

Revisiting Shibboleths of Race and Urban Economy: Black Employment in Manufacturing and the Public Sector Compared, Chicago 1950-2000

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Abstract

Despite a singular focus on the linked fate of blacks and manufacturing in many accounts of race and urban economy, black workers in Chicago have relied upon the public sector as a critical route to economic security throughout much of the twentieth century. Four significant trends are identified for the period between 1950 and 2000: (1) African Americans were disproportionately concentrated in the public sector — to a greater degree than in manufacturing; (2) both blacks and whites were disproportionately concentrated in manufacturing — blacks only slightly more; (3) Latinos were most disproportionately concentrated in manufacturing yet experienced no aggregate losses over the 50-year period; (4) the disproportionate decline in black male public employment during the 1990s is a marked break from past sector trends of black male employment growth and stability. These findings emphasize the need to reassess the role of the public sector — the postwar economy's 'other' high wage, unionized sector — in racialized accounts of urban economic restructuring. Recognizing the public sector as not only the most pronounced black employment niche, but also as a labor market standards-setter, sharpens our understanding of the racialized impacts of contemporary public employment trends (e.g. privatization) linked to neoliberal political shifts in urban governance.

In his classic work on black urban politics, Harold Gosnell (1935: 305) described African American postal workers as 'among the best livers of Chicago's south side'. Gosnell's observation of the positive effects of government employment on black material wellbeing during the 1920s and 1930s stands as an early comment in a long, but often overlooked, line of research on the significance of public sector employment for black economic prosperity through the twentieth century. Due largely to stronger anti-discrimination hiring and promotion policies and higher earnings than in the private sector, public employment has contributed significantly to the upward mobility and economic progress of African Americans (Harrison and Osterman, 1974; Eisinger, 1982a; 1986; Hout, 1984). Scholars widely accept that public employment was

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instrumental to the making of the 'new black middle class', especially through the 1960s and 1970s (Krislov, 1967; Wilson, 1978; Erie, 1980; Brown and Erie, 1981; Collins, 1983; Darity, 1986; Landry, 1987).

Despite these striking findings, inquiry into public employment's historic and contemporary influence on racial inequality and black economic prosperity has largely dropped off the urban research agenda. The backdrop to most contemporary urban political economy accounts of black employment centers nearly exclusively on manufacturing: black economic progress is tied to the growth of black postwar manufacturing employment while blacks' increasing economic marginalization since 1970 is linked to its demise, constitutive and reflective of the US's rocky transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist political economy (Wilson, 1987; Kasarda, 1989; Wacquant and Wilson, 1989). Such accounts imply that manufacturing contributed substantially, if not singularly, to the making of the black middle class, and its corollary, deindustrialization, led to the unmaking, or deproletarianization, of the black working class (e.g. Katz, 1993: 447; for an especially useful discussion of deproletarianization and African American labor, see Trotter, 1994: 522–3).

This singular focus on manufacturing has eclipsed other patterns of racial employment in urban labor markets, thus obscuring a fuller assessment of the racialized effects of economic restructuring. I suggest that attention to comparative 'how much' questions provides one means toward a fuller assessment. In the particular case of manufacturing, two comparative 'how much' questions seem particularly instructive: (1) How much did manufacturing matter for blacks compared to whites? (2) How much did manufacturing matter for blacks compared to other sectors of employment?

My answers to these questions are preliminary and are primarily intended to generate new questions and hypotheses with regard to race and urban economy. In this article, I review the arguments of the few scholars who have challenged the dominance of manufacturing in accounts of African American economic progress (e.g. Waldinger, 1996; Katz *et al.*, 2005). I then briefly review the literature on black public sector employment to make its case as a competing sector of significance. In a first-cut assessment of this argument, I track the relative position of blacks in manufacturing and public sector employment in Chicago — a Fordist stronghold — between 1950 and 2000. My intent is to focus attention on economic restructuring trends with the most pronounced racial inflections. In so doing, I underscore the unique role of the public sector for black prosperity and its significance as the preeminent postindustrial high-wage, highly unionized black employment niche.

I draw out four notable trends: (1) African Americans were disproportionately concentrated in, and therefore disproportionately relied upon, the public sector to a greater degree than manufacturing throughout this 50-year period — it was their most persistent employment niche; (2) both blacks and whites were disproportionately concentrated in manufacturing — blacks only slightly more than whites; (3) disproportionate concentration arguments demand refinement given that Latinos were disproportionately concentrated in manufacturing to a greater extent than blacks or whites yet they experienced no aggregate manufacturing losses over the 50-year period; (4) the abrupt decline in black male public employment during the 1990s represents a marked break from past trends, signaling specific patterns of gender and racial restructuring within the sector itself and a possibly altogether new shift in public employment as an avenue of economic mobility for black men.

These findings, as well as the broader literature on public employment, emphasize the need to reassess the role of public sector employment in racialized accounts of urban economic restructuring. Explanations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century urban economic restructuring need to address better the public sector's historic role as not only a black employment niche, but also as an economic buffer and a labor market standards-setter. I suggest that such a reassessment is particularly critical now given the dominance of neoliberal economic and governance models within our postindustrial cities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Current privatization trends in particular seem a strangely familiar

return to the renege promises of Fordism for urban working-class communities of color, reflective of a postindustrial experience of deproletarianization.

The role of manufacturing for black economic progress

Wilson (1987) popularized the prevailing explanation for the demise of black urban fortunes — the loss of manufacturing jobs from the urban core driven by deindustrialization. A multifaceted process abetted by domestic relocation and decentralization, expanded offshore production and disinvestment within the manufacturing sector generally (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982), deindustrialization threw many rustbelt urban communities into crisis (e.g. Sugrue, 1996: 144–52). Unemployment rose, labor force participation declined, poverty grew. To paraphrase John Friedmann, deindustrialization pitted mobile capital against immobile community, devastating the latter (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982: 20).

Scholars have pointed to the particularly acute impact of deindustrialization on black workers given their disproportionate reliance on manufacturing jobs and their difficulty in accessing the postindustrial city's new job base due both to a spatial and skills mismatch (Wilson, 1987; Kasarda, 1989). Relocated manufacturing jobs were inaccessible to blacks, constrained by a discriminatory housing market, and new jobs on offer in a restructured economy demanded skills that blacks did not have. For both these reasons, Wilson (1987: 39) argued that blacks were 'particularly vulnerable' to the 'shift from goods-producing to service-producing industries'. Displaced from one urban economy and excluded from the other, Katz (1993: 447, emphasis in original) declared 'the contemporary African-American experience is one of *deproletarianization*'. The pronouncement is ominous, as it speaks of the unmaking of the black working class — a massive dispossession of socio-economic power that depended upon manufacturing employment as its base.

