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UNDERCLASS AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN AS ECONOMIC ACTORS: RETHINKING CITIZENSHIP IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ECONOMY

M. Patricia Fernández Kelly*

INTRODUCTION

In an age when millions of working people throughout the developing world are hired by transnational corporations, others migrate to distant places in search of work, and still others languish without employment in advanced industrial countries, where does the locus of civic rights and obligations reside? How are the dramatic political and economic changes occurring around the world altering our concept of citizenship?

The answer to these questions begins with the essential point that reconfigured borders and changing economic conditions affect various groups in disparate ways. For professionals and those linked to the most advanced sectors of the economy, the global village is laden with opportunity. For others — impoverished racial minorities, unskilled workers, especially women, and some immigrants — the prospects are not as favorable. The former group faces an expanded definition of citizenship made possible by plentiful earnings, access to specialized information, and rapid transportation; the latter group confronts stagnant wages, dismantled or weakened welfare programs, and growing exclusion from civic participation. Yet, even within the group for whom the future seems bleak, there are critical differences that require exploration.

A central premise of this Essay concerns our concept of citizenship.¹

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¹ Black's Law Dictionary defines citizenship as “[t]he status of being citizens,” and citizens as “members of a political community who, in their associated capacity, have established or submitted themselves to the dominion of a government for the promotion of their general welfare and the protection of their individual as well as collective rights.” BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY 222 (5th ed. 1979).
This Essay highlights the significance of economic factors in defining citizenship, and their importance to the implementation of individual rights. Citizenship is best understood as a potentiality emanating from grounded economic and political realities, and not as a disembodied expectation equally accessible to all those who share a national territory. By way of illustration, this Essay focuses on two populations that are affected very differently by the processes of economic internationalization and industrial restructuring. Taken together, however, the populations show that gender, ethnicity, and migratory background are common factors that constrain the realization of citizenship, and its attendant rights and responsibilities.

Part II of this Essay derives from recent ethnographic research I conducted in West Baltimore, an area typical of major cities in the United States that are plagued by the persistent poverty and welfare dependence of an urban underclass. In recent years, the debate, particularly regarding adolescent mothers who are welfare dependent, has reached new levels of intensity. The purpose of this section is to enhance an understanding of a stigmatized group by forcing us to examine the meaning of citizenship from its vantage point, one characterized by high levels of unemployment, inherited dependence on public assistance, and imperviousness to the advantages of economic internationalization.

Nominally impoverished African-American adolescents are citizens of one of the wealthiest and most civic-minded societies in the world. Yet, for the majority of them, the means to enact citizenship and to fulfill the promise of membership in a wealthy society are only becoming dimmer. This realization is particularly true for a large number of girls and young women for whom motherhood represents both a psychological substitute for, and a deterrent from, participation in the larger econo-

2. See generally Ken Auletta, The Underclass (1983) (discussing and contributing to the meaning of the term “the underclass,” which has been in use for some time).

3. See Michael B. Katz, The Undeserving Poor 157-65 (discussing Lawrence Mead’s opinion that the lack of child care should not excuse one from the requirement to work). The author notes that Mead’s idea became the center of the arguments for welfare reform. Id. at 225. See generally Constance A. Nathanson, Dangerous Passage: The Social Control of Sexuality in Women’s Adulthood (1991) (discussing the public debate over how to resolve the problem of teen pregnancies); The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, The Ghetto Underclass: Social Science Perspectives (William Julius Wilson ed., 1989) (discussing the various problems of the urban underclass, and possible solutions).
my and society.

Part III discusses the economic reasons and the significance behind the sizable employment of Hispanic women in the electronics industry, particularly in southern California. While impoverished African-Americans face formidable obstacles in the United States labor market, immigrants are increasingly concentrated in its most vibrant sectors. This section explores one reason why immigrants are so attractive to employers: many of them are not citizens. Accordingly, immigrants assess working conditions, wage levels, and quality of life by comparison to their point of origin, not to their point of destination. As a result, immigrants tend to be less demanding and more compliant than native United States citizens.

