Force's participation helped garner project designation for Sunset Park, the goal of a garment center that would facilitate a comprehensive approach toward building a viable neighborhood economy has failed to materialize.

The Chinese American Planning Council considered Brooklyn Mills a "closed-door deal" despite the involvement of Sunset Park's Apparel Industry Task Force (C. Xie, Director, personal communication, September 17, 1998). Except for an invitation to the official announcement of Brooklyn Mills, Asian and Latino community leaders "received no news at all" about its planning and development (C. Xie, personal communication, September 17, 1998). The initial enthusiasm about the garment center quickly dissipated as it became apparent that the design of Brooklyn Mills "does not fit our expectations" (C. Xie, personal communication, September 17, 1998). The Apparel Industry Task Force advocated for a garment center that promoted business development as well as programs and services for immigrant workers and their families. The task force clearly recognized that the conditions of an immigrant economy required not only an industry sector solution but also a comprehensive approach building on labor and community alliances (Chen & Wong, 1998; Kelly, 1997).

Brooklyn Mills illustrates the limitations in promoting conventional business development practices as a high-road strategy in the immigrant-dominated garment industry. The objective of an incubator is to nurture start-up businesses and create new jobs (Markley & McNamara, 1995). Aside from subsidizing operating costs, namely through below-market rents, the key benefits are "intangible" and include mentoring relationships, moral support, access to information, and

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business networks (Markley & McNamara, 1995). These benefits help promote firm innovation, collaboration, and complementarity. The prognosis for Brooklyn Mills's providing these advantages to tenant firms is poor. The Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce on-site manager for Brooklyn Mills is also the group's director of economic development. Her duties are split among many projects, leaving little time for on-site services or management. Moreover, her concept of the garment manufacturers' incubator is strictly based on a narrow definition of market success. The selection criteria for incubator tenants were similar to those of a conventional loan application because "at the end of the day, it's a business deal" (J. Williams, personal communication, November 21, 2000).

According to the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, Brooklyn Mills tenants primarily sought subsidized rents and are not interested in the intangible benefits of location or affiliation with a business incubator. This observation is affirmed by a GIDC survey that found "4 of the 6 tenants in Brooklyn Mills were either unwilling to meet with the GIDC or decisively not interested in any services that could be provided in the facility" (GIDC, 2001a, p. 7). Clearly, the priority of Brooklyn Mills tenants was to reduce the cost of conducting business. They considered the key attraction to locating in the business incubator to be subsidized rents rather than the added benefits and opportunities to improve business practices. Brooklyn Mills tenants generated few if any employment opportunities. Four of the firms do in-house production; the rest are jobbers who do no production work at all. In total, about 30 employees work in Brooklyn Mills. Because they were already working for the firms that relocated to the business incubator, there has been no direct or spin-off job creation in the community to date.¹⁸

Brooklyn Mills's Quick Sew Center provides a venue for the GIDC to expand its services and establish a presence in the outer boroughs where the garment industry is growing.¹⁹ Based on interviews with local contractors, manufacturers, and economic development institutions, the GIDC recommended the following services: bulletin boards to post notices about equipment exchange and repair, employment opportunities, and real estate availability; training in basic sewing skills, specialty machine operation skills, and sewing machine maintenance and repair; and a contractors certification seminar to provide instruction in garment pricing and financing sources. These services are similar to those offered at the GIDC's Fashion Modernization Center in Manhattan Chinatown.²⁰

Equipped with 30 sewing machines, the Quick Sew Center opened in September 2001 by offering a 15-week sewing skills course to about 15 neighborhood garment workers. Funding has since run out, and currently, there are no prospects for additional resources necessary to continue its operation (Geri Jasper, director of economic development, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, April 15, 2002). Although upgrading worker skills is essential, the prospect of worker training in an industry with virtually no career ladders begs the question of the larger dilemma of innovative job creation and worker training strategies in immigrant economies.²¹

The planning and implementation of Brooklyn Mills represents a critical missed opportunity to continue and build on the collaboration initiated by the local Apparel Industry Task Force to convene all stakeholders in a declining industry that nonetheless remains the cornerstone of an immigrant neighborhood economy. Brooklyn Mills has failed to serve as a high-road development strategy and has had no measurable impact on Sunset Park's garment industry. Lacking a "higher level of services" (B. Shockney, executive director, the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation, personal communication, April 5, 2002), Brooklyn Mills merely subsidizes rents, providing a necessary but certainly not sufficient intervention to promote improved garment production practices. The Quick Sew Center also represents a missed opportunity to advance labor and community alliances that are necessary to incubate and implement meaningful and comprehensive strategies for immigrant economic development.