A handful of scholars, most notably Waldinger (1996) and Katz *et al.* (2005), have challenged the dominance of deindustrialization as the leading explanation for declining black prosperity on two counts: its geographic generalizability and its assumptions about the disproportionate concentration of blacks in manufacturing employment (e.g. 'massive job losses in the very industries in which urban minorities were concentrated', Wilson *et al.*, 1988: 142; see also Wacquant and Wilson, 1989: 13). Testing Wilson's conclusions (drawn from Chicago) in a different Northern industrial city, Waldinger (1996: 64) examined New York's manufacturing sector between 1940 and 1990 and found that at no time did native-born black New Yorkers achieve a disproportionate share of factory employment, even at its peak in 1950. In fact, black New Yorkers never achieved parity representation — a share of manufacturing jobs equal to their share of the workforce as a whole. Because blacks in New York were less concentrated in manufacturing than other groups *before* the onset of deindustrialization, Waldinger (1996) argued that the explanation of disproportionate risk did not apply. By Waldinger's (*ibid.*: 70) account, 'black New Yorkers moved out of their historical concentrations in declining sectors, developing a job mix that reduced their exposure to the downside of New York's postindustrial transformation'. In short, the decline of manufacturing in the 1970s could not have contributed significantly to the declining economic fortunes of blacks as a group, at least not in New York.

Katz *et al.* (2005: 77) similarly 'challenge the common argument that the problems of black men in the labor market result from deindustrialization'. They explain that, nationally, blacks found extensive employment in manufacturing only in Detroit and Chicago. When blacks did secure industrial work, it did not pay more than work in other sectors. Because racial discrimination served to keep many blacks out of manufacturing altogether, they argue that the collapse of agriculture negatively affected black men's employment prospects far more than deindustrialization. In accounting for black

economic progress, Katz *et al.* (*ibid.*) conclude that public employment was ‘the principal source of black mobility, especially for women’ through the second half of the twentieth century.

Black economic progress and the public sector

The emphasis on manufacturing as a singular path to good jobs and stable employment for African Americans in the postwar era is puzzling in light of the history of public employment as a course of labor market advancement for African Americans. Efforts to open public employment to nonwhites, especially federal jobs, have been longstanding in the US. Once in these jobs, blacks benefited from higher wages, more generous pensions, longer tenures, greater opportunities for advancement and higher rates of unionization than in the private sector. Though rarely remarked upon in Fordist and post-Fordist accounts of urban restructuring, scholars widely agree that employment within the high-wage, highly unionized *public* sector contributed significantly to black upward mobility in the postwar decades (e.g. Harrison and Osterman, 1974; Freeman, 1976; Landry, 1987; Katz *et al.*, 2005).

The first significant movement by blacks into federal jobs can be traced to the establishment of the federal civil service commission in 1883 as legislated by the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act. With the implementation of a merit system in hiring and promotions, black representation in federal employment was ‘sustained, vigorous, and definite’ for the next several decades (Krislov, 1967: 19). Reconstruction-era civil rights legislation also helped facilitate black federal employment. Notably, Congress repealed a statute in 1865 that had barred blacks from the postal service — ironically, the federal agency that was to become the single largest employer of blacks through the twentieth century (*ibid.*: 9–10).

Efforts to desegregate and open federal employment to nonwhites continued during the following decades, but were most vigorous during the 1920s. Desegregation of federal units such as the Census Bureau and the departments of Commerce, Interior and Treasury moved forward with such visible results that several Southern Congressional members complained of ‘delegate buying’ (*ibid.*: 22). By 1928, blacks were estimated to comprise 15–30% of the workforces at major urban post offices (*ibid.*).

During the New Deal era, blacks slowly continued to move into federal employment apart from their high representation in WPA programs. But more significant gains were on the horizon. The 1940s heralded a great burst in black economic advancement that scholars have attributed to various factors, chief among them shifts in labor demand, government intervention (e.g. Roosevelt’s 1941 Executive Order 8802 that outlawed racial discrimination in the defense industry), and accelerated migration from the South (Margo, 1995). Public sector employment contributed to the reduction of wage inequality (Margo and Finegan, 2002), and, as Landry (1987: 121) argued, the ‘first breach in the solid wall of prejudice against the employment of blacks in middle-class jobs was achieved through employment in the federal government . . . in the 1940s’.

The most pronounced growth in black public employment occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, black employment in the public sector increased at twice the rate of whites (Eisinger, 1982b; Collins, 1983: 373; Carrington *et al.*, 1996: 465). By the mid-1970s, 25% of all black men and 34% of all black women were employed in the public sector compared to 16% of all white men and 24% of all white women (Carrington *et al.*, 1996: 463).

Scholars have attributed most of this growth to the expansion of government under the Great Society. Driven largely by black political pressure, antipoverty programs of the 1960s yielded an array of concessionary public services that benefited blacks as both consumers and producers — as low-income service recipients in their neighborhoods and as middle-income service providers working for the expanded public agencies (Piven,

1973: 384; Brown and Erie, 1981; Darity, 1986). Aggressive affirmative action policies, such as the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972 that expanded civil rights coverage to the public sector, helped blacks move into these jobs and, to employ Lieberman's (1980: 379) term, the 'special niche' of government work for blacks became firmly entrenched within urban economies. Katz *et al.* (2005: 88) have called this growth of black public employment the 'hidden labor market policy' of the War on Poverty and the Great Society.

Scholars widely agree that this expansion of government employment contributed significantly to building the 'new black middle class', a group of salaried professionals no longer dependent upon work within the segregated black community (e.g. Wilson, 1978; Brown and Erie, 1981; Collins, 1983; Darity, 1986; Landry, 1987). Between 1960 and 1976, 55% of the increase of black professional and managerial jobs occurred in the public sector, compared to 34% of the increase for whites (Brown and Erie, 1981). In 1970 nearly half of all black male professionals and two-thirds of all black female professionals worked in the public sector. Comparatively, only one-third of white male and half of all white female professionals did (Freeman, 1976). By 1980, nearly 54% of all black professionals and managers worked in the public sector, compared to only 28% of whites (Edsall and Edsall, 1991).

