

Sweatshops Here and There: The Garment Industry, Latinas, and Labor Migrations¹

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Abstract

From the post-World War II era to the present, the US garment industry has turned to Latinas as a source of low-wage workers in their countries of origin and as migrants to the United States. The globalization of the garment industry has meant the proliferation of export processing zones overseas and of sweatshops in US cities. Sweatshops, here and there, have become a locus of Latinas' labor in the global economy. This essay examines the impact of this evolving process on Puerto Rican and Dominican women, in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and as labor migrants to New York City. The globalization of the garment industry provides an example of the economic and political connections between the United States and countries of origin that shape migrations, as well as a lens for understanding deteriorating economic conditions in the inner cities.

In 1991, an advertisement in a trade magazine sought to lure the US garment industry to El Salvador. The ad revealed key elements that had come to define the globalization of the garment industry and its impact on Latinas. Across the top in bold print, it announced, "Quality, Industriousness, and Reliability Is What El Salvador Offers You!" Just beneath this was the picture of a young woman working at a sewing machine, her eyes focused on the machine in front of her. She was surrounded by piles of material on one side and neatly folded shirts complete with tags on the other. The ad continued, "Rosa Martinez produces apparel for US markets on her sewing machine in El Salvador. *You* can hire her for thirty-three cents an hour." Rosa's wages had declined, as the same ad the previous year had boasted wages of fifty-seven cents an hour. In addition to low wages, there were other advantages, "Rosa is more than just colorful. She and her co-workers are known for their industriousness, reliability and quick learning. They make El Salvador one of the best buys." El Salvador also offered potential investors "excellent road and sea transportation," Central America's "most modern airport," and "*no* quotas," indicating that US companies could produce and export as much as they wished. Placed by an organization that was funded in large part by the US government through the US Agency for International Development, the ad highlighted the US government's role in promoting export processing zones, as well as the centrality of the garment industry, and the key combination of low wages and women's labor.²

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has turned to Latinas as a source of low-wage workers in their countries of origin and as migrants to the United States. The globalization of the garment industry has meant the proliferation of export processing zones overseas and of sweatshops in US cities. Sweatshops, here and there, have become a locus of Latinas's labor in the global economy. As a result, the globalization of labor intensive industries, like the garment industry, has fostered the labor migrations of Latinas, both within their countries and to the United States. This essay examines this evolving process by looking first at the experiences of Puerto Rican women in the postwar era. As the garment industry relocated to Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican women migrated and found garment industry jobs, not only in New York City, but also in urban areas in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in the States. Yet the postwar economic boom in New York gave way to the industry's continued relocation to lower-wage areas, and Puerto Rican women confronted fewer jobs and deteriorating working conditions. Dominican women then encountered this changed labor market, as they became the next group of Latinas incorporated into New York's garment industry, while also experiencing the impact of export processing in the Dominican Republic.

Immigration is often portrayed as something that happens *to* the United States and that is problematic precisely because the United States does *not* control the process. This perspective ignores the impact of US political and economic interventions in shaping economic development and in causing out-migration, as well as the continuing reliance of US economic interests on low-wage immigrant labor in the United States. The globalization of the garment industry provides an example of the economic and political connections between the United States and countries of origin that shape migrations, particularly from the region that the United States has historically defined as its backyard.³ In addition, the experiences of Puerto Rican and Dominican women provide an important basis for exploring how the globalization of labor-intensive industries, like the garment industry, fostered the labor migrations of women and deteriorating economic conditions in the inner cities. My goals are to combine an assessment of the structural factors that constitute the globalization of the garment industry with women's own narratives in order to explore sweatshops here and there, as well as Latinas' labor migrations.⁴

Puerto Rican Women and the Postwar Garment Industry

The post-World War II era is often overlooked in the scholarship on the US garment industry. Historians have focused on earlier periods of the industry's growth, while social scientists have focused on the industry's decline since the 1960s. As a result, Puerto Rican women's experiences have not been fully integrated into this scholarship.⁵ Yet in the postwar era Puerto Rico became in essence the first export processing zone. The political ties between the United States and Puerto Rico facilitated the emergence of patterns of investment and migration that would be repeated in other countries. Puerto Rico's policymakers crafted an economic development strategy based on industrialization by in-

vation, and the US garment industry relocated to Puerto Rico to take advantage of low wages for women, as well as tax and other incentives. Puerto Rico became the model for a particular strategy of economic development that was based on foreign investment and export oriented industrialization, and that was accompanied by massive migration. For Puerto Rican women, the globalization of the garment industry shaped their labor migrations within Puerto Rico, their increased migration to the States, and their concentration in garment industry jobs.

Puerto Rico illustrates key elements of the export-processing zones that then proliferated along the U.S.-Mexico border, in the Caribbean, Central America, and Asia. Because of the political ties between Puerto Rico and the United States, Puerto Rico provided a safe and profitable investment site for US capital. The United States took control of Puerto Rico in 1898 at the end of the Spanish American War and has retained sovereignty to the present day. In 1917, the US Congress made Puerto Ricans US citizens and exempted individuals and businesses in Puerto Rico from federal income taxes. In 1947, Puerto Rico's policymakers extended this tax break by instituting their own tax exemptions, as they shifted from development strategies based on import substitution to strategies based on export oriented industrialization and US investment. US companies could now manufacture goods in Puerto Rico tax-free and then "export" those goods to the States without having to pay "import" duties. As a former employee of Puerto Rico's Economic Development Administration, David Ross suggested in 1969, it was "freedom from taxes without leaving the United States."⁶ Despite political ties, federal minimum wages were not applied in Puerto Rico until the late 1970s, so that wages were significantly lower than those in the States. Recognizing the impact of wage differentials in attracting US industries, Puerto Rico's policymakers opposed the application of the federal minimum wage. Hence, for the US garment industry, Puerto Rico offered the advantages of overseas investment without the associated risks.⁷

Promotional efforts touted Puerto Rico's advantages, including low wages. In February 1949, the *New York Times* declared, "Puerto Rico Urged on US Business." Tax exemptions offered "outstanding advantages to United States companies," as a hypothetical textile company with a plant in Puerto Rico could "retain almost twice as much of its profits." In addition to tax exemptions, the article continued, "Puerto Rican labor, which was highly skilled in the textile field, commanded wage rates from one-third to one-half of those in the United States, which would allow United States concerns located there to save at least thirty cents on every dollar of manufacturing value."⁸ Similarly, a 1949 pamphlet by the Office of Puerto Rico pointed out the abundance of workers, extensive unemployment and underemployment, "orderly and tranquil" labor relations, and "very few strikes." Focusing on women workers, it noted that "workers in the needlework industry, both men and women, but mostly the latter, are many and are noted for their dexterity and their industry," and that labor laws had "recently been liberalized to permit night work for women in textile industries." With wages in the needlework industry only twenty-six percent of those in the

United States, the pamphlet concluded, "In virtually all lines and stages of textile and apparel manufacturing the current wage structure of Puerto Rico offers the possibility of substantial advantages to the entrepreneur."⁹

The garment industry came to Puerto Rico to reap the potential profits, establishing the dynamics of an export-processing zone in its wake. In the immediate postwar era, both the home needlework industry and garment factories increased. The home needlework industry was, as economist Harvey Perloff noted in 1950, "developed chiefly by mainland capital" and "based essentially on cheap labor." Through a system of contractors and subcontractors, materials were shipped from the US mainland, contractors in Puerto Rico handled the distribution and collection of materials, and rural women added the hand details at home, earning piece-work wages. The finished products were shipped back to the States for marketing.¹⁰ By the late 1950s, the home needlework industry declined, and factory work increased. Yet, these key dynamics remained. The industry, according to sociologist Robert Laurentz, was characterized by "semi-skilled workers in contracting shops working at de-skilled jobs for low wages."¹¹

