

Talking Points for EC 137 Discussion on Immigration and Work, 3/21/06

- Huge recent immigration flows into US (since 1965 liberalization)
- Current flows from Latin America and Asia, not Europe. Racial implications?
- Contemporary debates over immigration reform, amnesty, securing borders
- This a global phenomenon – witness Europe. Reasons political and economic
- The “immigrant” is also an “other” subject to stereotyping and stigmatization.
- Language conflicts (English as official language); denials of social services; resentment of remittances (proposed to be taxed in one jurisdiction)
- Large numbers of low-skilled newcomers, particularly from Mexico. How, ask Lichter and Waldinger, can this be if there’s already a shortage of low-skilled jobs? Their answer: there are plenty of low-skilled jobs. Employers want mainly “soft” not “hard” skills, and immigrants have these. Besides, most skills are learned on the job, from other workers...
- (p. 10) “Work is fundamentally a social phenomenon; one both acquires the necessary skills and gets things done by working successfully with others.” This means that the social organization of the workplace partly determines an individual worker’s value to an employer. So, immigrant niches matter.
- Networks and migration. Social capital. Opportunity hoarding (Tilly.) Migration facilitated over time by linkages between home and migrant populations. Employers directly and indirectly rely on such linkages.
- Networks generate information, elaborate codes of conduct, and contain resources needed to sanction deviants and thus to enforce behavioral norms within network.
- (p. 20) “Given the exclusionary effects of immigrant networks, the general preference among employers for immigrant workers, and the long-standing aversion of white managers toward African Americans, the latter appear to face some formidable barriers to employment.” [Question: If so, then why are African American political leaders so relatively silent in the immigration debate? Could it be same reason Asian Americans are so relatively silent re. affirmative action?]
- “Ethno-methodological competence is required for any job.” What’s that mean? “The interactive service worker needs to alter his or her behavior in just the way that will lead the customer to respond as desired... The word *service* after all implies a *servant*, and there is no servant without a master who needs to be pleased.... Consequently one’s suitability (or willingness) to comply with the customary demands for subordination rank high among the qualifications that employers want. Skills, whether hard or soft, matter a good deal less... The messy hotel room, for example, would surely be more of an embarrassment were it cleaned by someone with a claim to equality... The dual frame of reference makes it easier for immigrants to produce the appropriate performance in workplaces where displays of subordination are *de rigueur*.” (pp. 39-41)
- Perhaps, then, “outsider-ness” is a main qualification for some low-end jobs??