Additionally, public employment played a crucial role in shoring up and expanding the black middle class by providing blacks a critical channel for intergenerational mobility (Erie, 1980). Eisinger (1986), for example, found that municipal employment served as a pathway to intergenerational mobility for urban blacks in a way that it did not for whites. In his study of a New York City public agency, black professionals were much more likely than whites to come from lower-class backgrounds. Hout's (1984) findings confirmed the link between public sector employment and mobility — both intergenerational and individual. On the latter, Hout (1984: 317) found that the 'risk of downward mobility is much greater for men in private employment than it is for public employees'. Hout's analysis showed that among black men employed in a non-manual occupation in 1962, only 7% of those initially employed in the public sector moved to lower manual occupation by 1973, compared to 21% of black men initially employed in the private sector. Few researchers have subsequently recognized this feature of public employment as an economic buffer.

Government jobs have widely been viewed as good jobs because of their relatively high wages and generous benefits. Studies on data from the 1960s onward have consistently found that similarly skilled blacks across all educational levels and occupational statuses have earned higher wages in the public sector than the private sector, despite shrinking wage differentials in recent decades (Harrison and Osterman, 1974; Freeman, 1976; Landry, 1987; Boyd, 1993; Zipp, 1994; Bernhardt and Dresser, 2002). Like other groups, less-educated blacks (those without a college degree) have profited most from public employment. That is, their public sector wage premium has been higher than that of more educated workers (Poterba and Rueben, 1994; Bernhardt and Dresser, 2002). Public sector jobs also provide substantially more generous benefit packages. In 1998, 82% of all black men employed in the public sector had employer-provided health insurance and 76% had a pension plan compared to 55% and 41% in the private sector, respectively (Bernhardt and Dresser, 2002: 9). Lastly, racial wage inequality has been less pronounced within the public sector (Long, 1975; Freeman, 1976; Erie, 1980; Smith, 1980). Though recent trends indicate a reversal among federal employees, racial wage inequality has continued to steadily decline among state and municipal employees (Zipp, 1994).

Higher unionization rates largely account for the public sector's higher wages and more generous benefits — a causal factor unique to the last 30 years (Freeman, 1986; Card, 2001). Prior to the 1960s, few public sector workers were covered by a union contract due to their exclusion under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. In 1962, President Kennedy granted unionization rights to federal employees through executive order, opening the doors to public sector organizing. Many states quickly followed the

federal government's lead in authorizing public sector collective bargaining, and rates of public sector unionization increased dramatically at all levels of government through the 1960s and 1970s. By the mid-1980s, union density in the public sector far exceeded that in the private sector — a trend that continues today. In 1984, 44% of all government workers were covered by a collective bargaining agreement (36% were union members) compared to only 18% in the private sector (Freeman, 1986: 41). In 2008, nearly 37% of all government employees belonged to a union compared to 8% in the private sector (Zipperer, 2009). The numbers for workers in the Chicago CMSA reflect a similar trend. In 1987, union density in manufacturing was 27% (18% in all private employment) compared to 49% in the public sector. By 2000, union density in manufacturing in the Chicago region had fallen to 17% (14% in all private employment) compared to 50% in the public sector (Hirsch and Macpherson, 2003).

Politics and public employment

In sum, public employment has accorded black workers multiple socio-economic benefits not available to them in the private sector and has fostered the most racially equitable, albeit imperfect, employment domain available to black workers. This route to upward mobility and economic prosperity has depended on politics and policy to a greater degree than other employment pathways because of the distinctively *direct* effect of politics on public employment and the degree to which government employment has been targeted to address racial incorporation and economic equality.

Government employment is more proximate to the political process than private sector employment for a number of reasons. Firstly, politicians serve as employers in the former, but not the latter, domain. Patronage exemplifies this distinction — politicians can directly distribute jobs in exchange for votes. US politicians have long exercised their role as public employers to accommodate new voting blocks, through both explicit patronage systems and less explicit social mandates (e.g. Clark, 1975). The growth of black public employment at both the federal and local level reflects these attempts by politicians, black and otherwise, to secure the growing urban black vote (Brown and Erie, 1981; Eisinger, 1982a). In particular, the Chicago machine was exceptionally adept at incorporating the black vote through patronage throughout much of the twentieth century (Grimshaw, 1992). Eisinger (1982b: 754) has described the reciprocal reinforcing effect between politics and public employment for blacks in which black political power creates access to public jobs and public jobs function 'as a path to power', increasing access to jobs further.

Secondly, the political process directly bears upon the demand curve for labor in the public sector, whereas politics indirectly influences the demand curve for labor in the private sector. In the former case, politicians can decide to directly expand or contract the public sector workforce. City officials may increase the size of the police force or slash the number of teachers. By contrast, politicians indirectly influence the size of the private sector workforce through contracts, tax incentives, and other policy mechanisms. Though such policy actions strongly influence economic outcomes, they are indirect, and less visible, than political actions that affect the size and working conditions of public sector employment.

Thirdly, in its capacity as an employer, government can directly hire and set wages according to social agenda goals, such as inequality reduction, and other nonmarket considerations (perhaps patronage of another from, but not as narrowly instrumental as explicit patronage). This 'social equity function' is peculiar to public employment (Lobao and Hooks, 2003: 520). Thus, government employment can contribute to the racial equity agenda by hiring more black workers at comparable wages to whites, as it did aggressively at the federal level during the 1960s and 1970s.

But government can pursue alternate social agendas through its treatment of public employment, as the 1980s attest. Under the Reagan administration, prior political norms and practices that had facilitated the advancement of minority public employment were abruptly abandoned, and public employment became the target of severe cutbacks and restructuring policies that impacted black workers disproportionately. Minorities were laid off at a rate of 50% greater than white federal employees (Landry, 1987: 212), and black federal workers who managed to keep their jobs experienced increased racial wage inequality (Zipp, 1994).

Lastly, the government's role as employer also positions unionization issues within the public sector as more proximate to the political process than in the private sector. Not only are public sector unionists' bread-and-butter issues inextricably linked to decisions regarding state policies and funding, politicians negotiate such issues with public sector unionists simultaneously as their employers and as their elected representatives. To put the emphasis differently, public employees exert influence at the bargaining table as both workers and voters. As Freeman (1986: 42) has argued, 'public sector unions, more so than private sector unions, can influence employer behavior through the political process . . . Private sector unions . . . do not in general help elect the board of directors of companies or top management'.