The garment industry was central to Puerto Rico's industrialization, and women's labor was central to the garment industry. As sociologist Palmira Ríos contends, "Low-paid women workers are the key to survival of these highly competitive industries in the new global economy." By 1963, plants established by Puerto Rico's Economic Development Administration or Fomento, employed 70,000 workers, with sixty percent of the new jobs filled by women. In 1970, apparel was the largest industrial employer and eighty-seven percent of the workers were women. Women's labor force participation increased as a result, from twenty-one to twenty-five percent between 1950 and 1970, while men's declined from seventy-one to fifty-nine percent.¹² Wage differentials, tax exemptions, and profits remained central to Fomento's efforts to recruit the US apparel industry. In 1973, Fomento attributed their success to "the competence and skill of the workforce" and to "tax and other incentives." Yet the wage differential between Puerto Rico and the United States had increased from \$.71 to \$.91 between 1965 and 1972, when garment workers earned an average of \$2.67 an hour in the United States compared to \$1.76 in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico still offered "a very favorable profit record," as firms in Puerto Rico were almost two-and-a-half times more profitable than those in the States before taxes, and were more than four and a half times more profitable after taxes.¹³

Although all of Puerto Rico became an export processing zone in terms of tax exemptions and low wages, new manufacturing jobs were concentrated in the San Juan metropolitan area, creating a "zone" in the more geographic sense. By 1957, small towns received just one-sixth of the new jobs for more than a third of the population. Fomento conceded, "even though our overall rate of economic progress and development is perhaps as rapid and as firmly grounded as in any part of our hemisphere, there remain groups of workers, individual towns, and even broader areas of Puerto Rico that have not shared fully in the measure of advance so far achieved." The beneficiaries had been "the major cities, their

surrounding metropolitan areas, and city women.” Despite longer tax exemptions for industries in Puerto Rico’s rural areas, the garment industry remained concentrated in urban areas.¹⁴

Puerto Rico demonstrated that economic development based on export processing and labor intensive industries failed to generate sufficient employment. New manufacturing jobs in urban areas did not replace the jobs lost in rural areas, as Puerto Rico’s agriculture and home needlework industry declined. As Ross noted, “No one could greatly lament the passing of an industry which made a sweatshop of every poor man’s home in some sections of the island; except that this industry provided desperately needed income for several times the number of families that had been benefitted by the Development Company.”¹⁵ Total employment in Puerto Rico declined during the 1950s. As a result, Puerto Rico’s industrialization coincided with massive migration.

As Puerto Rico’s rural economies declined, Puerto Rican women became labor migrants, going to nearby towns, as well as to urban areas in Puerto Rico and the States in search of work. Doña Genara, who was born in 1926 in a rural area recalled, “We started to leave the *barrio* little by little and to look for work.” For Doña Genara, moving to the nearby town to live with her sister in the early 1950s, enabled her to attend a vocational training program that taught embroidering, knitting, and sewing by machine. After the training program, she explained, “I stayed mostly at my sister’s house because in the country there still wasn’t any electricity. So I stayed to do my work.” Her first job was in a knitting shop, where she earned \$12.80 for the week, “But we had to work fast, if not, they fired you.” After two years, the shop closed. Doña Genara turned to knitting homework, working longer hours and earning less money, “Three dozen, it was thirty-six hats to earn four dollars . . . I didn’t have time for anything. I worked about ten or twelve hours [a day].” She saw few options, “I always worked in knitting, because there wasn’t anything else, I mean in my town.”¹⁶

Seeing few options in Puerto Rico’s rural areas and towns, other women migrated to urban areas in Puerto Rico and the States. As migrants left San Lorenzo, for example, women were more likely than the men to be married in the rapidly urbanizing areas of San Juan and Caguas between 1945 and 1965, and in New York City and Philadelphia, places where garment industry jobs were readily available.¹⁷ Even contemporary policymakers and scholars who downplayed women’s significance as workers revealed the centrality of women’s labor migration in Puerto Rico’s rural to urban migration. A 1966 dissertation found that women who migrated to urban areas between 1955 and 1960 were more successful than their male counterparts in securing employment.¹⁸ Women’s labor migration was also central in the migration to the States, as sixty-four percent of women were migrating because they had a job offer or were looking for work, according to a 1952 survey. The others were joining family members, and perhaps would look for work as well.¹⁹ Women garment workers were among the labor migrants. According to needlework employers in San Juan in a 1953 survey, migration to the States was one of the primary reasons their workers quit.²⁰

A year later a study in Philadelphia found that forty-eight percent of women had last worked as operatives in Puerto Rico and only twenty-eight percent identified themselves as housewives.²¹

Both government programs and informal networks facilitated women's labor migration to the States. In their efforts to reduce Puerto Rico's population, policymakers fostered migration, providing training programs and alerting potential migrants to the availability of jobs in the States. As one policymaker commented in 1948, "Any man or woman who can earn a substandard living at needle work in Puerto Rico can earn a standard living at the hosiery plants around Philadelphia."²² Referring to her sewing instructor, Doña Genara explained, "She told us, 'You can work here, and in the United States there are also good jobs on the sewing machine.' She told us, 'Try to do well on the machine because this is the most important work that all of you are going to find.'" A sister already living in Philadelphia eased her migration in 1954, "I had a sister here, and I came to my sister's house." She found work easily, "As soon as I arrived from Puerto Rico, I started in that factory." The wage differentials that lured the US garment industry to Puerto Rico also made garment work in the States appealing to migrants. "I wanted to come for a better life . . . I worked as much as I could . . . I wanted to earn more money," said Doña Genara, adding, "I earned more money. I, for example, in Puerto Rico I earned twelve dollars a week and here I earned forty, they took out two, I kept thirty-eight."²³

Finding jobs readily available, Puerto Rican women helped each other migrate and get garment industry jobs. Sewing in a rural area in Puerto Rico, Doña Anastasia came to New York in 1951:

I worked on a sewing machine making blouses by the dozen and I sewed to sell on my own. I set up a little business . . . Then, *Comadre* Miguelina came to this country and I wanted to come even more than before and she would write about how good it was here and that you could make money . . . making dresses.

When she arrived, she explained, "I started to work right away."²⁴ Doña Juanita came to Philadelphia with the help of her sister. Leaving Naguabo in 1953 because "there wasn't any work," Doña Juanita's first job was in the garment factory where her sister worked, making men's suits. Their neighbors from Naguabo, a family of twelve, gradually made their way to Philadelphia, "They wanted to come to the United States. They wrote to my sister, and we helped each other out . . . It was my sister who first received them and got them work." They all worked in the garment industry, as Doña Juanita explained, "because there were a lot of garment factories in Philadelphia. You would get a factory job anywhere."²⁵

At the end of World War II, Puerto Rican women in New York City were entering what was still the center of the US garment industry.²⁶ The war had temporarily halted the industry's relocation and had pent-up consumer demand. In 1947, New York City accounted for forty percent of US employment in women and children's apparel, and the New York metropolitan region accounted for

forty-nine percent. Within the region, employment in women and children's apparel increased from 239,000 to 260,000 between 1947 and 1954.²⁷ In 1953, New York City still produced seventy-eight percent of unit-priced dresses, seventy-three percent of coats and suits, seventy-two percent of blouses, and sixty-eight percent of underwear.²⁸

Employers and union representatives complained of labor shortages of skilled workers, and urged the admission of displaced persons from Europe. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in February 1947, the general president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America wrote, "The needle-trade industries alone, both men's and women's, could not only absorb but would welcome thousands as workers."²⁹ Revealing the gender-based segmentation in the industry, the demand was particularly acute for "trained men" for the cloak and suit industry.³⁰ Nevertheless, Puerto Rican women found work more easily than Puerto Rican men, according to an article in the *New York Times*. In February 1947, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union had 7,500 Puerto Rican women members and estimated that an additional 4,000 to 8,000 worked in other small shops.³¹

As a result of their labor migrations, Puerto Rican women became concentrated in New York City's garment industry, but only within certain trades.³² During the 1940s, Puerto Ricans became the "major new source" of labor for the undergarments trade, and constituted half of the skirt industry's labor force. Puerto Ricans, along with African Americans, constituted half of the new members of the unit-priced dresses local by 1948. Puerto Ricans became the largest ethnic group in dressmaking, skirts, and blouses. The skirt and dress trades, however, were the lowest skilled and lowest paid trades. Puerto Ricans had not found work in the skilled and higher paid suit trades; nor had they entered the skilled cutters' and pressers' locals.³³ Successful in finding jobs, Puerto Rican women were more likely than other women in the city to be in the labor market by 1950, forty compared to thirty-five percent. The overwhelming majority of Puerto Rican women, seventy-two percent, worked as operatives.³⁴