The undocumented, or insufficiently documented, status of many immigrants further contributes to their vulnerability and, thus, to their appeal. Nonetheless, although there is greater demand for their labor than for that of urban adolescent African-Americans, immigrants face harsh working conditions in most sectors of the United States economy. By examining the disparate economic conditions experienced by immigrants and impoverished African-Americans, this Essay provides a glimpse into our economic future, and shows it to be more complex than that anticipated by the prophets of post-industrialism.

Part IV summarizes the analysis and considers implications for a reconceptualization of citizenship that will reflect the broader realities of economically excluded and under-included populations.

I. OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN: GENDER, POVERTY, AND RACE IN THE AMERICAN GHETTO

As noted, this section is based on research I conducted between 1988 and 1992 in the West Baltimore neighborhoods of Upton and Lower Park Heights. I began this project in an attempt to understand the effects of industrial restructuring on the urban poor, most of whom are African-American. My interest was fueled by the new literature spear-

4. See generally DANIEL BELL, THE COMING OF POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY 125 (1976) (forecasting that industrial workers in the post-industrial era, like farmers in the industrial era, will become a relatively insignificant portion of the labor force).

5. My research consisted of a series of in-depth interviews with the members of fifty families living in the two neighborhoods, a total of nearly 250 individuals. Questions centered on household composition, income-generating strategies — including involvement in the informal economy — gender roles, and other related issues. This Article focuses on a small sub-sample of adolescent mothers.

6. To some extent, this Essay is the cumulative product of successive studies.
headed by William Julius Wilson suggesting that industrial restructuring, while it has revitalized the demand for immigrant workers, also has compressed opportunities for blue-collar employment among African-Americans.\footnote{William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged (1987). There is debate concerning the question of whether immigrants displace African-Americans and other native-born workers. Conditions vary by geographical area. In many cases, immigrants are not concentrated in residential areas or labor markets where they compete directly against working-class African-Americans. There are notable exceptions in cities like Los Angeles, Miami, and New York. See George Borjas, The Impact of Immigrants on the U.S. Economy (1990) (noting the influence of immigrants on U.S. urban centers).}

In West Baltimore, where I conducted my research, poverty is more than material deprivation. For several generations, racial segregation and the paucity of productive investment also have shaped the area’s collective life and attitudes. Ninety-eight percent of residents are of African descent.\footnote{Abandonment and arson are commonplace, as evidenced by}

Earlier, my interest in comparative international development had led me to the United States-Mexican border where, since 1968, a successful maquiladora program had grown under the auspices of the Mexican Government. I followed that project with a study of Hispanic women in the garment and electronics industries in southern California and New York. Conducted between 1985 and 1989, this study was a collaborative effort with Professor Saskia Sassen of Columbia University’s Department of Architecture and Urban Planning.

Our research focused on industrial employment in New York and southern California, the two locations with the fastest growing Hispanic populations. We hypothesized that the incorporation of immigrant and ethnic women into manufacturing activities in these locations was symptomatic of a broader process of industrial reorganization. More specifically, we conjectured that the incorporation of Hispanic women, many of whom are foreign-born, into labor-intensive operations in the United States was a part of the same process that had led to the relocation of similar operations to locales such as Asia and the United States-Mexican border.

Our study combined survey and ethnographic research. We took a comparative approach to understanding the relationship between industrial adjustment, immigration, and Hispanic women’s employment in the electronics industry. We collected information on a random sample of 200 electronics firms in New York and southern California, including extensive interviews with firm owners and managers, and in-depth case studies of a smaller number of companies. Our goal was to identify the junctures at which hiring patterns along the lines of gender, ethnicity, and migratory background, converged with the reorganization of production. The study underscored the relationship between industrial restructuring and the renewed demand for immigrant labor, even in sectors previously dominated by native United States citizens. Finally, the study raised questions about the different degrees of success that immigrants and working-class African-Americans enjoy in the labor market.