This relationship has been especially important in efforts to win collective bargaining rights for government employees. An example from Chicago highlights the implications of black political power for public sector unionization. Before 1983, multiple attempts to pass public sector collective bargaining legislation in Illinois had foundered on opposition from Chicago's mayors who feared collective bargaining would undermine patronage (e.g. contract rules would disallow politically motivated transfers, promotions and dismissals; Saltzman, 1988: 53). Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor, reversed this political trend. Immediately upon winning the Democratic primary in 1983, Washington committed strong political support to the legislative effort, largely on behalf of his black public sector constituency (Saltzman, 1988). Passage of the legislation quickly followed, extending collective bargaining rights to segments of Chicago's heavily black municipal workforce that previously had been barred from bargaining. To summarize, blacks' disproportionate representation in government employment and the latter's proximate relationship to the political process render black public employment especially sensitive to politics and policy.

Data and analysis

My analysis centers on a comparison of African American employment patterns in Chicago's manufacturing and public sectors between 1950 and 2000. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Chicago was one of the US's largest manufacturing centers and home to more African Americans than any city other than New York. An archetypal Fordist city and 'black metropolis' (Drake and Cayton, 1962), Chicago has repeatedly been raised in the urban literature as paradigmatic of the black industrial experience. Yet research by Waldinger (1996) and Katz *et al.* (2005) points to deindustrialization's uneven significance as an explanation for black economic outcomes and raises new questions about the role of deindustrialization even in those cities from which this narrative first emerged. I focus on Chicago not to question its import as a stronghold of black industrial employment, but to assess claims of blacks' *disproportionate* dependence on manufacturing drawn from Chicago as a case (Wilson, 1987; Wacquant and Wilson, 1989). I do so comparatively, racially (compared to whites and other groups) and sectorally (compared to public employment). With respect to the latter comparison, Chicago provides a salient case given its political status as the 'black metropolis'. Historically, black Chicagoans have struggled for political incorporation at the municipal level and its concrete reward of public employment (Gosnell, 1935; Eisinger, 1982a).

To assess the relative dependence of African Americans on manufacturing and the public sector in Chicago, I employ the commonly used index of representation calculated as follows:

$$IR_{ij} = (E_{ij} / E_{im}) / (E_j / E_m)$$

where IR_{ij} is the index of representation for group i in industry j , E_{ij} is the employment of group i in industry j , E_{im} is the employment of group i in metro area m , E_j is the total employment in industry j and E_m is the total employment in metro area m . An IR equal to one denotes parity representation. That is, the percentage of a group employed in industry j is equal to the percentage of all jobs in the metro area in industry j . That is, a group depends upon an industry to the same degree that a city's economy depends upon that industry. I utilize an index of representation because disproportionate dependence can only be discerned by a comparison to a baseline; in this case, the percentage of *all* jobs in manufacturing. Frequently, an index of representation is expressed as the group's share of industry j divided by the group's share of all jobs in the metro area (e.g. Waldinger, 1996). Both ratios produce the same result. I analyze the concentration of black workers in each sector relative to whites and Latinos and separately by gender between 1950 and 2000. Though my primary focus is on male workers, I provide similar data for women to better assess racially specific patterns.

My data come from the University of Minnesota's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for the Chicago CMSA region (Ruggles *et al.*, 2008). I use the 1950 industrial codes to classify industry of employment as 'manufacturing', an aggregate category that includes both durable (e.g. automobiles, steel) and nondurable (e.g. clothing, food products) manufacturing. I use the census classification for workers employed in local, state and federal government to measure public employment. In both sectors, I include employed civilian workers aged 18–64. Microlevel data at the CMSA level are not available for the 1960 decennial census, a characteristic unique to this census.

I begin with manufacturing. Table 1 and Figure 1 show that, in contrast to the black experience that Waldinger (1996) described for New York, black male workers in Chicago were overconcentrated in manufacturing for much of the postwar period. However, whites were as well. Between 1950 and 1980, both groups relied upon manufacturing disproportionately in that the percentage of both groups employed in manufacturing exceeded the percentage of all employment in manufacturing ($IR > 1$). Put differently, each group's share of manufacturing employment exceeded its share of total employment.

Nonetheless, black overconcentration did exceed that of whites in 1970 and, to a lesser extent, in 1980. This captures the significant, and likely exceptional, case of the black manufacturing experience in Chicago. Beginning with nearly equal representation in 1950, blacks became more concentrated in manufacturing than white men over the next 30 years. Following two decades of growth in black manufacturing employment (by 57%) and the beginning of white decline (by 9%), the racial disparity in overrepresentation hit a high in 1970: 41% of black men ($IR = 1.3$) compared to 35% of white men ($IR = 1.1$) were employed in manufacturing. This pattern bears out one aspect of the racially disproportionate impact argument — similar rates of job loss over the 1970s (14% for whites and 17% for blacks) affected a relatively greater portion of black workers and yielded disparate decreases in the proportion of blacks employed in manufacturing (41–33%) compared to whites (35–31%).

Yet arguments that center on the disproportionate employment of blacks in manufacturing call for refinement with respect to the following points. First, racially disproportionate effects of deindustrialization that stem from a disproportionate dependence of blacks on manufacturing *as a whole* were largely confined to the 1970s. At the start of the decade, blacks were more dependent upon manufacturing than whites than at any other time (41% of all blacks were in manufacturing compared to 35% of all

Table 1 Manufacturing employment and concentration by race-ethnicity and gender

	1950			1970			1980			1990			2000						
	Manf Emp	% in Manf	IR	Manf Emp	% in Manf	IR	Manf Emp	% in Manf	IR	Manf Emp	% in Manf	IR	Manf Emp	% in Manf	IR				
White male	620,056	40	1.1	561,500	-9%	35	1.1	485,600	-14%	31	1.1	345,902	-29%	22	1.1	272,557	-21%	19	1.2
Black male	63,743	42	1.1	100,000	57%	41	1.3	83,200	-17%	33	1.2	52,950	-36%	21	1.0	41,929	-21%	16	1.0
Latino male	10,101	63	1.7	25,700	154%	59	1.8	59,000	130%	57	2.1	67,649	15%	39	2.0	80,991	20%	30	1.8
White female	214,118	33	0.9	221,100	3%	24	0.7	209,300	-5%	19	0.7	159,638	-24%	13	0.7	119,245	-25%	10	0.6
Black female	23,400	28	0.7	39,800	70%	21	0.7	44,000	11%	17	0.6	28,953	-34%	10	0.5	24,448	-16%	7	0.4
Latina female	3,002	47	1.2	8,200	173%	51	1.6	23,800	190%	45	1.6	31,056	30%	35	1.8	51,081	64%	32	1.9
All manuf emp	942,265			994,700	6%			964,000	-3%			755,029	-22%			663,038	-12%		
All emp	2,469,339	38		3,114,200	26%	32		3,516,500	13%	27		3,840,549	9%	20		4,034,631	5%	16	