Nevertheless, contemporary observers failed to consider Puerto Rican women as labor migrants. Writing in 1959, Roy B. Helfgott wondered why more Puerto Ricans were not migrating to New York City, given the demand for unskilled labor in the women's and children's apparel industries. He explained, "The answer seems to lie in the fact that the garment industry attracts almost exclusively women workers, while the crucial factor in migration is job opportunities for men."³⁵ Similarly, Raymond Vernon excluded Puerto Rican women from the ranks of labor migrants. He noted in 1960, "Most of these in-migrants can be thought of as responding to economic opportunities, but not all." He added, "Some of the Puerto Rican women, for instance, probably came to the mainland because of their husband's job opportunities, not their own, then joined the labor force when they discovered that some apparel plants were begging for their services." From this perspective, labor migration was a male phenomenon, while women followed "their" men and "discovered" work in the receiving society.³⁶

Even with the postwar boom in the garment industry, Puerto Rican women

encountered a range of working conditions in union and non-union shops. For journalist Dan Wakefield, “The seventy-two hour week, at less than a dollar an hour, sounds like a tale of life in the New York sweatshops of thirty years ago. To the lady at the Sano garment shop, it was not a remote fact of history but a fact of life in Spanish Harlem in 1958.” She earned \$.35 per garment, regardless of the difficulty of the piece, and the most she had ever earned was seventy dollars in a week, a feat she accomplished by working from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. for six days. In union shops, piece rates were set based on the difficulty of the piece, with some set at \$.70 to \$.90. Another woman suggested that non-union jobs were easier to come by than union jobs, “I’ve worked in a lot of them around the neighborhood, and the one where I am now is the best. I tell you, you don’t find many like this one. Well lighted, and clean, and nice machines.” Wakefield considered the “farmed-out needlework of garment shops” and “the small often fly-by-night dress shops” as “the main chance of employment within the neighborhood,” and concluded that “very few girls grow up in these streets without getting a touch of it.”³⁷ In Philadelphia, most of Doña Genara’s shops were represented by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and she considered these good jobs, “The factory was good. The bosses were good. It was good work.” Yet in one of her shops, “They didn’t turn in social security, they found themselves in trouble . . . It seems they didn’t pay taxes or something, I don’t know. And we had to go to another factory.” Others did homework, “I didn’t sew at home . . . but I saw a lot of people sewing at home . . . They got homework . . . because the factory gave them clothes to sew at home.”³⁸

Working for piece-work rates created challenges in non-union and union shops. Doña Anastasia described her first garment industry job in New York City:

The lady, the owner of the shop, was from Mayaguez. We would sew dresses for the Bella Hess Company, but I wouldn’t get far ’cause I was too slow. So, I would make twenty dollars a week. They were supposed to pay me thirty, but they wouldn’t. There was no union there. All there was was sew, sew, sew.³⁹

Doña María had trouble with her boss in a union shop, where she was one of two people trained on a zigzag machine. She explained, “Every time that a garment was new and it took me longer I had to fight for the price. So at one point [a new garment] came in and this work was very hard. I cannot make enough money for the hours . . . [My boss] told me if you don’t want to do the work just go home but at this time I had the protection of the union.” Instead of going home, she went to the union. The union agent accompanied her to work and established the piece rate with her boss.⁴⁰

The availability of garment industry jobs gave women a certain leverage in the labor market, enabling them to switch jobs for better conditions or to struggle to improve conditions in their shops. Doña María, who had confronted her boss about piece-work rates, did not appreciate being fired in front of fifty coworkers. She waited until her skills on the machine were needed and then quit, creating a predicament for her boss, “I worked Monday and Tuesday and on Wednesday I didn’t report to work. I went next door and I find another job, this

time in bathing suits . . . They paid me about seventy-five cents a garment which at that time, this was in 1956, was good money.” Her interviewer, Blanca Vázquez Erazo concluded, “Because of the relative ease of finding work in the boom era of the 1950s and 1960s, María had the same option as other women did: to go from factory to factory, to ‘shop’ for better salaries and working conditions.”⁴¹ Similarly, Doña Anastasia left her first job, “So when I found that I wasn’t satisfied but already had the experience to work on any machine, I said ‘No, I’m not staying here. I’m going somewhere else.’” As the “chairlady” in one of her factories, Doña Anastasia helped other women and took their complaints to the union, contrary to her boss’ wishes. Her interviewer, Ana Juarbe, explained that Doña Anastasia “engaged in more direct confrontation with unfavorable situations without fear of losing her family’s livelihood. She could always find work in another shop.”⁴²

Women also learned to sew on the job, and balanced paid employment and household responsibilities by leaving and reentering the workforce as needed. Upon arriving in New York in 1948, Doña María realized, “All the jobs available were for sewing machine operators and I said to myself, ‘My God, I have to learn to sew.’” She taught herself to sew by getting jobs and getting fired after fifteen minutes or less, but with more practice each time.⁴³ In Philadelphia, Doña Juanita recalled, “I sewed too even though I didn’t know how to sew anything . . . I learned to sew what they gave me there [at the factory], but I didn’t like the idea of piece-work, to earn your money.”⁴⁴ Given that in Philadelphia, “It was very easy to work before,” Doña Genara explained, “Before, it was good here. You left one factory and you could get work in another. And since I had five children, I had to stop working for a while. But when I could, I returned to a factory and started to work again.”⁴⁵

Although labor migration has often been portrayed as a male phenomenon, the globalization of the garment industry sparked and shaped the labor migrations of Puerto Rican women. Globalization brought the U.S. garment industry to Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican women became labor migrants as they were displaced from rural economies and migrated in response to the availability of garment industry jobs. During the postwar economic boom, Puerto Rican women found jobs easily, which increased their migration and concentration in the garment industry, and gave them a certain leverage in the industry. Puerto Rican women, however, had entered and become concentrated in an industry that was on the verge of fundamental changes. After slowing during and immediately after the Second World War, the relocation of the garment industry was about to accelerate as the industry continued its search for lower-wage workers. Both working conditions and Puerto Rican women’s position in the industry would change as a result.

The Changing Nature of New York City’s Garment Industry

Responding to increased competition from imports, the US garment industry relied increasingly on contractors, which fostered sweatshops in US cities and facilitated the industry’s relocation to lower-wage areas at greater distances. The

ratio between imports and domestic production of all women's and men's apparel grew from seven to fifty-one percent between 1959 and 1980. By 1984, half of all clothing sold in the United States was imported from abroad.⁴⁶ As US apparel manufacturers and US apparel retailers sent production overseas, they contributed to the increase in imports that they bemoaned.⁴⁷ While many scholars and labor leaders have decried the loss of US jobs, others have argued that offshore assembly benefits US workers. Scholars Edna Bonacich and David Waller argued that "... labor standards are much lower in the countries of origin, allowing a substantial savings to US garment manufacturers and avoiding the proliferation of sweatshops on US territory."⁴⁸ I argue, instead, that competition and contracting exerted downward pressure on wages in the United States, as well as overseas. They hastened the continued relocation of the industry and the low-wage incorporation of Puerto Rican women in New York. These changes affected Puerto Rican women and more recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic.

