

Asia comes to Main Street and may learn to speak Spanish: Globalization in a poor neighborhood in Worcester

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Introduction: immigration and globalization.

Waves of immigration are like fingerprints. Each leaves a distinctive pattern, and those patterns tell the stories of their times. Great tides of history and social change toss families about the globe and they wash up here and there to make their ways as they can.

Worcester, Massachusetts has been stamped by recent global trends and by the U.S. role in world affairs – and by the more local forces of regional redistribution. These have come together in one of the city’s oldest and poorest neighborhoods to make something entirely new for the city: an Asian enclave in an increasingly Hispanic area. War and peace, boom and bust – all have stamped the human variety of the Main South neighborhood.

Its role as the hegemonic power of global capital caused the United States to serve as the armed rampart against revolution in the Cold War period (and beyond). (Kentor 2000; Chase-Dunn 1989) The U.S. thus engaged in a string of large and small wars – Korea, Vietnam (and Laos and Cambodia), interventions in Cuba and Guatemala and Iran; interventions in the Dominican Republic, and Haiti; participation in civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. These interventions each involved client relations with

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governments and personnel, and in a number of instances obligations to provide for the safety of these clients by giving them refuge in the U.S. In other instances the traffic between client states and the U.S. produced at first smaller and then larger trickles of migration that, by a familiar pattern of chain migration and internal redistribution, led a variety of post-World War II immigrants to settle in different places within the U.S. In this volume, for example, Lowell's Cambodian migrants are products of this aspect of the United States' global role. In this regard, the U.S. global role of hegemon entails an inevitable flow of peoples toward the center. It was true two thousand years ago, as well: when ruled by Rome, peoples came to the capital to find their future. Let us call this angle of perspective on Worcester's post-1965 immigrant flows the "global hegemon" perspective. It informs our understanding of how and why Vietnamese restaurants should appear in a middle-sized city's low income neighborhood.

In addition to the proposition that migration to U.S. cities is in part a consequence of our imperial wars, the globalization of (especially) manufacturing capital and the restructuring of regional economies is also part of the story. Economic marginalization in peripheral countries, especially among landless laborers, pushes them towards cities. In developing countries these cities frequently grow in population much more rapidly than in their basic employment structures – and so, many of their residents look outwards for work and survival. Simultaneously, the globalization of capital has caused manufacturing jobs to flow from older "advanced" industrial regions to semi-peripheral and peripheral developing countries (Ross and Trachte 1990) –known as deindustrialization in one place and industrialization in the others. In a paradox first noted by Sassen-Koob, (e.g. 1983, 1989; Sassen 1988) the flight of capital from older

industrial regions may be accompanied by an influx of migrants from the very regions towards which investment is moving.

In the Worcester region, as other Northeastern cities, what Sassen called “downgraded” manufacturing attracted Puerto Rican migrants and the implantation of Spanish speaking neighborhoods. In turn they were followed in the 1980s and 1990s by migrants thrown up by revolutionary and counter-revolutionary wars in Central America. As a consequence whole new industrial sectors and job niches became dominated by Latino migrants, e.g. landscaping, flower-growing at the metropolitan the periphery, central city fast food, etc. And so, to the Main South neighborhood, after the 1960s, came first Puerto Rican and then Central American migrants.

Inequality and structural change

Worcester’s deindustrialization was part of a process that began in the older manufacturing-intense regions and is now a structural reality for the whole nation. This is one of the main contributors to the widely noted growth of inequality in America. As Harrison and Bluestone noted, the older mill-based economy tended to produce an income/occupation structure bulky in the middle with smaller tails at the top and bottom – like the hump of a dromedary camel. By contrast, the postindustrial structure gives great rewards to the more highly qualified, and weakens the labor market position of those at the bottom. It creates a large number of service sector jobs of low pay. (Harrison and Bluestone 1988; Bluestone 1995)

These trends show up in national data. The ratio of the top 10% of wage earners to the bottom 10% of wage earners was 3.7:1 in 1973; 4:1 in 1983; 4.3:1 in 1993 and in 2003. Another way to see this is the ratio of average hourly wages of those with college

education to those with less than High School. College educated workers earned 1.7 times as much as high school dropouts in 1973 and 1983; 2.1 times the less than high school wage in 1993; and 2.4 times the lower wage in 2001. (Mishel, Bernstein Boushey 2003).