Source: Ruggles *et al.* (2008)

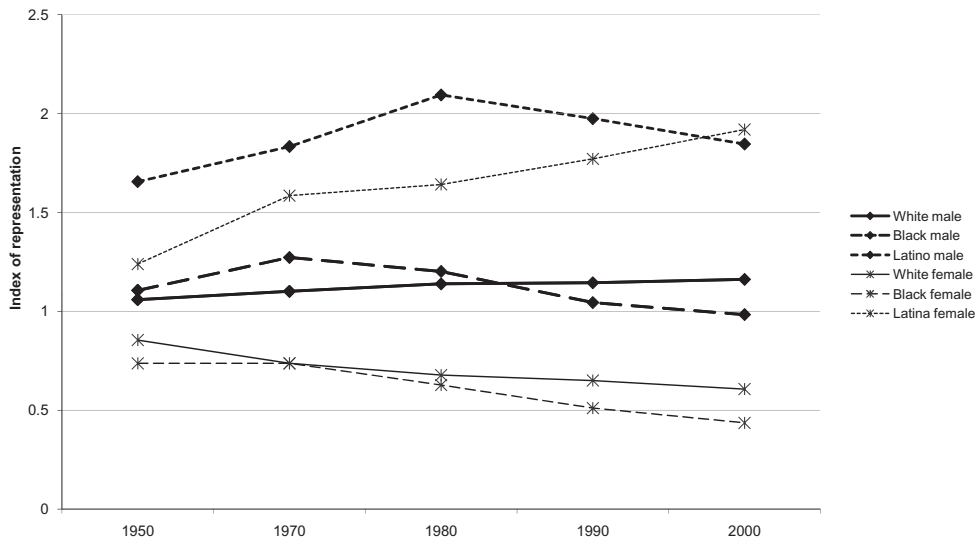


Figure 1 Manufacturing concentration by race-ethnicity and gender, Chicago 1950-2000

whites). By 1980, blacks and whites were again similarly dependent on manufacturing (33% of blacks in manufacturing compared to 31% of whites).

Yet most scholars employ the disproportionate concentration argument in reference to the 1980s. What this argument does explain is the racially disproportionate job losses *within* manufacturing during the 1980s — a story primarily about steel. In 1980, one in every four black manufacturing workers was employed in steel, twice as many as whites. Over the next decade, Chicago’s steel industry was hit hardest by deindustrialization, shedding relatively more jobs than any other manufacturing subsector. Blacks’ disproportionate concentration in steel, combined with relatively greater job losses (59% compared to 51% for whites), contributed significantly to the overall decline in black manufacturing employment. During the 1980s, steel losses alone comprised 40% of all black manufacturing losses. Ironically, these losses became the ill-fated consequence of the decades-earlier struggle to open steel jobs to blacks (Stein, 1998).

Aggregation of black employment across subsectors, however, yields a profile of disproportionate dependence on manufacturing as a whole that differs not so much from whites. Blacks had a poor industry mix within manufacturing due to their concentration in vulnerable subsectors, but not a poor industry mix within the economy as a whole due to their concentration in manufacturing. Further, the racial dynamics of steel do not generalize to all of manufacturing. Within many other subsectors, whites experienced disproportionate job losses as a result of concentration in vulnerable subsectors, as well as racially disparate rates of loss. In 1980, the largest white manufacturing workforce was in miscellaneous machinery, a declining subsector (72,700 or 15% of the white manufacturing workforce, compared to 7% of the black manufacturing workforce). Whites were also the greatest relative losers in this subsector with a job loss rate of 32% compared to 27% for blacks.

A second point concerns ethnoracial comparisons and degree of difference. Because racialized accounts of deindustrialization are largely constrained to differences between black and white men, their degree of similarity is rarely, if ever, assessed. In fact, black and white male employment trends in manufacturing were more similar to each other than to any other racial or gender group. Between 1950 and 1980, both black and white men were disproportionately concentrated in manufacturing. Between 1970 and 2000, both groups lost jobs in manufacturing at rates greater than the overall rate of

manufacturing job loss (see Table 1; e.g. the rate of overall job loss in manufacturing was 3% over the 1970s, 22% over the 1980s, and 12% over the 1990s).

Though narratives of race and economy hinge on black–white comparisons, the most striking ethnoracial comparison in manufacturing is with Latinos. Latinos were more concentrated in, and thus the most dependent upon, manufacturing than blacks or whites for the entire 50-year period under study (a finding that resonates with Waldinger's 1996 study of New York). In 1950, 63% of all Latinos were employed in manufacturing (IR = 1.7 compared to 1.1 for both whites and blacks). At their highest level of concentration in 1980, Latino men were overrepresented at over two times their expected share, an IR equal to 2.1. (Note that an IR can go up even as the percentage of a group employed in an industry goes down — as occurred between 1950 and 1980 — when the percentage of a group employed in an industry declines at a slower rate than the industry's share of all employment, i.e. the denominator shrinks relatively more than the numerator.) Yet Latinos never sustained aggregate job losses at any point between 1950 and 2000 even as manufacturing declined — the pace of Latino employment growth simply slowed. During the 1980s, Latino employment grew by 15% even as overall manufacturing employment dropped by 22%, white male employment by 29% and black male employment by 36%.

Latina women experienced the greatest relative employment gains in manufacturing of any group. In the 1970s, their employment increased by 190%; in the 1980s, by 30%; and in the 1990s, by 64% — all decades characterized by a contracting manufacturing sector. By the century's close, Latina women had become more concentrated in manufacturing than their male counterparts (in 1990, IR = 1.8 compared to 2.0 for Latino men; by 2000, the index was 1.9 for women and 1.8 for men). Further, the gains of Latinas do not reflect a broader feminization of manufacturing employment as black and white women experienced aggregate job losses over the last two decades. The pattern of growth is characterized foremost as racially and ethnically specific — all Latinos are gaining in manufacturing — but one with a pronounced gender inflection — Latina women are outpacing their male counterparts in relative employment gains.

The finding that Latinos historically have depended upon manufacturing to a greater degree than blacks in Chicago raises questions about explanations that assert racially disproportionate effects of deindustrialization due to a group's disproportionate dependence upon manufacturing. If disproportionate concentration explains a group's vulnerability to deindustrialization, then Latinos should have been the minority group most at risk to the dramatic decline in manufacturing employment. Yet the exact opposite was true. Latinos posted absolute job gains in manufacturing throughout the entire 50-year period between 1950 and 2000. Latinos depended upon manufacturing to a much greater degree than African Americans, yet they suffered no aggregate job losses as a result of deindustrialization. And as a group, Latinos were no more skilled than the lower-skilled blacks argued to be most at risk from deindustrialization (Wilson and Wacquant, 1989).