As Puerto Ricans entered the garment industry in large numbers, wages declined. The garment industry was shifting from a higher paying to a lower paying industry, and New York City itself was changing from a high to a low wage area.⁴⁹ Between 1946 and 1949, wages in the dress trade, a major employer of Puerto Rican women, decreased from \$1.44 to \$1.37, while wages for all manufacturing increased from \$1.08 to \$1.40.⁵⁰ The deskilling of the industry continued. As consumer demand shifted to casual wear, the more simple, standardized garments could be produced by unskilled workers. Garment production was broken down into particular tasks or section work, with each worker responsible for a single task. These tasks were increasingly parceled out to contracting shops, which relied heavily on the labor of Puerto Rican and African American women. Manufacturers and jobbers were larger employers responsible for several dimensions of garment production, while contractors were smaller employers that focused on a particular task, usually sewing. Between 1953 and 1961, dress shops operated by manufacturers and jobbers decreased by twenty-two percent, while those operated by contractors decreased by less than one percent. The proportion of dress workers in contracting shops increased from sixty-nine to seventy-nine percent. This contributed to declining wages, as workers in shops operated by manufacturers and jobbers earned 1.6 times more than their counterparts in contracting shops.⁵¹ While competition and contracting exerted downward pressure on wages, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union supported wage restraint, opposing increases in New York's minimum wage during the 1960s in an effort to keep the garment industry in the city.⁵²

Puerto Rican women's low wages temporarily slowed the industry's relocation. Writing in 1959, Edgar M. Hoover and Raymond Vernon suggested, "A plant may cling to the central city for similar reasons: because of the availability in some neighborhoods of a group of Puerto Rican or Negro women who have not yet acquired the mobility or skills to command a higher wage."⁵³ Similarly, Laurentz found that "the abundant supply of black and Puerto Rican labor within New York led to a temporary deceleration of the rate of relocation of the in-

dustry to out-of-town areas.”⁵⁴ Even as shops relocated within the region, they continued to rely on Puerto Rican women workers. Between 1953 and 1961, dressmakers in Manhattan’s core garment area decreased by thirty-two percent. But they increased slightly in Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, where Puerto Ricans and African Americans worked in large numbers and where wages were lower, averaging \$62.54 a week in contrast to \$88.72 a week in Manhattan in 1961. Wages were even lower in the Northeast region, \$47.30 a week, and in Pennsylvania, \$46.55 a week, and the wage gap was increasing. While wages in Manhattan rose by thirty-three percent, those for the Northeast and Pennsylvania rose sixteen and fifteen percent, respectively.⁵⁵

Also, deskilling, section work, and contracting lessened the industry’s dependence on New York City, with its skilled labor force. Merchandising was separated from sewing, with the former remaining in the city and the latter relocated elsewhere. Improvements in transportation lowered the costs of conducting business beyond the city’s limits, at the same time that high rents, limited manufacturing space, and traffic congestion increased the cost of doing business in the city.

Employment in New York’s apparel industry plummeted, as did the quality of the remaining jobs. Between 1947 and 1982, New York City’s share of production of women and children’s apparel decreased from forty-two to sixteen percent.⁵⁶ Employment in the apparel industry decreased by 54,000 jobs between 1947 and 1958, and the next decade witnessed the loss of another 72,000 jobs. After losing 20,000 jobs in 1969 alone, the city lost an average of 12,500 jobs per year between 1969 and 1975. By 1975, fewer than 150,000 people worked in apparel, just one-third of the 1969 labor force.⁵⁷ While manufacturing jobs that were secure, unionized and paid above the minimum wage declined during the 1970s, as Saskia Sassen suggests, a “downgraded manufacturing sector” expanded, relying on sweatshops and homework. Small garment shops provided flexibility and absorbed the risks and instability of the market. Wages in the apparel industry continued to decline relative to other manufacturing wages. In 1977 garment workers earned just sixty-four percent of average manufacturing wages, a sharp contrast to ninety-five percent in 1947. Nevertheless, labor still constituted twenty-seven percent of the production costs in apparel, in contrast to ten percent for manufacturing as a whole, propelling the industry’s search for cheaper labor.⁵⁸

The continued globalization of the garment industry meant that Puerto Rican women in New York City confronted fewer jobs, economic displacement, and deteriorating working conditions. Laurentz found that after 1950, “Garment employers, especially in the dress trade, where the largest concentrations of blacks and Puerto Ricans were found, were quicker than ever to flee to lower-wage areas outside the city.”⁵⁹ In 1969, the *New York Times* reported “an increase in illegal home work.”⁶⁰ During the 1970s, an estimated 400 to 600 non-union shops operated in the Bronx, employing primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican workers, according to one union organizer. A Puerto Rican woman, who worked a forty-five hour week with days up to fifteen hours, averaged fifty-

four dollars per week without any benefits, at a time when union wages ranged from eighty-five to ninety-five dollars for a thirty-five hour week. As Laurentz concluded, "The contraction of the garment industry in New York City has thus led to the proliferation of non-union shops in which opportunities for Puerto Rican workers have been reduced from what they had been when the industry was healthier and union shops were more prevalent."⁶¹

As the garment industry continued its search for cheap labor via sweatshops in the States and continued relocation, Puerto Rican women became displaced labor migrants. Puerto Rican women's labor force participation decreased as the garment industry declined, poverty among Puerto Ricans in the inner city increased, and Puerto Rican women turned to the state for the financial assistance they needed to sustain their households.⁶² In Philadelphia Doña Genara described the change, "All those lots that are vacant over there, those were factories."⁶³ Some jobs disappeared, while as anthropologist Judith Goode notes, "A somewhat clandestine garment industry has developed based on Korean and Chinese capital and using newcomer Asian labor."⁶⁴ Hence, the garment industry shaped not only Puerto Rican women's labor migration patterns, but also their economic wellbeing and that of their households and communities. Writing in 1984, Elizabeth Weiner and Hardy Green described New York's two-tiered garment industry with its "legitimate" and "underground" sectors. Instead of a simple equation of Puerto Rican citizens in the legitimate sector and undocumented "Hispanic" immigrants in the underground sector, they found Puerto Rican women in non-union shops and taking in homework.⁶⁵ This was the labor market that Dominican women then confronted.

Dominican Women's Labor Migrations

Like Puerto Rican women, Dominican women were affected by export processing in their home country, as well as by the continuing decline of New York's garment industry. The growth of export processing zones in the Dominican Republic echoed Puerto Rico's economic development. Policymakers in the Dominican Republic lured foreign investment through incentives that resembled those in Puerto Rico, while US policymakers instituted trade policies to promote the assembly of manufactured goods abroad. US investment and the garment industry dominated export-oriented manufacturing. Wage differentials and women's labor remained key ingredients in the economic development strategy and in the industry's relocation. Here too, economic development based on foreign investment and export processing failed to generate sufficient employment, and was accompanied by internal and international migration. Women figured prominently in both migration streams, finding garment work in export processing zones and in New York City. Although not a colony of the United States, export processing zones in the Dominican Republic highlight the impact of US political and economic interventions in shaping economic development and migration.

US policymakers facilitated overseas investment in ways that made the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean nations more like Puerto Rico. Trade

policies reduced tariffs and hence the costs for US firms doing business beyond the boundaries of the United States. Beginning with Tariff Item 807, the US reduced the duties on imports that were made from US components but processed or assembled abroad. Tariffs were collected only on the “value added” or on the low-wage labor that companies had sought. From 1965 to 1983, the value of Item 807 imports increased from \$578 million to \$9,226 million. Mexico sent the most in 1983, over \$156 million worth of Item 807 clothing exports, and the Dominican Republic was second, sending almost \$130 million.⁶⁶ Although the 1983 Caribbean Basin Initiative excluded garments and textiles from duty-free status, three years later the Caribbean Basin Textile Access Program provided unlimited access to the US market for apparel products provided that the fabric was made and cut in the United States. Quantitative limits were set for those garments assembled abroad but not from US made and cut fabrics. In addition to favorable trade policies, the US government has provided financial assistance to firms that invest overseas, as well as to the governments of host countries that welcome them. Investment and project financing, and investment insurance have been provided by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and by the Agency for International Development, which also supported organizations promoting export-oriented manufacturing and advertised free trade zones during the 1980s.⁶⁷

As in Puerto Rico, policymakers in the Dominican Republic shifted from import substitution to export-oriented industrialization with foreign investment. Establishing free trade zones in the Industrial Incentive Act of 1968, policymakers exempted industries from local taxes, from customs duties on imported capital and semi-finished goods, and from export duties on finished or semi-finished goods. Employment in manufacturing increased from 20,000 to 47,562 between 1968 and 1977. More than 125 subsidiaries of US firms were among those providing manufacturing jobs.⁶⁸ The number of free trade zones, foreign investment, and imports to the United States all increased dramatically between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. By 1988, garments accounted for seventy-eight percent of manufacturing exports. In that same year, sixty-three percent of export-processing firms were US owned, while only ten percent were Dominican owned. Indeed, most garment factories were direct subsidiaries of US transnational corporations rather than subcontractors.⁶⁹