Clearly, one project cannot be a panacea to the multiple issues of sweatshop economies. The significance of Brooklyn Mills highlights the limitations of industry high-road strategies to address the community development needs of Asian and Latino immigrant economies. The prevalent form of garment production in New York is based on the cheap labor of risk-taking immigrant business owners and their coethnic workers. Brooklyn Mills underscores the mismatch of conventional economic development tools due to poor planning and lack of commitment to effectively

assist a marginalized immigrant sector. Without sound economic development intervention, small immigrant contractors will continue along the low road of garment production where marginal profits are based on squeezing labor. This is an especially significant challenge in a climate where even a high-road development strategy is only slightly better than compliance with existing labor laws.

CONCLUSION

Sunset Park's neighborhood economy is embedded in the economic restructuring of New York City. The decline of Sunset Park's waterfront industries in the 1960s was related to the massive and fundamental shift in New York City's economic base from manufacturing to service-related industries. Moreover, the reindustrialization of Sunset Park is centered on downgraded manufacturing where the key competitive advantage is cheap domestic labor in the form of risk-taking entrepreneurs and exploited workers. Despite the steady decline of manufacturing jobs, the influx of Asian and Latino immigrants has enabled New York City to hold on to the garment industry. Sunset Park's informal economy is a key link in this global assembly line by providing cheap rents, easy access to regional transportation networks, and a vulnerable, largely nonunionized labor supply.

The investment dollars in Brooklyn Mills was relatively modest, but given that public resources are rare in communities such as Sunset Park, it nonetheless represents a significant economic development initiative. The development of Brooklyn Mills demonstrates how the state intervenes in mediating the effects of globalization in immigrant communities. On one hand, the state acts as a policing entity to enforce labor laws and regulate the conditions in the sweatshop economy. At the same time, the state has not allocated resources to meaningfully address immigrant community development needs. This is reflected not only in the question of whether conventional economic development strategies, such as a business incubator, are appropriate forms of public investment for Sunset Park's immigrant economy but also in how community involvement in the development process has been essentially token at best.

Enforcement of standard labor practices is necessary to combat the prevalence of sweatshops in New York City's garment industry. However, this stick is largely felt by the most vulnerable sectors of the garment production chain. Similar to the criticism that the American labor movement has failed to address the issues and concerns of immigrant workers, economic development policy and institutions have also failed to adequately respond to the needs of immigrant economies concentrated in marginal industry sectors (Kwong, 1996). The exclusion of immigrant economies in high-road development strategies is based on two distinct ideological perspectives that ultimately provide the rationalization for institutional and policy neglect. The first perspective argues immigrant exceptionalism, which promotes immigrant social ties and ethnic solidarity that neutralize class divisions to attain collective and shared interests in economic survival and mobility. The other perspective recognizes class exploitation and projects immigrant entrepreneurs as "unfair" and "illegitimate" competitors engaged in low-road strategies who therefore are undeserving of economic development assistance. Both views fail to critique the positioning of immigrant economic sectors in the very bottom of a hierarchical production chain.

The garment industry is central to the economic livelihood of Sunset Park immigrant residents. However, local conditions indicate the prevalence of sweatshops and the related social and economic costs of working poverty and worker abuses. Chinese immigrants exploit extremely risky and marginal sectors primarily because there are no other alternatives. In contrast, Korean garment contractors are opting for other industries because of the cutthroat competition. As a state Department of Labor official explained, "The Chinese have exploitation down to a science" (L. Vanegas, personal communication, November 30, 2000). Chinese contractors will accept an unreasonable bid knowing that their slim profit margins will be eked out by "sweating" coethnic workers. The GIDC's (2001a) studies show that "most contractors accept orders to sew garments without really understanding the true cost of production" (p. 5). Increasingly, there is acknowledgement that manufacturers also bear responsibility because they must be aware that contractors simply cannot complete a job and pay workers fair wages at extremely low bids.

As a high-road development strategy in this economic context, the significance of Brooklyn Mills raises broader dilemmas in the feasibility of sustaining manufacturing jobs in a globalized industry, the availability of institutional resources for immigrant workforce and economic development, and the need to reconceptualize assets in neighborhoods where small business ownership is common but the goals of equity, sustainable development, livable wages, and community wealth remain elusive. As the GIDC (2001a) recommended, "The challenge for Brooklyn is to try to upgrade these businesses into legal operations rather than eliminate employment through enforcement" (p. 5). In addition to the stick, clearly, carrots must also be applied to the immigrant sector of the garment industry. To do this effectively, Brooklyn Mills illustrates the need to reconcile a heightening mismatch in conventional economic development solutions and the outstanding needs of immigrant economies.