Trends in black public employment

In this section, I chart the relative concentration of blacks in the public sector using the same measures I did above for the manufacturing sector. I then comparatively assess employment trends across these two sectors for blacks.

The data presented in Table 2 and Figure 2 clearly indicate blacks' significant dependence upon government employment and the distinctive feature of the public sector as an exclusive black niche. Whereas whites and Latinos were never overrepresented in public employment, blacks were overrepresented — at high levels — throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Black women relied most heavily upon the public sector for employment; between 1970 and 2000, they were overrepresented at twice their expected share (IR > 2). Black men were not far behind, concentrated at more than one

Table 2 Public sector employment and concentration by race-ethnicity and gender

	1950			1970			1980			1990			2000						
	Pub Emp	% in Pub	IR	Pub Emp	% in Pub	IR	Pub Emp	% in Pub	IR	Pub Emp	% in Pub	IR	Pub Emp	% in Pub	IR				
White male	116,441	8	1.0	172,300	48%	11	0.9	170,800	-1%	11	0.8	153,714	-10%	10	0.8	140,459	-9%	10	0.8
Black male	13,762	9	1.1	45,900	234%	19	1.5	57,300	25%	23	1.7	55,669	-3%	22	1.8	49,108	-12%	19	1.6
Latino male	123	1	0.1	2,400	185,1%	5	0.4	5,500	129%	5	0.4	7,747	41%	4	0.4	12,719	64%	5	0.4
White female	56,889	9	1.1	122,800	116%	13	1.0	136,400	11%	12	0.9	134,043	-2%	11	0.9	146,745	9%	12	1.0
Black female	8,013	10	1.2	50,000	524%	27	2.1	78,700	57%	31	2.3	74,947	-5%	26	2.2	84,232	12%	25	2.1
Latina female	412	6	0.8	1,800	337%	11	0.9	5,200	189%	10	0.7	8,156	57%	9	0.8	13,079	60%	8	0.7
All public emp	196,969			392,700	99%			472,500	20%			458,290	-3%			480,545	5%		
All emp	2,469,339	8		3,114,200	26%	13		3,516,500	13%	13		3,840,549	9%	12		4,034,631	5%	12	

Source: Ruggles *et al.* (2008)

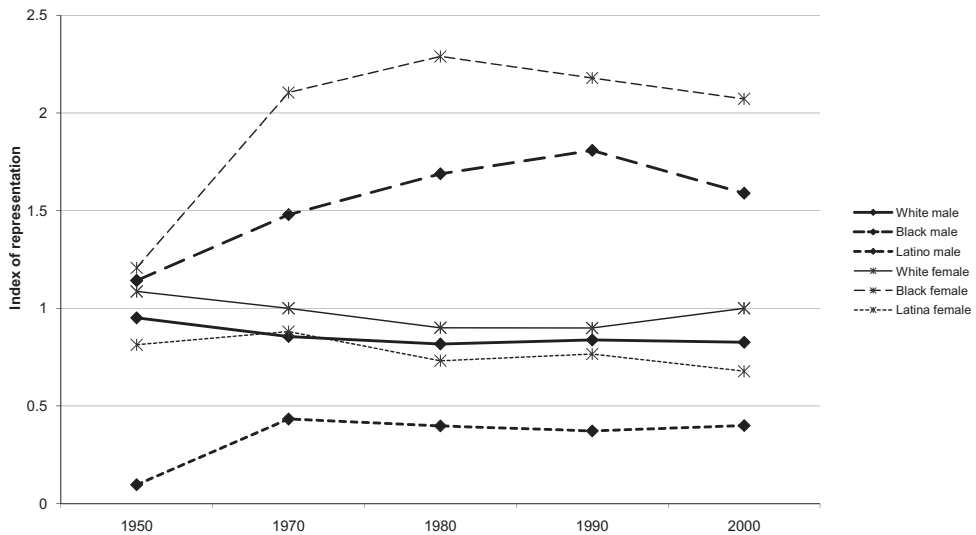


Figure 2 Public sector concentration by race-ethnicity and gender, Chicago 1950-2000

and a half times their expected share over the same time period ($IR \geq 1.5$). By contrast, no other racial or gender group had greater than parity representation after 1950 (white women were at parity in 1950 and again in 2000).

In terms of growth, black public employment surged between 1950 and 1980. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of black men employed in the public sector grew by 234%; the number of black women increased by 524%. Growth continued through the 1970s: by 25% for black men and by 57% for black women. This decades-long trend of unparalleled employment expansion came to an abrupt end in the 1980s, the first decade of overall contraction in the public sector (by 3%). Black women's employment declined by 5% (their only public sector losses between 1950 and 2000) and, for the first time, black women's level of representation within the sector also declined — a trend that continued through the 1990s. Black men also sustained job losses during the 1980s, but at the same rate as all public employment (by 3%). Their most acute job losses came in the 1990s (−12%), despite the sector's renewed growth (+5%).

Three aspects of the long-term trend of black dependence on public employment are of note. Firstly, though black women's concentration in the public sector began to dilute during the 1980s, their degree of concentration remained high, dropping relatively little from a zenith of 2.3 in 1980 to 2.1 in 2000 (greater than twice the expected likelihood).

Secondly, the decline in black men's public employment during the 1990s was an unprecedented departure from past trends of disproportionate growth and increased concentration (or non-discriminate job loss, i.e. their parity losses during the 1980s). At the century's close, black men's relative concentration in public employment declined for the first time in 50 years.