The US garment industry relied on the low-wage labor of Dominican women in the export processing zones, providing “low-paying and extremely insecure” jobs.⁷⁰ Wages in the Dominican Republic were significantly lower than in the United States, and they were declining. In 1984, US apparel workers earned an average of \$7.00 an hour.⁷¹ Between 1984 and 1990, wages in the Dominican Republic plummeted from \$1.33 to \$.56 an hour. Meanwhile, industrial exports grew to \$850 million in 1991.⁷² By 1991, women held three-fourths of the 135,000 jobs in the free trade zones. Between 1960 and 1990, women’s labor force participation increased from nine to thirty-eight percent, while men’s decreased from seventy-six to seventy-two percent. This was a more dramatic increase in women’s labor force participation than among Puerto Rican women.⁷³

Economic development via export-oriented industrialization fostered in-

ternal and international migration, and the rural population decreased from sixty-five to forty-five percent between 1965 and 1984. The assassination of Trujillo in 1961 and changes in US immigration policies in 1965 increased Dominican immigration to the United States. "From 1968–1972, the height of economic expansion, international migration averaged 10,804 annually," and it increased to almost 15,000 people per year from 1973 to 1980.⁷⁴ During the first half of the 1990s, immigration averaged over 26,000 per year, and by 1997, 832,000 Dominicans lived in the United States. Sixty percent lived in New York City, where Dominicans were the fastest growing ethnic group and constituted the second-largest Latino group after Puerto Ricans.⁷⁵

Dominican women became labor migrants. As early as 1970, anthropologist Nancie L. González observed that "According to informants in the U.S. consulate, as well as among prospective migrants themselves, women find jobs more easily from afar than men." Although most secured labor certification and visas for work as domestics, "Employment is really not so difficult for Dominicans to find, once they arrive in New York. Most of the women work as domestics or in the garment industry." For undocumented workers, "there are many jobs available in New York where employers are glad to avoid having to pay their own share and can thus lower the wages since the employee then has no deductions." Women were also among the rural migrants to the capital, Santo Domingo, and another industrial zone being constructed in Santiago.⁷⁶ A 1982 survey of 231 women working in three free trade zones found that more than seventy-eight percent of the women were migrants, with sixty percent having lived in the city for ten years or less.⁷⁷ Women were fifty-five percent of internal migrants from a village in La Sierra in the early 1980s, according to anthropologist Eugenia Georges. Many headed to the export processing zone in Santiago, which employed 6,275 workers in 1980, almost all of whom were women. With the availability of jobs in New York City's secondary labor market a key reason for their migration, women were fifty-two percent of international migrants, as well.⁷⁸

Dominican women found garment industry jobs readily available in New York City. The garment industry, according to González, was one of "the few avenues open to these women to improve their situation." "For the working-class woman, work is available, regular, and though poorly paid by United States standards, nevertheless enables her to live better than at home."⁷⁹ In 1974 Glenn Hendricks explained that "Most informants insisted that with enough persistence some work could always be found; the problem was not merely finding a job, but finding a 'good' job." Social networks helped migrants find garment industry jobs. One shop, owned by two cousins from two neighboring villages, employed twenty-seven workers, all from their villages and all connected by kinship networks. This was a nonunion shop that subcontracted piece-work for a clothing manufacturer. Garment factories offered more employment than any other occupation for the 309 workers from the village studied by Hendricks, accounting for thirty percent of all workers and fifty-six percent of working women.⁸⁰

As Dominican women continued to migrate to New York City, they became

concentrated in the now downgraded garment industry. As Sherri Grasmuck and Patricia Pessar explain, “The comparatively high rates of labor-force participation of Dominicans show that they were generally successful in finding work, despite the economic downturns characterizing New York City during the 1970s.”⁸¹ By 1980, Dominican women were more likely to be in the labor force than women citywide, fifty percent compared to forty-seven percent, and most worked as operatives. Both documented and undocumented women worked in blue-collar jobs, sixty-three and seventy-one percent respectively, according to their survey of 301 Dominicans in the early 1980s. Undocumented workers, however, were more often in smaller, informal firms that paid workers lower wages and in cash. Almost sixty-five percent of the undocumented and thirty-one percent of the documented workers were in non-union firms. As Grasmuck and Pessar noted, “Our female informants voiced concern that garment work was virtually the only avenue of ‘honorable’ employment opened to female immigrants with little or no proficiency in English. They also observed, correctly, that jobs in the apparel industry were becoming scarcer.”⁸²

Still, women’s labor migration continued. In search of work at the age of fifteen, Nerida left a rural area in the Dominican Republic and came to New York in 1993. In the Dominican Republic she had lived near an export processing, but she noted: “I never worked there . . . I couldn’t work because until you are of age, you can’t work.” In New York, she explained, “I couldn’t study because I had a baby to support. Since I arrived, I was working under the table because I wasn’t of the age that they require for one to be able to work . . . But almost always, where I tried to find work was in a store, because there they don’t require papers.” Nerida had left her child in the care of family and joined her parents in the city. After working in a couple of stores, she found work in the garment industry.⁸³ Nerida was not alone. Women accounted for fifty-nine percent of all Dominican immigrants in the United States in 1996, and most immigrants were young, sixteen percent were between sixteen and twenty-four years of age, and forty-nine percent were between twenty-five and forty-four.⁸⁴ Like Puerto Rican women, Dominican women who migrated in search of work, found themselves concentrated in low-wage jobs and then displaced.

Dominican Women Workers: “A lot of work and a little money”

Confronting the two-tiered garment industry, Nerida’s work experiences in New York City suggest the conditions Dominicans confronted and the effects on their households and community. Debating the impact of the garment industry on Dominicans in New York City, some scholars have suggested that it offered opportunities for small businesses or that garment industry jobs were compatible with women’s domestic ideologies.⁸⁵ Others have pointed to the exploitation of workers.⁸⁶ While changes in the garment industry may have created some opportunities for ethnic entrepreneurs, most Dominican women, like Nerida, found low-paid, dead-end jobs, less demand for labor, and deteriorating working conditions. Their options and leverage in the garment industry were much

more circumscribed than those initially encountered by Puerto Rican women in the post-war era.

In 1998, Nerida was working in New York's garment district in a nonunion packing shop that handled women's sportswear for several brand-name labels. During the year and a half that she was there, the work force shifted but working conditions did not:

When I started, we were only six people working legally—everyone was illegal. But then there were a lot of problems with immigration. The owner of the factory, he withheld taxes from the people but was not reporting it to the government. That is to say, he had a lot of problems. He decided not to have any more illegals . . . There were . . . about sixty-five, seventy people . . . It was completely empty, completely. It was a Saturday, in the middle of the day, when everyone left. . . . They were all Mexicans. The six people that had papers, we were four Dominicans and two Mexicans.

The shop was no longer mostly Mexican and undocumented, but now employed about forty workers, mostly Dominican and documented, women, and young, under the age of thirty. As Nerida suggested, however, "Everything stayed the same. Already they were paying *overtime* to those who didn't have papers the same as to those who had them."⁸⁷

In describing their shop, workers emphasized the long hours, strict supervision, the tiring pace of the work, and the low wages. One worker summarized the conditions as, "a lot of work and a little money."⁸⁸ Their regular work week was Monday through Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., with breaks from 12:00 to 12:30 and from 4:00 to 4:15; and Saturdays from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with just the one break from 12:00 to 12:30, a total of fifty-three and-a-half hours. During busy times, they were expected to work late and occasionally on Sundays and holidays, as Nerida recounted, "Maybe until 7:00 at night, or 7:30, or 8:00, until the time they say that there's work, depending on whether I want to stay . . . If there is enough work in the factory, almost always there is enough work until after 5:30 and there is work seven days a week or six . . . The latest I have stayed, not always, until 10:00 at night." While stating that overtime was optional, workers suggested that there were repercussions for those unwilling to work overtime and added that they needed the money.⁸⁹

The work pace is intense, Nerida explained, referring to their new supervisor. "The one that is currently there, I don't know if it's because he has only been there for a short time, I don't know if it's because he's learning, I don't know the reason, but he leans on people, 'do it well, try to do it a little faster.'" Compared to working in stores, Nerida found:

It was a bit more difficult, because when you are used to working with people, it is more difficult to work in a shop where you have to be quiet, you can't talk, you can't go to the bathroom as many times as you could in the store. You have to be standing in the same place—in the store you are walking, you get less tired.