8. The majority of the residents in my sample are renters, not property owners.
the many charred, boarded-up buildings which have become havens for drug dealers. With the exception of grocery stores and liquor shops inherited by Korean entrepreneurs from an earlier cohort of Jewish merchants, business activity is limited.

The West Baltimore neighborhood attracts attention for another reason: the incidence of adolescent pregnancies in the neighborhood surpasses even that of Baltimore, a city whose rate of adolescent pregnancies triples the national average and is among the highest in the nation. Many of the girls who become mothers at an early age have grown up in female-headed households receiving government aid. In West Baltimore, as in the nation at large, those girls are likely to have been born to women who became mothers themselves in adolescence, for whom public assistance is a permanent source of livelihood. Whether, and to what extent, taxpayers should bear the burden of supporting the children of unmarried, impoverished adolescents, has long been a matter of controversy in the public mind. Increasingly, however, a part of the discourse on welfare and teen pregnancy has turned toward balancing the right to bear children with the obligation to support them.

The stigma that haunts recipients of welfare may derive largely from conflicting sentiments regarding the grudging concession of parenting rights to those believed not to have earned them through successful

Mortgages and other types of loans are virtually unavailable to them. In 1990, the average price of a house in the neighborhood was $7,442 — a bad investment by any measure. In 1990, not a single youngster graduated from high school in some census tracks in Upton. Several were killed or wounded, some the victims of stray bullets. Owners find it more profitable to bum down their properties than to repair them. Partly due to the instances of arson, vacancy rates are high, as is the level of unemployment and under-employment. More than thirty percent of men between fifteen and twenty-five years of age have no formal work.

At the opposite extreme in Baltimore, less than fifteen minutes away from Upton, are the neighborhoods of Homeland and Roland Park. The average price of a house in this area approximates $300,000; vacant houses are non-existent; and seventy-five percent of high school students attend private institutions. Almost everyone in these neighborhoods is white.

9. See Molly Rath, Maryland Expanding Use of Norplant for Poor Women, REUTERS LTD., Apr. 10, 1993. In 1990, nearly a quarter of Baltimore’s 13,000 births were to teenagers. The same year, almost one-third of girls between the ages of fourteen and nineteen living in West Baltimore already had at least one child.

participation in the labor market. That indictment implicitly assumes that all citizens share equivalent conditions and prerogatives of citizenship, and therefore should be measured by the same standards of responsibility. The seemingly equitable treatment of citizenship, however, challenges historical inequalities and differentials of power stemming from class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Speculating about the rights and obligations of citizens without considering those critical vectors does violence to the very meaning of civic action, for nothing is more unequal than the application of equal measures, like those defining citizenship, upon populations who historically and circumstantially have been treated unequally. Individuals cannot effectuate rights and obligations independently of the groups to which they belong. For impoverished adolescent mothers, the critical issue is not the abstract one of responsibility toward the taxpayer. Rather, for them, the critical issue is their exclusion from opportunity and their lack of access to resources that make the notion of citizenship meaningful.

Will the recent and dramatic changes in the United States economy create opportunities for impoverished, adolescent women like those that their affluent counterparts enjoy? The early signs are not encouraging. While economic restructuring has led to the proliferation of lucrative positions for some, the majority of newly created jobs offer only modest wages. Furthermore, increasing gaps in income distribution and educational qualifications suggest that it might be more difficult than ever for the labor market to incorporate groups currently excluded from the labor market.

If the gap in income distribution increases, so too will the likelihood that a larger number of impoverished adolescents will become mothers. This might increase pressures on impoverished groups to relinquish the right to bear children. Thus, not only do the recent economic transformations continue systemic exclusion of impoverished adolescent mothers, but more than ever, this exclusion threatens to result in the diminution of the traditional rights of citizenship.