The national trends are part of the Massachusetts and Worcester stories as well. The Commonwealth had higher levels of inequality than the nation in 1998-99; and those levels had grown between 1979 and 1999. Using the ratio of the incomes of the top 10% of families, to the bottom 10 %, Andrew Sum and his colleagues calculated the increase as rising more than a third from 6.4:1 to 8.7:1. (Sum et al. 2000). The same ratio for household incomes in 1998-99 showed Massachusetts at 11.5 and the U.S. at 10.5.

Table Four: Some measures of income deprivation and inequality

	<i>US</i>		<i>MA</i>		<i>Worc Metro</i>		<i>Worc city</i>	
Extreme Poverty (1)	1990	5.8%	1990	4.4%	1990	4.7%	1990	9.1%
	2000	5.6%	2000	3.6%	2000	3.3%	2000	5.6%
Very Low Income (2)	1990	na	1990	na	1990	18.0%	1990	33%
	2000	na	2000	na	2000	25%	2000	34%
International Relative Poverty (3)	1990	24%	1990	20%	1990	21%	1990	28%
	2000	23.0%	2000	20.5%	2000	21.7%	2000	30%
Median Household income	1990	\$30,056		\$36,952		\$35,977		\$ 28,955
	2000	\$41,994		\$50,502		\$47,899		\$ 35,653

1) Households Under 50% of official poverty standard; Table P121 (1990); P88 2000

2) Households under 50% of metro unit median income (HUD);(NB: not adjusted for family size) calculated from SF3, 1990, 2000

3) Households under 50% national median (NB: not adjusted for family size), calculated from SF3, 1990, 2000

These larger trends have had a clear impact on Worcester. Between 1990 and 2000, a period of very high employment levels for most of Massachusetts, and falling unemployment rates in Worcester, metro region median incomes grew less rapidly than the state's – the ratio fell from about 97% to about 95%. As a region going through the final phase of deindustrialization, Worcester has little of the high technology industry of the areas to its East, nor the FIRE (Finance Insurance and Real Estate) headquarters functions that contributed so largely to Boston regional incomes.

More ominously, some measures of inequality and deprivation grew markedly in this decade of growth. Table Four reports three different measures of deprivation. The first is “extreme poverty”. This measure uses the official US poverty line (corrected for family size) and inquires as to the number of households that falls below one-half of official poverty. As many observers believe the U.S. official poverty is considerably lower than it should be, incomes that fail to reach over one-half of it suggest painful suffering. Happily, this proportion fell slightly in the US, more markedly in the Commonwealth, substantially in the Worcester Metro region and dramatically in Worcester City – cut nearly in half. This is a measure of absolute suffering, using a “market basket” approach to defining poverty. The other measures are more relative, and indicate localized inequality. In these the story is more mixed.

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) creates income guidelines to define eligibility and target populations for public housing and housing subsidies. Different levels of income qualify a family for different subsidy programs. As housing markets vary locally, the subsidy levels are tied to local incomes. For the HUD “Section 8” housing vouchers, which families may use to pay rent on the

private market, levels of subsidy depend on family income in relation to the local median. HUD uses three levels. Families with incomes no higher than 30% of the local median are called “extremely low income”; those whose incomes are no higher than 50% of the local median are considered “very low income,” and those at 80% of the median are “low income.” HUD adjusts these definitions by family size. Table Four uses the HUD 50% level (very low income) as a proxy for a localized inequality measure. It is only an estimate, since it is a) not adjusted for family or household size and b) it uses household not family income data.² At the metro and city level more households fell under the 50% level in 2000 than in 1990. The growth was more rapid in the metro area, reflecting its enlargement between the two periods and the even lower rates of economic growth in some of the other urban centers in the region (i.e., the smaller cities of Fitchburg and Leominster). Still the level of the “very low income” aggregate in the city (34%) is a strong reminder of the polarization between the central city poor and working poor and the “new economy” suburbs, especially to the city’s east.

Finally, the third measure in Table Four is the international measure of relative poverty – at least among the rich countries – income one-half or less than the national median.³ (E.g., Rainwater, Smeeding, Coder 1999) By that measure the region showed no change, but the city edged upwards, with 30% of its households among the poor or “very much less than equal.”

² Adjustments for family size are beyond of the scope of this work; the use of household data captures a broader range of persons and units.

³ Among the principal centers of work on income inequality using this definition is the Luxembourg Income Study. Their leading American principals now appear to advocate using regionalized median, rather than national median as the benchmark for comparative inequality/poverty studies. See Rainwater, Smeeding, Coder (1999)

The occupational structures driving these results can be illustrated with some simple job change data. From 1990-2001 Worcester lost over 4400 manufacturing jobs (27% fewer than in 1990); it gained about 10,500 miscellaneous service jobs (a 32% gain). In 2001, the average Worcester manufacturing job produced weekly earnings of \$870. By contrast, the average service producing job (including its higher paid sub-sectors, which did not produce job growth) provided earnings of \$698 (Extracted from Massachusetts Division of Unemployment Assistance 2004.)