The faster pace also increased the potential for injuries:

The machine that is used for packing, if you put your hand in, it can cut it. If it doesn't completely catch your hand, it will burn it . . . I have burned myself many times, many times . . . Almost always it happens when you are more pressured because there is a lot of work. In trying to do the work a little faster, you forget yourself and you forget that your hand is there.

Workers who pressed also suffered from burns.

Having worked in two other garment shops, Nerida considered this shop neither the best nor the worst. Her first garment industry job was in a union shop that sewed collars on t-shirts, paid above the minimum wage, and provided benefits:

The shop is very efficient. It has health insurance, it has a union, they pay your vacation. This shop, after you have been there a certain amount of time, they increase your salary. Later, the month they put you in the union, they increase it a quarter. It wasn't much but they increased it some. And my brother . . . is there, he is earning about eight dollars an hour, which also isn't much, but there are other shops that are only paying \$5.15, \$6.

Hers was the night shift, however, and because she had a child to care for, Nerida kept this job for just two to three weeks. When she was laid off from her current shop for three months, she went to work in a large shop in Brooklyn that occupied two floors and made sweaters. While most of the work was sewing, a small packing section employed about six workers, including Nerida. She traveled two hours to work and discovered that this shop paid the minimum wage but not overtime:

I was only working forty hours a week because I said I wasn't going to work overtime if they weren't going to pay it . . . They didn't pay overtime. They paid it the same . . . But I only stayed the three months, until [my] factory called me [back] . . . Because this is the protection we have if they pay us overtime.

The next time she was laid off she applied for unemployment instead.

For Nerida, meeting her household expenses as well as balancing her job and household responsibilities presented challenges. She had remarried and was living with her husband and their daughter, while sending money to the Dominican Republic to support her first child. Household finances were tight, "If the work is good, I work the whole week, for example until 7:00 at night, I can pay my bills . . . If this week I don't work much, I pay the babysitter, I can't pay any bills. So, yeah, it depends on how the work is." Her husband contributed financially, working as a wholesale delivery driver, and shared in household chores and childcare. She described their daily routine:

I leave the factory at 7:00. I get home at 8:00, 8:15. I get a bath and I eat. Basically, I get together the things for the baby for the next day. I prepare lunch, look for clothes, it's already time to go to bed. Before I leave [in the morning], I don't have to do anything because . . . he gets the baby ready to take her to the babysitter because he leaves later than I do.

Her husband also picked up their daughter after work and cooked dinner, as he came home earlier than she did. Nerida and her husband were both taking English classes, on different nights so that one of them was home with their daughter. They barely saw each other, "He arrives from class at 10:00, I arrive home more or less at 10:00 . . . about half an hour, an hour, we go to bed."

In defining a "sweatshop," Nerida pointed to the physical conditions, exploitation, and oppressive supervision. Her current shop paid the minimum wage of \$5.15, and time-and-a-half for overtime. Workers were paid weekly, by check, their shop had never missed a payroll, and workers were not owed back wages. Workers had been paid off the books and in cash only on rare occasions, mostly for holidays, Sundays, and excessive overtime. But there were no benefits, except unemployment once workers were eligible. Seasonal fluctuations meant overwork at times, and layoffs at others, decreasing workers' incomes and providing supervisors with a means to reprimand workers. Was it a sweatshop? Nerida answered:

That term, I believe means because where you work that is where you leave your sweat . . . I think that word should be used for when there is exploitation in the shops. Even though all of them are exploiters, but some are more extreme than others. But I suppose that term should be used where it is really believed that the workers are being exploited . . . I think that [my shop] would fall in the middle. I wouldn't say that it's good, because it isn't good . . . It isn't a shop that has benefits or anything like that . . . For me, where you are working, without subjection and without them pressuring you, in a certain way they are abusing you, yeah, I believe that they are exploiting, but in a certain way they do demand that you work, but without being overbearing and other conflicts.

Nerida concluded:

Sometimes I feel like I don't want to keep doing it, because it's tiring. It's something that everyday I know that tomorrow I'm going to the same thing. A year passes me by, and I'm back again to the same thing . . . It's sort of difficult to know that you are sacrificing so much for work and at the end of the year you say, 'Let me see how much I've saved.' When you see it's a pittance . . . That's the bad thing about this country.

Long hours, low wages, and layoffs strained her household economy and her aspirations.

Dominicans' economic status has parallels to that of Puerto Ricans, sug-

gesting the impact of the garment industry in shaping not only women's migration patterns, but also the well-being of migrants in the city. Dominican women's concentration in the garment industry had consequences for their households and for the Dominican community. As manufacturing employment declined by almost 90,000 between 1989 and 1995, so did Dominican women's labor force participation. By 1997, forty-two percent of Dominican women were in the labor force compared to fifty-one percent of all women citywide. Like Puerto Rican women, Dominican women had gone from higher than average to lower than average labor-force participation. And Dominicans were still overrepresented as operators, laborers, and fabricators: thirty-six percent of all Dominicans in contrast to twelve percent of workers citywide. Dominican women were especially concentrated in manufacturing: thirty-three percent compared to eighteen percent of Dominican men in 1990. As New York began to witness a growing disparity in incomes during the 1990s, Dominicans' earnings decreased. Poverty levels increased from thirty-seven to forty-six percent for Dominicans and from seventeen to twenty-four percent citywide between 1989 and 1996.⁹⁰ While their low-wage labor may have kept some garment industry jobs in New York City, for Dominican women, working in the garment industry has increasingly meant a life of working poverty for individuals, as well as households and communities confronting poverty.

Conclusions: Repeating Patterns?

Parallels in the experiences of Puerto Rican and Dominican women suggest that the globalization of the garment industry is resulting in repeating patterns of economic displacement, labor migration, and sweatshop jobs in US cities. The garment industry continues to be marked by relocation and by the persistence of sweatshops here and there. The garment industry figures prominently in a particular model of economic development based on export-oriented industrialization and foreign, often US, investment. In both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic this model was accompanied by internal and international migration as insufficient employment and wages too low to sustain households sent people in search of work; Latinas became labor migrants. These economies remain dependent and mired in low-wage assembly jobs that are always poised to relocate to even lower-wage areas. Nevertheless, "It is the dominant world policy," as Edna Bonacich and her colleagues conclude, dictated by international agencies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and by US economic interests and policies.⁹¹ Indeed, as the ad at the beginning of this essay suggests, export-processing zones and the garment industry have spread to Central American countries and elsewhere, bringing the same model of economic development to different countries at different times. Displaced, Latinas will likely continue their search for paid employment that will sustain their households.

Meanwhile, Latinas working in New York City's garment industry have become more diverse, with many coming from countries where the US garment in-

dustry and export processing zones have taken hold. Here too, competition and contracting exert a relentless downward pressure on wages, creating jobs that are notable for their low wages, long hours, pressured pace, harsh supervision, poor working conditions, and instability, as the possibility of shop relocation to lower-wage areas remains a constant and very real threat. For Puerto Rican and Dominican women, as well as for newcomer Latinas, the garment industry has been one of few avenues for employment. Yet garment industry jobs have translated into working poverty, offering few opportunities for improvements. For Puerto Rican and Dominican women, concentration in the garment industry was followed by economic displacement as employment continued to decline, at the same time that employers' search for the lowest-wage labor appears unrelenting. The repercussions for Puerto Rican and Dominican women, their households, and their communities have had sobering parallels. The US model for economic development in inner cities seems a repeating pattern as well, based on recruiting low-wage labor and then displacing it, abandoning communities in its wake. Here too, Latinas will likely continue their efforts to provide for their households and to improve conditions for their communities.

NOTES

1. Acknowledgments: In 1997–1998 I participated in a Rockefeller Humanities Institute, The Sweatshop Project, sponsored by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and UNITE! I would like to thank these sponsors, my colleagues at the Sweatshop Project, and especially the staff and workers at UNITE's Garment Workers' Justice Center. Research assistance was provided by Maria Ocasio and Lida Pascual-Yeras. For insightful comments and questions I thank Virginia Yans and my colleagues at Rutgers University's Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Cultures, where I was a faculty fellow in 1998–1999.

2. *Bobbin* (August 1991) as reproduced in Charles Kernaghan, "Paying to Lose Our Jobs," in *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York, 1997), 88. According to Kernaghan, US assistance accounted for ninety-four percent of the budget for the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), which placed the ad. Between 1984 and 1991, the US government provided \$102,397,000 in funding.