NOTES

1. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks have deepened this crisis, particularly for manufacturing contractors located in Manhattan Chinatown. See the Asian American Federation of New York (2002).
2. An advantage for domestic production is niche markets and high-end fashion products, especially because foreign manufacturing requires long lead times that preclude the creativity and flexibility best mined when showrooms and production facilities are nearby, as examined in recent research by Norma Rantisi (2000). Additional factors favoring small designers as a result of the September 11, 2001, tragedies are examined in Gina Bellafante's (2001) *The New York Times* article.
3. Mark Levitan (1998) used the phrase "carrots and sticks" in his 1998 study of New York City's garment industry.
4. A recent example of legislative action is the Apparel Workers' Protection Act passed by the New York State Assembly in July 2001. This act authorizes the labor commissioner to publish listings of noncompliant manufacturers and contractors on the Internet and grants a special apparel industry task force powers to evacuate and close any premises in serious violation of the fire code.
5. I use data analysis and in-depth interviews in this study of Sunset Park's garment industry. Data from the 1980 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990), 1990-1997 Immigration and Naturalization Services Public Use Files (U.S. Department of Justice, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997), county business patterns data (U.S. Census Bureau, 1980a, 1992, 1997, 1999, 2000), and the New York State Department of Labor (1999-2000) ES-202 data were used to compile a profile of garment manufacturing establishments and employees, including labor force characteristics. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with staff members of the Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC), the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, the Asian American Business Development Corporation, the United Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE), and local community organizations including the Kings County Apparel Association, Community Board 7, and the Chinese American Planning Council. In addition, meeting minutes from the now defunct Apparel Industry Task Force of Community Board 7 provided important documentation of community goals and discussion on the garment industry.
6. In addition, 10% of apparel employment was made up of precision production occupations such as tailors, pattern makers, layout workers, and cutters. The apparel industry also generated a fair share of nonproduction jobs, such as sales representatives, bookkeepers, shipping and office clerks, and managerial and designer jobs.
7. A sweatshop is defined as "an employer that violates more than one federal or state labor law governing minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation, or industry regulation" (refer to the New York State Department of Labor Web site, <http://www.labor.state.ny.us/html/workprot/garment.asp>).
8. Staff members of the GIDC and the Chinese Workers and Staff Association confirmed that it is common practice for workers not to be paid for up to 5 weeks at a time. This practice may be more acute in New York City. A conversation with Lora Jo Foo, cofounder of Sweatshop Watch in Oakland, California, noted that employers owing back wages is not as prevalent in Los Angeles or Oakland (personal communication, June 14, 2001).
9. A summary of the compliance report findings are available at <http://www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/media/press/whd/ny070699.htm>.
10. A GIDC 2001 internal report notes that in the 2 years before, more than 18 buildings housing garment contractors in Manhattan Chinatown had been vacated.
11. This figure is based on legal immigration and does not include undocumented immigrants. Community leaders and residents claim that the number of undocumented immigrants, in particular the Fukienese, is increasing dramatically in Sunset Park. This pattern was observed by Kwong (1996).
12. Approximately one third of new immigrants who did not hold a job were homemakers (36%), unemployed or retired (33%), or students (31%). The Immigration and Naturalization Service lumps those who were unemployed or retired in the country of origin into one category.
13. The Apparel Industry Task Force is no longer a subcommittee of Community Board 7. In a personal interview, current District Manager Jeremy Laufer said there was no interest in reviving the committee.
14. UNITE's Garment Workers Center closed a year or so afterward because of funding issues and the departure of key staff member Dan Yun Feng, who had made significant inroads with various neighborhood institutions, including the

contractors group Kings County Apparel Association. The closure of the Sunset Park Garment Workers Center represents a significant void in UNITE's organizing strategies and perhaps its growing irrelevance in mobilizing workers.

15. Trinh Duong's statement is available at <http://www.yams.org/archives/05-14-98.htm>.

16. This study and related press releases issued by the Brooklyn Borough president's office are available at <http://www.brooklyn-usa.org/bklynnews/Garment.htm>.

17. According to a recent study conducted by the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development (2001), Brooklyn contains the largest share of New York City's manufacturing land uses.

18. Jacqui Williams, director of economic development for the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce and the manager of Brooklyn Mills, noted that the incubator was not a true incubator because not all tenant firms were start-ups. In fact, some had been in business for up to 10 years.

19. The GIDC has been searching for the opportunity to expand outside Manhattan for many years. Lin (1998) described GIDC's exploratory efforts to expand its services in Bush Terminal during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

20. Located on 193 Centre Street in Manhattan, the GIDC's Fashion Industry Modernization Center opened in 1998, providing demonstrations on modern production equipment and offering worker and management training classes.

21. This dilemma is at the forefront of discussions on rebuilding Chinatown's neighborhood economy in the aftermath of September 11. See the Asian American Federation of New York (2002).

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