Things could be worse – and they are in Providence, Hartford and Springfield, where poverty and inequality measures are higher.⁴ Nevertheless, Worcester has not been a hotspot of growth, and its poor and working poor – while employed at higher rates over the decade – have fallen farther behind their region and nation. Still, immigrants come and workers and immigrant entrepreneurs pursue their own versions of liberty and happiness.

Coming to Worcester

Located 50 miles west of Boston, Worcester, Massachusetts is approximately tied with Providence, Rhode Island, as the second largest city in New England.⁵ It is part of a quadrangle of Southern New England cities in the same size class dominated either by

⁴ Gini coefficients of income inequality (calculated by author from census SF3 for: Hartford: 44; Springfield and Worcester 42; Providence 47; and by reference US 41. NB: this is considerably lower than the Census Bureau national calculation, undoubtedly because of the estimation of grouped data used here, that counts the top bracket of the publicly reported grouped data at its lower-bound. The comparisons however, are instructive. Worcester's official poverty rate (1999) is considerably lower than the other cities' as well: 16.8% of households compared to Hartford 29%; Springfield 21% and Providence 28%. Author's calculations from Census SF3, Table P92.

⁵ Providence, RI is marginally larger. From the 2000 Census: Hartford, CT, city, 121,578; Providence RI, city, 173,618; Springfield MA city, 152,082; Worcester MA city, 172,648.

New York City's reach, or Boston's, or in a field of influence shared by both: Hartford, Providence, Springfield, Worcester.

Worcester's economic and demographic past has been part of the larger stories of New England and the Northeast. A major destination for immigrants in the mid-19th Century, Worcester also shared the late 19th Century surge of migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. The national origins and ancestries that Worcester residents reported to the U.S. Census in 2000 register clearly these two waves.⁶ Table One shows the reason that Irish and Italian politicians dominated the late 20th Century history of the city: together they are 30 % of the population – but, as in Providence, they are rarely together.

Two or three other groups compose part of a distinctive immigration history for Worcester, but are not so apparent from these data. Worcester, Massachusetts was unusual as an East Coast urban destination for Swedes, and indeed, for Swedish industrial workers.(Ronblum 1995; Estus and McClymer 1995; Parkinson 2004) At the turn of the 21st Century there were still over 5500 Worcester residents who identified as Swedish.

Worcester was also among the earliest Armenian immigrant portals to America, thus the home of the first Armenian Church in the United States. (Deranian 1998) Though Providence, RI and Watertown, MA would later prove to be more important centers of Armenian-American life, the establishment of a Chair in Armenian Genocide Studies at Worcester's Clark University registers something of this history.

⁶ The Census Bureau question is : "What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?" They also report: "The question also provides examples of particular ethnic groups, which have changed since 1980. The response options to the question are two blank spaces in which respondents can write in whatever ancestry(ies) they want. We coded up to two ancestries per person." See U.S. Census: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/anc-faq.html#q02>. "Ancestry" is thus about ethnic self-identity. It differs from the foreign born category which is derived from census respondents reports of where they were born.

An industrial town, like many other New England's older cities, Worcester's Rust Belt experience of deindustrialization led to population stagnation and fiscal stress. (Ross and Riesman 1994) After the 1960's Worcester became a migration destination for the Puerto Rican journey Northeast from New York, a journey with large impact on Hartford, moderate on Worcester and otherwise widely distributed in New England. (2002) Puerto Rican workers in the Northeast have been relatively concentrated in manufacturing industries and their migration patterns have in part followed the paths to work provided for operatives. In the Census of 2000, fifteen percent of Worcester residents were classified as "Latino"; 13% of those over five years of age speak Spanish at home. In 1990 9.6% of Worcester Residents were "Hispanic".

The increase from Hispanic to Latino from 1990 to 2000 included individuals and families from Central America. In all these ways – Rust Belt decline; attempts at restructuring; shift from European to Western Hemisphere migrants, Worcester was like other New England cities, and until 1990, though the appearance of low income Spanish speakers was 'new', the migrant stream to Worcester was still Christian and the cultural backgrounds of even the lower income immigrants was part of the larger picture of the European expansion of the early modern era.