3. There are important parallels with Mexico's Border Industrialization Program and its *maquiladoras*, as well as with other Caribbean and Central American countries. While countries in this region seem stagnated in their economic development and mired in economic dependency, some Asian countries have shifted from assemblers to producers. See "The Garment Industry in the Restructuring Global Economy," in *Global Production: The Apparel Industry in the Pacific Rim*, Edna Bonadich, Lucie Chen, Norma Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and Paul Ong, eds. (Philadelphia, 1994), 9–12. For approaches that connect US interventions with migration, see Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (New York, 1979); Alejandro Portes, "From South of the Border: Hispanic Minorities in the United States," in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York, 1990), 160–181; and Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York, 1998), 41–5.

4. This essay draws on my book, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia, 2001), to explore the broader implications of the globalization of the garment industry and to begin comparative histories of export processing in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, as well as of Puerto Rican and Dominican women in New York City, based on my research with the Sweatshop Project. Although I have argued that defining women as labor migrants requires a broader definition of labor, here I focus on women's search for paid employment. See Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 3–5; and Carmen Teresa Whalen, "Labor Migrants or 'Submissive Wives': Competing Narratives of

Puerto Rican Women in the Post-World War II Era,” in *Puerto Rican Women’s History: New Perspectives*, ed. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez and Linda Delgado (Armonk, NY, 1998), 206–226.

5. For example, in her sweeping and comparative analysis of the garment industry in New York City and Paris, historian Nancy Green reflects the relative paucity of secondary sources on the post-war era. In their important analysis of the garment industry, social scientists Edna Bonacich and David V. Waller identify the beginnings of the globalization of the US garment industry in the late 1950s with its movement to Japan. See Nancy Green, *Ready-to-Wear, Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham, NC, 1997); and Edna Bonacich and David V. Waller, “Mapping a Global Industry: Apparel Production in the Pacific Rim Triangle,” in *Global Production*, ed. Bonacich, 21. On Puerto Rican women in the garment industry, see Altagracia Ortiz “‘En la aguja y el pedal eché la hiel’: Puerto Rican Women in the Garment Industry of New York City, 1920–1980,” in *Puerto Rican Women and Work: Bridges in Transnational Labor*, ed. Altagracia Ortiz (Philadelphia, 1996), 55–81; Altagracia Ortiz, “Puerto Ricans in the Garment Industry of New York City, 1920–1960,” in *Labor Divided: Race and Ethnicity in United States Labor Struggles, 1835–1960*, ed. Robert Asher and Charles Stephenson (Albany, 1990), 105–125; and Rina Benmayor, et al., “Stories to Live By: Continuity and Change in Three Generations of Puerto Rican Women,” *Oral History Review* 16 (Fall 1988): 1–46.

6. David Ross, *The Long Uphill Path: A Historical Study of Puerto Rico’s Program of Economic Development* (San Juan, PR, 1969), 98.

7. See Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, Chapters 1 and 2. Individuals and corporations in Puerto Rico were exempted from federal income taxes in the Jones Act of 1917, and in section 931 of Internal Revenue code. Puerto Rico’s legislature passed the Industrial Incentives Act of 1947, providing additional exemptions. Federal minimum wages were phased in in Puerto Rico between 1977 and 1981.

8. “Puerto Rico Urged on U.S. Business,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1949, 36.

9. Office of Puerto Rico, “Puerto Rico’s Potential as a Site for Textile, Apparel and Other Industries,” by Donald J. O’Connor (Washington, D.C., 1949), Government Documents, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

10. Harvey S. Perloff, *Puerto Rico’s Economic Future: A Study in Planned Development* (Chicago, 1950): 184, 99. See also Eileen Boris, “Needlewomen under the New Deal in Puerto Rico, 1920–1945,” in *Puerto Rican Women and Work*, ed. Ortiz, 33–54.

11. Robert Laurentz, “Racial/Ethnic Conflict in the New York City Garment Industry, 1933–1980” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1980), 260.

12. Palmira N. Rios, “Export-Oriented Industrialization and the Demand for Female Labor: Puerto Rican Women in the Manufacturing Sector, 1953–1980,” in *Colonial Dilemma: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Puerto Rico*, ed. Edwin Meléndez and Edgardo Meléndez (Boston, 1993): 95, 97, 93, 92.

13. Puerto Rico, Economic Development Administration (Fomento), Continental Operations Branch, NY, NY, “The Apparel and Related Products Industry” (August 1973), La Colección Puertorriqueña, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, PR (hereafter CP).

14. Puerto Rico, Economic Development Administration (Fomento), “Social Directions in Industrial Development” (January 3, 1957), CP.

15. Ross, *Long Uphill Path*, 119.

16. Genara Aponte, interview by author, 9 October 1997, November 6 and 20, 1997, Philadelphia, PA, tape recording, translated by author except for words in italics.

17. Whalen, *From Puerto Rico*, Chapter 4. During the 1950s, the Puerto Rican population in New York City grew from 245,880 to 612,574, while that in Philadelphia grew from fewer than 2,000 to more than 14,000.

18. John Macisco, Jr., “Internal Migration in Puerto Rico, 1955–1960” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1966), 105, 118.

19. Puerto Rico, Office of the Governor, Division of Statistics, “Estudio Sobre La Emigración” (San Juan, 1952), Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York, NY.

20. Lloyd G. Reynolds and Peter Gregory, *Wages, Productivity and Industrialization in Puerto Rico* (Homewood, IL, 1965), 158.

21. Philadelphia, Commission on Human Relations, *Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia: A Study of Their Demographic Characteristics, Problems and Attitudes*, by Arthur Siegel, Harold Orland and Loyal Greer of the Institute for Research in Human Relations (April 1954; reprint ed., New York, 1975), 35.

22. Donald J. O'Connor, "Memorandum: Mainland Labor Force Needs in 1948–1949 and Puerto Rico's Opportunities to Exploit Them," August 10, 1948, Record Group 126, File 9-8-116, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
23. Genara Aponte, interview, trans.
24. Ana Juarbe, "Anastasia's Story: A Window into the Past— A Bridge to the Present," in *Stories to Live By: Continuity and Change in Three Generations of Puerto Rican Women*, ed. Rina Benmayor, Ana Juarbe, Celia Alvarez, and Blanca Vázquez (New York: Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Working Paper Series, 1987), 58 in translation, 59 in translation.
25. Juanita Rodríguez, interview by author, June 18, 1997, Palmyra, NJ, tape recording, translated by author.
26. On Puerto Rican women's earlier history in New York's garment industry, see Ortiz, "En la aguja"; and Laurentz, "Racial/Ethnic Conflict."
27. Roy B. Helfgott, "Women's and Children's Apparel," in *Made in New York: Case Studies in Metropolitan Manufacturing*, ed. Max Hall (Cambridge, MA, 1959), 68–69.
28. Laurentz, "Racial/Ethnic Conflict," 248.
29. Jacob S. Potofsky, "Proposal for Immigration," *New York Times*, February 19, 1947, 24.
30. "ILGWU Maps War on New Labor Act," *New York Times*, September 4, 1947, 18.
31. "Puerto Rico Seeks to Curb Migration," *New York Times*, February 23, 1947, 20.
32. On labor market segmentation and its impact, see Andrés Torres, *Between Melting Pot and Mosaic: African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the New York Political Economy* (Philadelphia, 1995); and Clara E. Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.* (Boulder, 1991).
33. Helfgott, "Women's and Children's Apparel," 94–95.
34. Ortiz, "Puerto Rican Workers," 105; and Ortiz, "En la aguja," 60. Puerto Rican women in Philadelphia were also more likely to be in the labor force than women citywide, and they too were overwhelmingly concentrated in manufacturing. See Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 144–152.
35. Helfgott, "Women and Children's Apparel," 96. Helfgott's study was one of several conducted via collaboration between the Regional Plan Association, a nonprofit research and planning agency, and Harvard University's Graduate School of Public Administration.
36. Raymond Vernon, *Metropolis 1985: An Interpretation of the Findings of the New York Metropolitan Region Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), 88, 90. In explaining New York's higher labor force participation rates relative to the national average, Vernon included white women among the labor migrants, as they were "coming into the area for work," but he excluded Puerto Rican women, referring to "the tide of Puerto Rican and Negro males."
37. Dan Wakefield, *Island in the City: Puerto Ricans in New York* (New York, 1957), 199, 195, 198.
38. Genara Aponte, interview, trans.
39. Juarbe, "Anastasia's Story," 59.
40. Blanca Vázquez Erazo, "The Stories Our Mothers Tell: Projections-of-Self in the Stories of Puerto Rican Garment Workers," in *Stories to Live By*, ed. Benmayor, 47.
41. Vázquez Erazo, "Stories Our Mothers Tell," 47, 48.
42. Juarbe, "Anastasia's Story," 59 in translation, 22.
43. Vázquez Erazo, "Stories Our Mothers Tell," 47, 48, 64 in translation.
44. Rodríguez, interview, trans.
45. Genara Aponte, interview, trans.
46. Roger D. Waldinger, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Immigrants and Enterprise in New York's Garment Trades* (New York, 1986), 72.
47. Edna Bonacich and David V. Waller, "The Role of U.S. Apparel Manufacturers in the Globalization of the Industry in the Pacific Rim," in *Global Production*, ed. Bonacich, 100.
48. Bonacich and Waller, "Mapping a Global Industry," 29.
49. Kathie Friedman Kasaba, "New York City: the underside of the world's capital," in *Creating and Transforming Households: The Constraints of the World-Economy*, ed. Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein (Cambridge, 1992), 63.
50. Laurentz, "Racial/Ethnic Conflict," 188.
51. Laurentz, "Racial/Ethnic Conflict," 252–253.
52. On Puerto Ricans and the garment unions, see Herbert Hill, "Guardians of the Sweatshops: The Trade Unions, Racism, and the Garment Industry," in *Puerto Rico and Puerto Ri-*