11. KATZ, supra note 3, at 157-65.
12. KATZ, supra note 3, at 158, 163-65.
13. See KATZ, supra note 3, at 161 (arguing that Mead ignores historical differences between blacks and whites). Katz also notes that many resources that should be available to all citizens, like health care and education, are not available to the poor. Id. at 164-65.
II. RECASTING WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY: INTERNATIONALIZATION AND CHANGING DEFINITIONS OF GENDER ROLES

The discussion above suggests the importance of gender as a main factor in the allocation of power and resources. This section expands upon that notion by focusing on immigrant women who have become the preferred bearers of labor for certain kinds of manufacturing in the changing United States economy. Their experience is markedly different from that of impoverished African-American women.

Since the 1960s, there has been a substantial link between the internationalization of investments and the growing incorporation of women into the labor force. In the United States, and in other advanced countries, internationalization has led to industrial restructuring. While this restructuring has resulted in the expansion of some technical and professional job opportunities, it has yielded in an even larger growth in jobs generally associated with women — jobs that provide only part-time employment, comparatively low wages, and reduced union member-

15. See generally Cynthia Enloe, BANANAS, BEACHES, AND BASES: MAKING FEMINIST SENSE OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS (1990) (discussing the many ways in which women have influenced international economics); WOMEN, MEN, AND THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOR (June Nash et al. eds., 1983) (discussing growing inequalities between men and women in the labor force as a result of economic globalization); FOLKER FROBEL ET AL., THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR (Pete Burgess trans., 1981) (discussing the reorganization of industrial production as a result of economic globalization).


17. See Kuhn & Bluestone, supra note 14, at 3 (noting that while many new jobs are being created and are being filled by women, they are poor substitutes for the ones lost, primarily because of low wages); 1987 Yearbook of Labour Statistics (International Labour Organisation ed., 1987) (stating that women's share of the workforce in the United States rose from 43.5% in 1982 to 44.1% in 1985, and that, by 1990, 47% of employable women in the United States were working outside the home, up from 29% in 1960).

Internationalization of investments also has altered development strategies in less developed countries, particularly those of Asia and Latin America, which in turn have caused significant adjustments in their respective labor markets. Responding to the changing global market, and to the expansion of export-processing zones, these less developed countries have abandoned the import-substitution industrialization policies of the 1960s and 1970s in favor of national economic liberalization. As in the United States, this transformation has paralleled an unprecedented feminization of the labor force. Why are women playing such a conspicuous role in the reconfiguration of the world economy? How does the feminization of the labor force change the definition of rights and responsibilities upon which citizenship is based? To answer these questions, I explore two converging processes that are reshaping the way that women participate in the labor market.

A. FEMALE AND IMMIGRANT LABOR AS AN EMERGING ECONOMIC ASSET

The first process is the transformation in the systems of production of advanced countries and, consequently, in the reorganization of industrial

increase in part-time employment of women, and the association of part-time employment with "women's work").

19. See Kuhn & Bluestone, supra note 14, at 12-21 (discussing the evidence of increasing inequality in wages along gender lines).

20. See Milkman, supra note 18, at 122-26 (discussing how union membership decreased as the number of women in the workforce increased).

21. June Nash, Introduction, in WOMEN, MEN AND THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOR vii, viii (June Nash & Maria Patricia Fernández Kelly eds., 1983); FROBEL, supra note 15, at 295-402 (discussing characteristics of free production zones, the purpose of which is to promote exporting and world market factories).


23. Id. at 368.

24. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS IN LATIN AMERICA (Inter American Development Bank ed., 1990). The Latin American labor force will double — from 97 million to 195 million — between 1975 and the year 2000. Id. A major factor is increased participation by women, who now represent almost 30% of those working in the formal sector — up from 18% in 1950. Id. The female work force of 40 million is expected to reach 53 million by the year 2000. Id. Moreover, these figures may underestimate the reality because up to 50% of those working in the informal economy are likely to be women. Id. The prevalence of female labor is even more striking in export-oriented industries, where up to 75% of employees are women. Id.
activity and the recomposition of the labor force. During the 1970s, the rapid loss of manufacturing jobs raised concerns about the future viability of industry in the United States. Some analysts described an emerging international division of labor. According to this view, direct production would drastically diminish in advanced countries, while export-oriented industrialization would expand in developing countries. Others foresaw the coming of a post-industrial society reliant upon computer technology, the proliferation of well-paying professional jobs, and the disappearance of class conflict.