But now, in the last decade or so, Asia has come to Main Street, and that is something entirely different. In the census of 1970 Massachusetts' Asian and Pacific Island population composed but 0.4% of the whole, about 60% of the nation's ratio. In the ensuing generation the Northeast and the Commonwealth attracted Asian migrants at

a faster rate than the nation as a whole, and Massachusetts now is home to over 53,000 Asian people, 3.8% of its population, higher than the Nation's 3.6%.⁷ [See Table 2]

The city of Worcester, Massachusetts has received an ample share of the Asian part of the recent migration patterns. From 1990 to the 2000 Census the number and proportion of people of Asian background in the central city of Worcester nearly doubled, from 4800 to 9400 (See Table Three). More numerous than any other group among the new Asian migrants to the heart of the Commonwealth, however, have been those from Vietnam. The 2400 Vietnamese who lived in the city of Worcester in 1990 have become 5100 by the year 2000. From a barely visible 1% of the population they are now a very visible 3% of the population.

Consistent with the classic models of immigrant economy and community building, the Vietnamese presence in Worcester is accentuated by the concentration of enterprise along a particular stretch of one the two main North-South commercial streets of the city.

Main South

Main Street bisects Worcester on a North-South axis. South of the Central Business District, Main Street enters the poorest precincts of town. Emerging from the older, and far from thriving, commercial area of the city, Main Street becomes the center of a community known as Main South, housing among other institutions, Clark

⁷ The 2000 Census separated Asian from Pacific Islander populations – 0.1% of the U.S. population.

University. In Main South we have seen the tides of the twentieth century ebb and flow and the 21st brings Asia following Ireland, and Latin America.

[Map 1 about here]

The community known as Main South is among the poorest in Worcester County: 17.9% of the City population fell under the official poverty line in 2000, but 28.5% of Main South residents did. Into this poor community as has usually been the case with immigrants who arrive without technical skills, the late 20th Century witnessed a new influx.

A quarter of Main South residents are Hispanic, and 60% of these are Puerto Rican (15.8% of the total). Over 9% of Main South residents are Black – a bit over double the City’s average. About 11% of area residents are from Asia (1364) and two-thirds of these are from Vietnam (877). The Vietnamese population is a relatively recent arrival in the community. Only 533 persons in 1990, by 2000, Vietnamese residents compose seven percent of the Main South population. Local observers, including those who have done housing surveys for the local Community Development Corporation report with some assurance that the numbers of Vietnamese are underreported in the census. Reluctant to talk to outsiders, the Vietnamese who have come to their front doors seem reluctant to tell how many people are living in their apartments. This leads the local CDC workers to guess they are saving on rent and living quite densely.

Despite the relatively small number of under or around 1000 Vietnamese residents and a total of about 1400 Asian residents, business presence of Asians is quite large. A windshield survey with follow-up interviews in October, 2003, found 23 (26.5%) Asian businesses, 36 (41%) Latino, and 28 (32.5%) categorized as other (i.e.,

Greek, African American, Caucasian) totaling 87 businesses. Thirteen of the Asian-owned businesses are owned by immigrants from Vietnam along a five or six block length of Main Street that has become something of a little Saigon, with a touch of Asian cosmopolitanism thrown in. Nine of these are owned by ethnic Vietnamese, two by ethnic Chinese – and two would not respond to student interviewers. None of these businesses existed before 1993.

The enterprises include one grocery (Chinese owner); one Vietnamese/Chinese restaurant (Vietnamese owner); one nail salon (Vietnamese owner); one Chinese restaurant (Chinese owner); one Laundromat (Vietnamese owner). Six others are a variety of food stores. An earlier interview study conducted by community development students collected six from among these businesses. Not all live in the community; most complained of poor business in the last few months (Spring 2003). Most indicate the complaints of retailers in poor neighborhoods: dirty streets, perceived dangers that deter outsiders from coming to eat or shop.

There are thirteen more Asian and Vietnamese-owned business locations outside of this striking single strip, including those on a large shopping street (Park Avenue) that is a border of the neighborhood; they do not create the same kind of internal community presence as those along Main Street.

The Vietnamese (and other Asians) in Worcester hold college degrees at about the same rate as other local residents, according to the Census, but are considerably less likely to hold high school degrees. They are, compared to relevant groups, highly entrepreneurial. Ten percent of Vietnamese employed persons are self-employed in the city and the Main South census tract (7312.02) where they are concentrated; this

compares to a 2.5% self-employment rate for Puerto Rican-Americans citywide, and 2% in Main South.⁸

The Vietnamese in Worcester are a smaller group than the Cambodians in Lowell, and their appearance in the city is more recent. Perhaps this accounts for their political and civic invisibility.