cans: Studies in History and Society, ed. Adalberto Lopez and James Petras (New York, 1974), 384–416; Laurentz, “Racial/Ethnic Conflict,” 301–308; and Ortiz, “Puerto Rican Workers.”

53. Edgar M. Hoover and Raymond Vernon, *Anatomy of a Metropolis: The Changing Distribution of People and Jobs Within the New York Metropolitan Region* (Cambridge, MA, 1959): 49.

54. Laurentz, “Racial/Ethnic Conflict,” 189.

55. Laurentz, “Racial/Ethnic Conflict,” 254–258.

56. Waldinger, *Through the Eye*, 71.

57. Waldinger, *Through the Eye*, 56.

58. Saskia Sassen-Koob, “Changing Composition and Labor Market Location of Hispanic Immigrants in New York City, 1960–1980,” in *Hispanics in the U.S. Economy*, ed. George J. Borjas and Marta Tienda (Orlando, FL, 1985), 302, 312.

59. Laurentz, “Racial/Ethnic Conflict,” 236.

60. “Major Labor Shortage Squeezing N.Y. Garment Center,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1969, III, 1. Twenty employers had been picked up for home work violations and seven had been prosecuted and fined during the first half of 1969.

61. Laurentz, “Racial/Ethnic Conflict,” 377, 431 (note number 154).

62. See Alice Colon-Warren, “The Impact of Job Losses on Puerto Rican Women in the Middle Atlantic Region, 1970–1980,” in *Puerto Rican Women and Work*, ed. Ortiz, 103–138; Rosa M. Torruellas, Rina Benmayor, and Ana Juarbe. “Negotiating Gender, Work, and Welfare: *Familia* as Productive Labor among Puerto Rican Women in New York City,” in *Puerto Rican Women and Work*, ed. Ortiz, 184–208; and Carol Smith, “Immigrant Women, Work and Use of Government Benefits: A Case Study of Hispanic Women Workers in New York’s Garment Industry” (Ph.D. diss., Adelphi University School of Social Welfare, 1980).

63. Genara Aponte, interview, trans. See also, Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 218–220.

64. Judith Goode, “Polishing the Rustbelt: Immigrants Enter a Restructuring Philadelphia,” in *Newcomers in the Workplace: Immigrants and the Restructuring of the U.S. Economy* (Philadelphia, 1994), 208.

65. Elizabeth Weiner and Hardy Green, “A Stitch in Our Time: New York’s Hispanic Garment Workers in the 1980s,” in *A Needle, A Bobbin, A Strike: Women Needleworkers in America*, ed. Joan M. Jensen and Sue Davidson (Philadelphia, 1984), 278–296.

66. Waldinger, *Through the Eye*, 77.

67. Bonacich and Waller, “The Role of U.S. Apparel Manufacturers,” 88–89. See also Kernaghan, “Paying to Lose Our Jobs.”

68. David Bray, “Economic Development: The Middle Class and International Migration in the Dominican Republic,” *International Migration Review* 18 (1984): 226.

69. Helen I. Safa, “Export Manufacturing, State Policy, and Women Workers in the Dominican Republic,” in *Global Production*, ed. Bonacich, 251, 253.

70. Bray, “Economic Development,” 230.

71. Bonacich, “Mapping a Global Industry,” 29.

72. Helen I. Safa, *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean* (Boulder, CO, 1995), 101.

73. Safa, “Export Manufacturing,” 250, 257.

74. Bray, “Economic Development,” 226–227.

75. Ramona Hernández and Francisco Rivera-Batiz, *Dominican New Yorkers: A Socio-economic Profile, 1997* (New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, Dominican Research Monographs, 1997), 9, 1–2.

76. Nancie L. González, “Peasant’s Progress: Dominicans in New York,” *Caribbean Studies* 10 (October 1970): 162, 161, 165.

77. Safa, *Myth of the Male Breadwinner*, 104.

78. Eugenia Georges, *The Making of a Transnational Community: Migration, Development, and Cultural Change in the Dominican Republic* (New York, 1990), 102, 105.

79. Nancie L. González, “Multiple Migratory Experiences of Dominican Women,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 49 (January 1976): 40, 42.

80. Glenn Hendricks, *The Dominican Diaspora: From the Dominican Republic to New York City, Villagers in Transition* (New York, 1974), 78, 76. On social networks, see also Roger D. Waldinger, “Immigration and Industrial Change in the New York City Apparel Industry,” in *Hispanics in the U.S. Economy*, ed. Borjas, 338–340.

81. Sherri Grasmuck and Patricia R. Pessar, *Between Two Islands: Dominican International Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 166. Saskia Sassen-Koob also asks “the question about the capacity of New York City’s economy to absorb a large immigrant pool under conditions of pronounced job losses in precisely those sectors of the economy likely to draw immigrant workers” and answers by examining the growth of the downgraded manufacturing sector and producer services. Saskia Sassen-Koob, “Changing Composition,” 300.

82. Grasmuck and Pessar, *Between Two Islands*, 163–164, 174, 182, 191. Their New York data was based on interviews with 301 persons born in the Dominican Republic and working at the time of their survey and on additional ethnographic data derived from casual conversations and participant observation between 1981 and 1983, see pages 58–60.

83. Interviews were conducted by the author between April and July 1998. Nerida and Maria were each interviewed twice, while Manuel and Miriam were each interviewed once. Their names and identifying details have been changed. The interviews were conducted in Spanish and have been translated, except for words in italics, and edited for clarity. This research was conducted as part of a Rockefeller Humanities Institute, The Sweatshop Project, sponsored by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and UNITE!

84. Hernández and Rivera-Batiz, *Dominican New Yorkers*, 29.

85. See Waldinger, “Immigration and Industrial Change,” 349; and Patricia Pessar, “Sweatshop Workers and Domestic Ideologies: Dominican Women in New York’s Apparel Industry,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 18 (1994): 133.

86. See Ramona Hernández, “Notes on the Incorporation of Dominican Workers into the Labor Market of New York” *Punto 7 Review: A Journal of Marginal Discourse* 2 (1989): 78.

87. Nerida, interview, trans.

88. Maria, interview, trans.

89. Nerida, interview, trans. All quotes are Nerida’s unless otherwise identified.

90. Hernández and Rivera-Batiz, *Dominican New Yorkers*, 54, 42, 51, 57, 37.

91. Edna Bonacich, Lucie Chen, Norma Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and Paul Ong, “The Garment Industry in the Restructuring Global Economy,” in *Global Production*, ed. Bonacich, 9, 10–12.