Neither of these visions has fully materialized. While the number of "high-tech" jobs requiring symbolic skills indeed did grow over the last twenty years, there was an even larger increase in menial, low-skilled occupations. There was a movement of jobs to overseas locations that offered cheap labor, which slowed industrial growth in the United States. The exodus did not, however, lead to the disappearance of domestic manufacturing. On the contrary, while overseas investment has increased, so too has domestic manufacturing.

Developments in the electronics industry illustrate this phenomenon. Despite major losses in actual and potential employment, electronics is still the fourth largest industry in the United States, and one of its fastest growing sectors. In no small measure, the emerging role of Hispanic women in electronics industries in New York and southern California. The study's findings are presented here as a means to understand larger forces propelling industrial activity in the United States, as well as the reasons why women have so rapidly enlarged the workforce.

25. By way of illustration, this Essay summarizes the main findings of a study of Hispanic women in electronics industries in New York and southern California. The study's findings are presented here as a means to understand larger forces propelling industrial activity in the United States, as well as the reasons why women have so rapidly enlarged the workforce.

27. BELL, supra note 4, at 27-33.
28. BELL, supra note 4, at 17-18, 129-42.
29. BELL, supra note 4, at 36-37.
32. See Fernández Kelly, International Development, supra note 16, at 152 (noting the loss of millions of manufacturing jobs in the United States as a result of their "migration" to overseas locations).
34. Fernández Kelly, International Development, supra note 16, at 152-53 (noting that the trend is not so much "a definitive transfer" of manufacturing from developed to less developed countries, as it is one toward "parallel operations" that include industrial sites both in advanced countries and in developing countries).
35. By May 1992, there were 2.35 million people formally employed in electronics production in the United States. Formal employment in that sector reached 2.5 million in 1984 and peaked at 2.6 million in 1989.
panics, and particularly Hispanic women, helps to explain this resilience, and also why electronics companies have continued production in the United States despite unfavorable international wage differentials.

Ethnographic data demonstrates the conspicuous presence of women, minorities, and immigrants in the lower echelons of electronics production. In southern California, one of the leading industrial centers in the world, fully sixty-six percent of the workforce in the large occupational category of operators, fabricators, and laborers, are ethnic minorities, of whom fifty-one percent are Hispanic females. Minority women comprise seventy percent of all machine operators, assemblers and inspectors, of which Hispanic women represent seventy-six percent. Finally, ethnic minorities comprise seventy-one percent of all metal and plastic machine operators, a category of special relevance to the electronics industry, of which Hispanics represent almost eighty percent.

During the 1970s, industries involving standardized production, which requires abundant inputs of manual labor and low levels of quality control, relocated jobs en masse to Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean Basin. During the 1980s, the electronics industry responded to foreign competition through strategies that combined (a) a shift toward flexibility in production and labor arrangements; (b) a move away from vertically integrated operations and a reduction of plant size; (c) an emphasis on customization and specialization in production; (d) a reliance on various types of subcontracting and the resulting expansion of the informal sector, including the proliferation of small shops outside

36. See Robert Snow, The New International Division of Labor and the U.S. Workforce: The Case of the Electronics Industry, in WOMEN, MEN AND THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOR 39, 58-63 (June Nash & Maria Patricia Fernández Kelly eds., 1983) [hereinafter Snow] (indicating that the number of women in the San Jose electronics workforce has increased by a factor of almost two and a half; that the number of minority workers in the blue-collar electronics workforce has increased almost four-fold; and that a very high percentage of the blue-collar workforce is made up of recent immigrants).

37. Fernández Kelly, International Development, supra note 16, at 156 (specifying also that 44% of all direct production workers in southern California are Hispanic, 19% are foreign-born Asians; and blacks constitute 3%).


39. Snow, supra note 36, at 39 (noting that the United States has shifted many of its labor-intensive operations to low-wage Third World countries to benefit from the pool of readily available and relatively docile workers).
government regulation and industrial home-working; and (e) the tapping of labor pools formed by the increasing numbers of women who wish to work, particularly those belonging to specific ethnic and immigrant groups.  