There is a Southeast Asian Outreach Center along Main Street at the heart of the neighborhood. It is housed in a structure shared with the main South Community Development Corporation. The Outreach Center's services include referrals, education and job training, social and cultural support. According to the staff, the center services as many as fifteen drop-in clients per day. Two people maintain the Center; it was founded in June of 2002. This minimal staff is overloaded by the multitudes of clientele and the services requested. The Outreach Center relies heavily on the network of other social organizations that provide more specialized service. In October 2003, the staff told student interviewers that Vietnamese value Massachusetts for the level of social benefits offered, mainly healthcare and childcare⁹. The Outreach Center staff also noted that Worcester is popular because the cost of housing is considered reasonable compared to surrounding areas.

The Center staff reported that a Southeast Asian Coalition is working on an education initiative with Southeast Asians and Latinos to strengthen attendance, parental support, and productivity for students. Neither the Center staff, nor knowledgeable observers with whom we consulted are aware of any other conscious political coalition

⁸ Author's calculations from Sample File 4, 2000 Census, Table PCT 87.

⁹ As of late Spring 2004, medical care and other means-tested benefits for legal immigrants are in jeopardy in the state legislature.

efforts that attempt common cause with local Latinos. Vietnamese merchants we interviewed affirm the lack of coalition activity.

The picture that emerges of Main South's (and Worcester's) Vietnamese and Southeast Asian immigrants is that of a relatively insular, hard-working and entrepreneurial population, whose civic presence is but a fraction of its commercial visibility.

Problems, Issues, Theories

Is there a pattern here, not unknown nor unsung elsewhere? From Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, to the LA riots, the appearance of Asian middle-man minority entrepreneurs in poor neighborhoods is a familiar pattern. Edna Bonacich (1973) in particular has conceptualized the general phenomenon.

On the one hand a minority ethnic group may be part of an immigrant cohort that is absent the technical skills to fit easily to the mainstream economy. The Southeast Asian Outreach Center staff told our group that the high incidence of factory jobs and the work of installing hardwood floors and tile among their co-ethnics were feasible and commonplace for Vietnamese and Southeast Asians due to their "low level of education and skill".

Language barriers may deter easy transfer of existing cultural skills to middle and upper income employment. It is also true that poor neighborhoods offer lower rents and the reluctance of majority status groups to compete in certain retail niches reduces competition. Blocked opportunity for middle income jobs, ambition to become part of an owning class, and a de facto vacuum of competition from mainstream groups produces an opening for the immigrant entrepreneur.

As employers such middle man ethnic business owners can often exploit the weakness of their co-ethnics – they hire cheap but obtain loyalty merely because they offer employment. Retail businesses offer the additional opportunity of self-exploitation – the restaurants surveyed are family owned and by observation appear to use family labor in long hours. In addition they offer co-ethnics specialty goods they cannot obtain at local supermarkets or franchise restaurants. To the low income locals they offer cheap food and the particularly American chance to eat another group’s street food.

Worcester’s Vietnamese do not however share the exact circumstances of the Koreans of Spike Lee’s fiction or of Los Angeles: their median incomes are below those of local African Americans (although they are higher than local Latinos). Asian poverty rates in Worcester (27%) are comparable to African Americans (25%) but less than Latinos (37%).

The New York and LA stories of Korean business owners in Black communities has had an ominous dimension, as has Asian contractor, Latino worker relations in the apparel industry (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000). No such tension is obvious in Worcester’s Main South between the largest ethnic minority in the community – Hispanics of Puerto Rican and Central American background and the new Asian entrepreneurs. Perhaps that is because there are also a substantial number of small retail establishments owned by and catering to Spanish speakers – Bodegas, a hair salon, etc. Though the rate of self-employment is lower, the presence of a vibrant Latino commercial sector is inviting to Spanish speakers. They are not, as Bedford-Stuyvesant’s Blacks were in Lee’s movie, excluded from the commercial sector.

The tensions and scapegoating that the “middle-man minority” thesis predicts are poorly echoed in the data or the relations of Worcester and Main South. Further, Bonacich’s emphasis on the “middle-man” entrepreneur as a “sojourner” – someone with a subjective intention to return to the home country – fares poorly in the comparison between Puerto Rican and Vietnamese rates of self-employment.

Alternatively Aldrich and Waldinger suggest that immigrant entrepreneurs identify market conditions that favor products that are oriented to their coethnics, which natives may *also* enjoy (1990). “The initial market for immigrant entrepreneurs typically arises within the immigrant community itself. The immigrant community has a special set of needs and preferences that are served, and sometimes can only be served, by those who share those needs and know them intimately, namely, the members of the immigrant community itself (Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward 1990: 21).”