Thirdly, white concentration within the public sector remained stable over this same period, even increasing for women, reflecting a resiliency to sector trends among whites. Though both black and white men lost jobs in the public sector during the 1980s and 1990s, the impact of these losses on whites as a group were minimal given white men's historically low levels of representation within public employment (since 1970, their indices of representation have been well below parity). Further, the decline in white male employment appears to be the result of a general contraction in the supply of white men, given that their likelihood of public employment has remained stable over the past 30

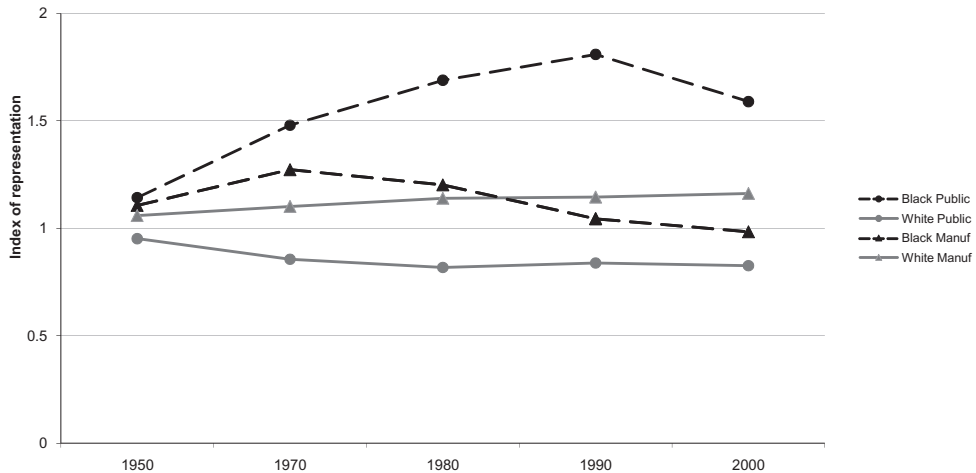


Figure 3 Male concentration in manufacturing and public employment by race, Chicago 1950-2000

years. White women fared well on multiple fronts: they experienced relatively minor job losses during the 1980s, and they increased both their number of jobs and their likelihood of public employment during the 1990s.

Taken together, these trends highlight the singularity of black men's public employment experience in the late twentieth century. During the 1980s, the public sector functioned as a buffer that softened the blow of greater job loss in sectors such as manufacturing. This is evident in the fact that black men increased their concentration within public employment (from IR = 1.7 to IR = 1.8) even as their public employment numbers were dropping (by 3%). Because black men lost jobs in the public sector at a slower pace relative to other industries such as manufacturing (by 36%), their likelihood of employment increased within the public sector. Ironically, this meant that black men became more dependent upon the public sector just as they began losing jobs within it. Black men then suffered disproportionate losses during the 1990s, an all the more disconcerting trend given overall growth in public employment through the decade.

Manufacturing and public employment compared

Figure 3 underscores the disproportionate reliance of black men on public sector work relative to manufacturing and relative to whites. This figure overlays black and white male patterns of concentration in manufacturing and the public sector, focusing on arguments of disproportionality. The middle two lines of the graph show that both black men and white men have been, for the most part, similarly dependent upon manufacturing.

By contrast, trends in public employment reveal a stark pattern of racial difference: black men have relied upon this sector to a much greater degree than white men. Black men have been highly concentrated in, thus disproportionately reliant upon, public sector employment, and white men, the bottommost line, have not. While a larger percentage of white men have consistently found work in manufacturing than in the public sector over the last 50 years, a larger percentage of black men have held employment in the public sector than in manufacturing over the last 20 years. This comparison nicely captures the sharp racial divide that characterizes postindustrial employment in Chicago. Whereas manufacturing employed the largest numbers of both whites and blacks during its



Figure 4 Black concentration in manufacturing and public employment by gender, Chicago 1950-2000

heyday, blacks and whites have followed increasingly divergent paths since manufacturing's collapse. By 1990, blacks were not only relatively, but also absolutely, more dependent on public employment than on manufacturing (55,669 workers compared to 52,950 respectively).

Figure 4 depicts the share of black employment by gender in both manufacturing and the public sector. Three trends stand out. Firstly, as black employment declined in manufacturing, blacks increased their reliance upon government work for employment — a pattern that holds for both black men and women.

Secondly, though black women have been more highly concentrated in the public sector and men more concentrated in manufacturing, black men and women nonetheless share similar aggregate patterns of rising and falling concentration in each sector across the five-decade period. Yet recent trends in public employment may signify emerging gendered divergences. Whereas black men and women's concentration in public employment both decreased during the 1990s, men did so through job losses and women through job gains. While black women increased their public jobs by 12%, they moved into other sectors at an even faster rate, thus lessening their concentration in the public sector relative to other industries. Men, by contrast, lost jobs at a greater rate than any other group (a 12% decrease), reducing their share of the public workforce and their 'hold' on public jobs as a result.

Lastly, black men's employment shares have declined precipitously in *both* sectors since 1980 — the most acute disproportionate decline of black employment in manufacturing and the public sector over the last 50 years. In the place of stable union jobs in either manufacturing or public employment, black Chicagoans have moved most quickly into new sectors such as home health care, private security and transportation, industries characterized by lower-wage jobs, nonstandard work and highly deregulated labor markets (Parks, 2010). None of these, however, reflect the structural purchase or significance that manufacturing once had and that the public sector continues to occupy, however tenuous, in Chicago's political economy.

Conclusion

Black economic progress in urban American has been largely understood in terms of manufacturing's rise and decline. Arguments that accent the racial significance of manufacturing and its corollary, deindustrialization, rest on manufacturing's position as

an economic niche for blacks. As a group, black workers were disproportionately dependent upon manufacturing, setting them up for a bigger fall when the bottom fell out of the industry through the 1970s and 1980s.

This account has primarily drawn upon the Chicago experience. Though Chicago has long served as a template for accounts of twentieth-century race and urban economy, a handful of scholars have argued that the Chicago experience was exceptional. In other American cities, blacks were less successful at making inroads into manufacturing and never came to depend disproportionately upon the industry (Waldinger, 1996; Katz *et al.*, 2005). I find that aspects of both accounts of the black manufacturing experience resonate in my analysis of Chicago's racial division of labor between 1950 and 2000. Black Chicagoans were indeed incorporated into a postwar Fordist labor market dominated by high-wage, unionized manufacturing employment, and they relied disproportionately upon manufacturing for much of the second half of the twentieth century.

Yet even for Chicago, narratives of race and economy that stress the role of manufacturing call for refinement and caveat. The 'doomed dependence' argument — that blacks disproportionately relied upon manufacturing relative to whites and were therefore disproportionately impacted by its decline — overstates the relative position of blacks. Using a standardized measure of dependence, I find that black, white and Latino men were all disproportionately dependent upon manufacturing relative to other sectors of employment. Blacks were more dependent on manufacturing than whites in 1970 and 1980, but not strikingly so. With the exception of the 1980s, both blacks and whites experienced relatively similar rates of job loss in manufacturing.

The dependence argument best describes the impact of job losses during the 1970s, at the outset of which blacks were more concentrated in manufacturing than whites. By 1980, blacks and whites were equally dependent upon manufacturing. Blacks, however, experienced a disproportionately higher *rate* of manufacturing job loss during the decade compared to whites due primarily to their greater concentration in steel, the manufacturing subsector hit hardest by deindustrialization.