As my interviews with electronics producers in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange counties confirm, employers value proximity to markets and research and development centers, but they also value the presence of large, affordable labor pools, characterized by comparatively low wage expectations and low unionization rates. These are all advantages associated with the employment of immigrants, particularly those who have recently arrived in this country, and those who are undocumented.

About thirty percent of workers employed in the southern California electronics industry indeed are foreign-born Hispanics. Contrary to the popular perception, the southern California electronics industry is characterized by comparatively low levels of automation, and devotes a considerable percentage of its operation costs to labor-intensive activities. In fact, the largest portion of jobs in these electronics firms are attributable to direct production, such as the assembly of semiconductor components, which is the dominant type of production in southern California.

Another revealing aspect of employment in the electronics industry relates to firm size. Large firms are more likely to produce highly advanced electronics equipment, have the largest number of employees, the highest percentage of employees in research and development, and the smallest proportion of expenditures attributable to labor costs. By contrast, small firms have lower sales, a higher percentage of labor costs relative to expenditures (almost fifty percent on average), and the largest

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41. The typical firm in our sample employed 446 workers, and spent 41.5% of its total costs on labor. Only 3% of the companies were fully automated, with 12.6% of employees in research and development and 36.7% in direct production. Approximately 20% of the firms surveyed had fifty employees or fewer; 7% had ten employees or fewer. Given the presence in our sample of a few giant manufacturers, these figures convey a somewhat lopsided image of southern California electronics firms. Small firms represent a growing stratum characterized both by the presence of native-born owners, and by an emerging class of ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurs, most of whom are Hispanic or Southeast Asian.
percentage of all employees involved in assembly. Because small firms in southern California are a locus for informal production, they represent a vulnerable stratum of the electronics industry, which may help to explain the propensity of those firms to hire cheap labor and to be cited for labor code violations. Almost sixty percent of direct production workers were women and almost half of those were Hispanic. At forty-nine percent, these small and informalized establishments had the largest proportion of Hispanic women involved in direct production. A large number of workers engaged in electronics assembly are Hispanic, whether native or foreign-born.

These employment statistics are striking in light of the general demographic composition of the region. Slightly over twenty-three percent of the population of southern California is Hispanic, but forty-four percent of direct production workers in our sample, and upwards of fifty-seven percent of those employed in small firms cited for labor code violations, belong to the same ethnic group. Perhaps even more significantly, almost half of direct production workers in small firms are foreign-born Hispanics. There are fewer immigrants in very large firms, approximately thirty percent. Similarly, although Asians represent five percent of the population of southern California, twenty percent of direct production workers in our sample are Asian.

These statistics are almost the reverse of those for African-Americans. African-Americans comprise twelve percent of the population of southern California, and almost half of the labor force, but they represent only three percent of direct production workers in electronics. This demonstrates that the labor market does not hire workers in a racially or ethnically random manner. On the contrary, at least in the electronics industry in southern California, the labor market expresses clear preferences for women and immigrants.

Subcontracting and home-working are two features of the electronics industry that help to explain these preferences. Electronics firms rely on a complex chain of subcontracting arrangements. More than half of all companies rely heavily on various forms of domestic and interna-

42. See Fernández Kelly, Invisible Amidst the Glitter, supra note 38, at 285 (discussing the findings of the Wage and Hour Division, California Department of Industrial Relations, that a small electronics production firm had violated wage and hour laws).

43. See Portes, supra note 40, at 179-85 (discussing the rationale for and implications of subcontracting as a production strategy).

44. See Portes, supra note 40, at 224-25 (discussing the rationale for and implications of home-working as a production strategy).
tional subcontracting. Some firms subcontract to operations in foreign locations and to small independent firms in southern California.\textsuperscript{44} The trend is towards a combination of strategies rather than full reliance on any particular form of production. In our survey, assembly emerged as the principal type of subcontracted activity.