We may adapt this argument and extend it. Consider the relative likelihood of survival of a Latino restaurant and an “Asian” one, i.e., Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese. One cannot argue that Americans simply prefer Asian: the popularity of Mexican restaurants and dishes suffices as evidence. On the other hand, notoriously, Asian restaurants (and indeed, those in Main South) give very high value for money: they are inexpensive or they are moderately priced at higher levels of service. This is where the exploitation of both co-ethnicity and family members is relevant. By holding labor costs down, such establishments reach out to a broader public; the Latino establishments, though inexpensive, are ... cheap. They use less labor, or provide a less service-oriented atmosphere. Why? Puerto Ricans and their Central American co-linguists, at the less than high school educational level, probably have broader employment opportunities than

Vietnamese. Twenty-nine percent of Worcester's Puerto Rican households were "linguistically isolated" in 2000, i.e., according to the Census, "all members 14 years old and over have at least some difficulty with English." Thirty percent of all Hispanic households also were so isolated. By comparison fifty-six percent of Vietnamese households had this linguistic barrier to the mainstream employment market.¹⁰ The implication is that the pool of both family and other labor that is constrained by language, i.e., labor that is cheaper, is relatively larger among the Vietnamese speakers than among the Spanish speakers.

This explanation is somewhat different than niche theory, although it joins it at some points. Lee finds that the field an immigrant pursues is also influenced by an evolutionary chain of immigrant retail niche domination (1999). "As immigrant entrepreneurs gather experience and capital, they move up the retail chain and penetrate more capital-intensive industries, thereby leaving room for newer immigrants to occupy the abandoned niches (Lee 1999: 1414)." The more recently immigrated, the more likely they are to occupy labor intensive industries, like take out food stores and groceries (Lee 1999). This is in line with our observation that Asian business owners in Main South, relative newcomers to the area, occupy such industries.

Aldrich and Waldinger have a similar theory that the exodus of Italian and Jewish petty merchants from labor intensive industries has left vacancies that Korean, Chinese and Arab entrepreneurs are able to fill. These new business owners are then left with a completely non-ethnic clientele (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). Their theory of occupational succession says that immigrants cannot convince their children, who have

¹⁰ Author's calculations from Census Sample File Four, Table PCT 42.

watched their parents (and probably worked for them), to go into the family business because it is too labor intensive, therefore leaving a vacancy for new immigrants (1990).¹¹

By contrast, Bonacich says that new immigrant entrepreneurs naturally seek out businesses that are easily liquidated, using the Jewish money lending niche as an example (1973). Korean sweatshops that require only sewing machines are another example. The restaurants and groceries of Main South do not so easily fit this model.

The desertion of inner city neighborhoods by large retailers may also enable ethnic entrepreneurs. High crime rates (and/or the perception of such) and other challenges to doing business in largely minority areas leave neighborhoods with low income populations who can't access necessities locally and often are without adequate transportation. The apparent undesirability of the neighborhood and its population reduce rents and keep out competing businesses. Ethnic entrepreneurs capitalize on this opportunity. Black and Hispanic communities are particularly important to ethnic entrepreneurs, who have set up shop in neighborhoods with high concentrations of minority populations. Middle man minorities thrive in black ghettos underserved by retail chains (Waldinger, McEvoy, and Aldrich 1990). Lee finds that recent immigrant insecurities about interacting with a more affluent clientele also play into their decision to situate in low income, minority neighborhoods (1999).

She quotes a Korean restaurant owner in West Harlem:

Here they don't have many car, so easier, cheaper rent.
When you go to White location... rent is already cost \$20,000

¹¹ Lee writes that her theory differs from Waldinger's in that she is referring to specific movement through niches, whereas Waldinger writes about movement through the retail industry all together (1403).

[per month], you know, and they don't have any room for us. But Black people area, other people hesitate to come because they worry about crime and something like that, so they got a lot of room for Koreans (Lee 1999: 1402).

In low income neighborhoods underserved by retail chains, ethnic entrepreneurs find a captive audience (Lee 1999).

In keeping with these theories of ethnic entrepreneurs as middle men serving an impoverished community lacking transportation and purchasing power to attract retail chains, Main South is much poorer than the rest of Worcester, and has double the African American residents.

In outlining the body of research examining the reason why immigrants go into business, how they chose what business to go into and where they chose to situate themselves, we've already touched on a number of things that make ethnic entrepreneurs competitive with natives. Strong coethnic networks likely heavily influence, if not decide, what businesses immigrants will pursue. Availability of coethnic and family labor naturally propel immigrants into businesses that can capitalize on those resources.