Against the larger spectrum of Chicago's polyglot workforce, however, black and white men shared employment legacies in manufacturing that were more, rather than less, similar. Latinos were more concentrated in the manufacturing than either whites or blacks, yet they experienced no aggregate job losses in manufacturing of the 50-year period. Dependence on a declining sector, in this case, did not lead to doom.

When our concern is with sharply racially inflected patterns of employment, generalizations drawn from a single aggregate sector — in this case, manufacturing — obscure other mobility pathways. Government, more so than manufacturing, served as black Chicagoans' most persistent and disproportionate sector of employment throughout the second half of twentieth century — a singularly African American employment trend. Public employment accorded black workers multiple socio-economic benefits not available to them in the private sector and proved the most racially equitable, albeit imperfect, employment venue available to black workers. Despite strong evidence of public employment as a primary mobility pathway for blacks, political economy narratives driven hard by a Fordist frame have missed this chapter in the story of twentieth-century black political economy. In the melee of deindustrialization and its visible landscapes of an economy literally emptied of jobs, manufacturing captured the popular and scholarly imagination. Yet the constancy and stability of public employment may well have facilitated and shored up black economic progress more than any other sector, manufacturing included, in ways that recent scholarly research has failed to recognize. Unionization, for example, has played a key role in assuring black mobility within the public sector — it remains the most highly unionized sector in the American economy, a position it has held since 1979 when it overtook manufacturing (Hirsch and Macpherson, 2003; Zipperer, 2009).

These findings, and the literature on public employment more broadly, emphasize the need to reassess the role of public sector employment in racialized accounts of urban economic restructuring. Explanations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century urban

economic restructuring need to better address the public sector's historic role as not only a black employment niche, but also as an economic buffer and a labor market standards-setter. Despite former calls to investigate the impact of downturns in government employment in conjunction with deindustrialization on black labor market inequality (e.g. by Harrison and Gorham, 1992: 249 in reference to the 1980s), we continue to pay little heed to the role of public employment in stabilizing the black working and middle class.

Identifying the historical dependence of blacks on public employment — the postwar economy's 'other' high wage, unionized sector — underscores the significance of the recent decline in black male public employment and throws into sharp relief the grim labor market conditions of the late twentieth century for black urban workers. African American men in particular have been at the epicenter of a political economy perfect storm, buffeted by multiple forces of labor market inequality and exclusion, e.g. discrimination, the penal system, racial segmentation (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993; Western and Beckett, 1999; Katz *et al.*, 2005). The disproportionate decline of black male employment in the public sector reflects an expansion of this racialized crisis when, against a backdrop of increasingly high black male unemployment and labor market non-participation, the government as both a 'model employer' and employer of last resort fails as a pathway to secure living-wage employment (Krislov, 1974).

Finally, recognition of this historic pathway for black workers — a group facing structural disadvantages in the labor market — demands greater emphasis in more global debates on the role of government. Public employment has played a central role in growing and stabilizing the black working and middle classes throughout the twentieth century. Yet the disproportionate representation of black workers in public employment renders them most directly dependent upon a political commitment to the public provision of goods and services and to the recognition of government as a legitimate employment venue in its own right. Thus, the dependence of blacks on public employment demands more research on not only the positive effects of public employment on black economic prosperity, but also that of its alter ego, privatization.

Research on the link between privatization and its racial impact on employment is minimal, though some researchers have identified a relationship between privatization and declining black public employment (e.g. Stein, 1994). Privatization may emerge as deindustrialization's early twenty-first-century political economy twin; rather than deproletarianization linked to industrial decline, privatization yields the unmaking of a black postindustrial working and middle class driven by a more purely political, rather than economic, restructuring of work and labor relations. Tracing the historic role of the public sector as a significant employment venue for blacks heightens the import of recent privatization trends and reveals them as attacks on a longstanding mobility pathway for urban African Americans. As such, privatization carries forward the legacy of deproletarianization but with perhaps even more pernicious racial consequences than those wrought by deindustrialization.

If deproletarianization is about the unmaking of the black working class, urban scholarship needs to expand its analysis of the processes that bring deproletarianization about within a postindustrial context (if we are willing to concede a working class separate from an industrial laboring class). These include restructuring trends in sectors other than manufacturing, attacks on unionization, and the role of labor market institutions such as the military and the prison system. Given the longstanding role of the public sector for black economic mobility, scholars must better assess the contemporary relationship between public employment and black economic prosperity in order to uncover possible connections between privatization and black poverty. These inquiries are of pressing importance in an era of neoliberal politics and public policy as they bear upon central questions of the role of government in a democratic society as not only a model diversity employer, but as a legitimate economic mobility channel for disadvantaged workers. Perhaps the current global economic crisis presents an opportunity for realizing a renewed role for public employment as an economic safety net for the economy as a whole, as well as for individual workers. Political responses to

the financial crisis of 2008 over the short- and medium-term will offer much fodder for analysis on just this question.

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union-membership-byte/jump-in-public-sector-unionization-raises-overall-rate-again-in-2008/ (accessed 28 January 2009).

Résumé

De nombreux textes sur les races et l'économie urbaine portent un intérêt singulier aux destins mêlés des Noirs et de l'industrie manufacturière. Toutefois, pendant une grande partie du vingtième siècle, les travailleurs noirs de Chicago ont trouvé dans le secteur public une voie décisive vers la sécurité économique. La période 1950–2000 a connu quatre grandes tendances: une concentration disproportionnée des Afro-américains dans le secteur public (supérieure à celle de l'industrie manufacturière); une concentration disproportionnée des Blancs et des Noirs dans l'industrie manufacturière (avec une très légère supériorité des Noirs); une concentration disproportionnée des Latino-américains dans l'industrie manufacturière, sans qu'ils connaissent pour autant des pertes massives sur ces cinquante années; un déclin disproportionné de l'emploi public des hommes noirs, en rupture avec les tendances sectorielles passées de croissance et de stabilité pour cette population. Ces résultats appellent à réévaluer la place du secteur public — 'l'autre' secteur syndiqué bien payé de l'économie d'après-guerre — dans les récits racialisés de la restructuration économique urbaine. Reconnaître le secteur public, non seulement comme la niche d'emploi prépondérante des Noirs, mais aussi comme un étalon pour le marché du travail, affine notre compréhension des impacts racialisés propres aux tendances de l'emploi public contemporain (dont la privatisation) liés aux mutations politiques néolibérales dans la gouvernance urbaine.