Researchers have identified three potential advantages ethnic entrepreneurs have over their native counterparts: a corner on the market of coethnic tastes, exclusive coethnic networks, and the ability to exploit coethnic labor and a willingness to exploit themselves.

Expanding on Light's (1972) "protected market hypothesis," Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward find that "ethnic consumer tastes provide a protected market position" for ethnic entrepreneurs (1990: 27). Not only do the wholesalers of ethnic goods have a preference for doing business with coethnics, but consumers have a preference for

patronizing coethnics. Others can't break into the market because they don't have the knowledge or the connections to sell or produce the goods in demand (1990). Ethnic stores thrive, among other reasons, because they can cater to the distinct tastes of their coethnics (Lee 1990). Aldrich and Waldinger's findings that ethnic concentrations are particularly loyal to coethnic entrepreneurs in early years of migration is especially applicable to the relatively recently arrived Vietnamese on Main Street (1990). Bonacich also identifies ethnic solidarity as a reason for ethnic entrepreneurial success, despite what she sees as inherent disadvantages for immigrants (1973).

A number of sociologists have observed dense networks of coethnics supplying wholesale goods to their retail counterparts and have theorized that this impenetrable network provides the ethnic entrepreneur with a significant advantage over his native counter part. "Family, regional, dialect sect, and ultimately ethnic ties are used for preferential economic treatment (Bonacich 1973: 586)." Such vertical distribution networks provide information and employment for newcomers, as well as provide loyal employees for ethnic entrepreneurs (Waldinger 1994, Bonacich 1973). The Vietnamese wholesale grocery store in the neighborhood suggests there is an element of vertical distribution in Main South, with Vietnamese wholesalers selling to Vietnamese restaurants and groceries who then sell exotic goods to their loyal coethnic consumers, still new comers to Worcester.

A third common explanation for the success of ethnic entrepreneurs is their advantage over native businesses owners in cutting labor costs, both by their willingness to exploit themselves, and their ability to exploit their families and their coethnics. Bonacich finds that because ethnic entrepreneurs are sojourners, in the host country only

to earn as much money as possible, they are willing to work longer hours than their permanent counterparts seeking more normal lives (1973). Waldinger also finds that solid information networks increase ethnic entrepreneur's access to a labor forces, and decreases the costs and risks associated with hiring and training (1994). These networks also provide access to coethnics with a strong sense of loyalty and ethnic solidarity, which serves to decrease union activity, and enable coethnic employers to maintain sweatshop conditions and impose low wages (Sanders and Nee 1987).

Bonacich writes that coethnics work excessively long hours in return for training that enables them to open their own businesses in the future (1973). Portes and Jensen claim that the immigrant working for the coethnic gains invaluable insight into starting their own business (1989). However, Sanders and Nee find no clear evidence that an immigrant previously employed in an immigrant enclave for a coethnic fares any better upon moving into self-employment than their counterpart that did not work in an enclave for a coethnic (1989). At issue is the benefit to future cohorts of immigrants of the energy and initiative of the current cohort of Vietnamese and Asian business owners.

Up to now, the appearance of Asian migrants to Worcester, in its poorest neighborhoods and its commercial sector is part of a larger unfolding story of increasing diversity, globalization and maybe, if we are lucky, a happy immigration saga. Looming ahead is also the darker possibility: recession; loss of working class purchasing power; increasing crime, business failure, immigrant privation; tension among competing groups.

The softening of the Massachusetts and Worcester labor market in the 2001-2003 period has not had a large impact on daily life in Main South – yet.¹² Anecdotes of increased crime cannot yet be confirmed as a trend. There are no prominent business failures along Main Street; citywide unemployment is up, but there is no obvious tension between Latinos and Asians. Impressionistically, this author’s “hooker quotient” is modestly rising.¹³

The impact of the type of growth experienced in Worcester and in the Commonwealth in the last 15 years or so has been mixed: low unemployment rates have relieved the intense suffering of desperate poverty (those existing at less than 50% of the official poverty income), but the globalization of manufacturing has produced higher rates of inequality. Officially measured poverty has increased slightly. If these trends are extrapolated into the future, with no public policy intervention or civil society innovation (e.g., a rise in union density or in social sector housing provision), the neighborhood and its Asian and Latino migrants will share the fate of the nation’s working poor. Some find middle income status and leave the neighborhood; most others will not and will live lives at the margins of poverty and deprivation, hoping for their children – who will likewise experience diverse futures.

One factor weighing in favor of reduced friction and somewhat more amenity for Main South’s migrants is the collaboration between the Main South Community Development Corporation and Clark University – the University Park Partnership. (Main

¹² A well-known local activist, Lynne Simonds, claims homelessness is growing in and around the neighborhood and she launched an (unsuccessful) write-in campaign for City Council to put her agenda forward.

¹³ The hooker quotient is the number of street prostitutes per block observed along Main Street proximate to the author’s Clark University commute in and out of the neighborhood. It seemed to peak in the late 1980s at about 0.5; it is now below 0.2. During the full employment period of the late 1990s it seemed to fall to negligible.

South CDC 2004; Clark University 2004) Without the wealth of many private universities¹⁴ that found themselves in poor neighborhoods, Clark University has endeavored to leverage its expertise and values on behalf of the neighborhood – and its own interest in a sustainable environment. The university encourages middle income and aspiring immigrant families to stay in the neighborhood by guaranteeing Clark admission and needs based financial aid to students who live in the neighborhood and achieve good high school records. This amounts to several hundred thousand dollars a year in subsidy. Its modestly subsidizes faculty and staff who buy houses in the neighborhood. The University has acted as loan guarantor for the CDC in its housing rehabilitation activity and over 200 units of affordable housing have been rehabbed or created by it. Reversing the stand-offish town/gown record (and local antagonisms) of prior decades, the University has opened its recreational facilities to local youngsters and runs free summer activities for them.

Clark has tried to turn its neighborhood from a recruitment liability to an asset: proclaiming its commitment to both good works and urban research. PhD, MA and undergraduate research students do benchmark research on business, housing and social conditions in the community.

This activity and the local presence of an educational and research institution cannot make good the losses of globalization or the tides of immigration that wars at the periphery of the empire may bring to the community. But it does offer a margin of resources to help buffer the blows, compensate for injuries and invent solutions.

¹⁴ Clark has lowest endowment per student of the research universities to which it compares itself.

Entering the middle years of the first decade of the 21st century one fears not so much the racial tension of Bedford Stuyvesant or LA's South Central; rather it is the grinding anxiety of not enough; the anxiety of the next job or whether one's child will come home safe. It is not race riot that haunts Main South: it is instead life at the margins of the Big Feast.

Map One: Main South



**Table One
WORCESTER ANCESTRY:
2000 Census
(single or multiple)**

Total population	172,648	100
Total ancestries reported	188,978	109.5
Irish	32,784	19
Italian	19,950	11.6
French (except Basque)¹	17,719	10.3
English	10,633	6.2
Polish	10,482	6.1
French Canadian	7,394	4.3
United States or American	6,054	3.5
German	5,894	3.4
Swedish	5,535	3.2
Lithuanian	3,812	2.2
Subsaharan African	3,878	2.2
Greek	2,431	1.4
Arab	2,292	1.3
Russian	2,174	1.3
Scottish	2,156	1.2
All others below 1%		

1: It is likely that most "French" are "French Canadian"

Source: Extracted from American Factfinder:

http://factfinder.census.gov/bf/?lang=en_vt_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_DP2_geo_id=16000US2582000.html

**Table 2. Percent Asian and Pacific Islander: U.S., Northeast and Massachusetts.
1970-2000**

Region	1970	MA:US	1980	MA:US	1990	MA:US	2000	MA:US
United States	0.7		1.5		2.9		3.6	
Northeast	0.4		1.1		2.6		4	
Massachusetts	0.4	.57	0.9	.6	2.4	.92	3.8	1.05

Source: Hobbs, Frank and Nicole Stoops,
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special
Reports, Series CENSR-4,
Demographic Trends in the 20th Century,
U.S. Government Printing Office,
Washington, DC, 2002. Table 8.

2000: 2001 Statistical Abstract of the United States, Tables 24 and 22.

Table Three
Worcester, MA-CT PMSA
Asian Population Data for the Central City Area

Race & Ethnicity	Population Distribution			
	1990		2000	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total	169,738	100	172,648	100
Non-Hispanic White	141,395	83.3	122,211	70.8
Non-Hispanic Black	6,746	4	12,132	7
Hispanic	16,258	9.6	26,155	15.1
Asian	4,770	2.8	9,377	5.4
Asian Indian	557	0.3	1,153	0.7
Chinese	694	0.4	1,347	0.8
Filipino	122	0.1	221	0.1
Japanese	178	0.1	259	0.2
Korean	231	0.1	265	0.2
Vietnamese	2,391	1.4	5,061	2.9
Other Asian	187	0.1	144	0.1

Source: Extracted from the Lewis Mumford Center Census analysis database. Available online at: <http://mumford1.dyndns.org/cen2000/AsianPop/AsianPopData.htm> .

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