Subcontracting has two complementary effects. First, it allows employers to lower production costs by displacing unskilled and semi-skilled operations to small independent firms specializing in individual tasks such as coiling, sorting, counting, and finishing. These firms are also the most likely to hire vulnerable workers such as immigrants and women. Second, subcontracting affords companies greater flexibility in adapting to fluctuating market conditions.

Electronics companies also depend on the intermittent use of home-workers. Home-workers are used by thirteen percent of firms in our sample and by fully thirty percent of small firms. Producers at the lower end of the industrial structure — many of whom are Hispanic or Southeast Asian entrepreneurs — are more likely to rely on the services of home-workers. Thus, electronics may be conceived of as a many-layered industry that relies on a complex series of strategies to maximize access to markets, flexibility, and responsiveness to the specific needs of customers. Some of those layers encompass manners of production which seem more congruent with older industries, like the apparel industry. Such is the case with industrial home-workers, who tend to be systematically concealed by aggregate figures.

The wide representation of Hispanic women in one of the major centers of the electronics industry is significant for several reasons. Paradoxically, for an industry that epitomizes manufacturing's incorporation of ever more advanced technology, the electronics industry predominantly employs unskilled and semi-skilled workers, many of whom are minority women. This employment pattern mirrors national trends. The largest number of jobs created through the end of the century may be in low-skill, low-pay occupations in services and direct production of nondurable and durable goods. By the year 2000, electronics manufacturing alone will require fifty times more custodians than engineers.\textsuperscript{45} More than fifty percent of all electronics workers will be involved in direct production and assembly, who primarily will be women. The smaller

\textsuperscript{45} Fernández Kelly, \textit{International Development}, \textit{supra} note 16, at 161 (noting that domestic and international subcontracting allows access to different segments of the market).

\textsuperscript{46} Fernández Kelly, \textit{Invisible Amidst the Glitter}, \textit{supra} note 38, at 279.
portion of electronics workers who are specialized professionals — the high-skilled technicians, engineers, computer designers, and programmers — primarily will be men.\textsuperscript{47} In short, electronics is likely to remain an example of acute stratification of labor on the basis of skill and sex.

While it may be accentuated in the electronics industry, this stratification is pervasive throughout all sectors of the United States economy. The search for flexibility in production and labor management, the targeting of strategic labor pools formed by women and immigrants, and the tendency towards unconventional modes of production such as subcontracting, are all features of industry that are emerging well beyond the field of electronics. Thus, changing roles for women in the electronics industry illustrates the recasting of women’s roles throughout the United States economy.

B. THE RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF WOMEN AS ECONOMIC ACTORS\textsuperscript{48}

The second process is the reconceptualization of women from domestic or “non-economic” actors to economic actors. During the early stages of industrial capitalism, the rationalization of production served to rigidify the division between the labor market and the home.\textsuperscript{49} This promoted gender definitions that bound women to the private sphere of family and unpaid work, and men to the public world of remunerated employment.\textsuperscript{50} While men acquired status as citizens on the basis of economic and political recognition, women’s domestic contributions were rendered invisible from that same economic and political viewpoint. Consequently, as exemplified by their disenfranchisement from the elec-

\textsuperscript{47} Snow, \textit{supra} note 36, at 54-55 (noting that women, who comprise a substantial percentage of the workforce in the electronics industry, are concentrated in operative and laborer jobs).

\textsuperscript{48} Over four months in 1986, I interviewed a sample of fifty women employed in southern California electronics and garments firms as part of an exploratory inquiry about gender perceptions and expectations. The women expressed two general sentiments. First, they acknowledged that expectations about the proper role of men and women have changed to the extent that women’s work outside the home is not only acceptable but necessary. Second, they hinted broadly at the advantages and disadvantages derived from those changes. Interestingly, the women believe that shifts in personal values are the main reason for the transformation of gender roles. Only five saw a connection between the labor market and altered gender roles.


\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Id.}
toral process, women's claims to citizenship remained contested if not mute. Gradually, women have attained more civic rights, but progress largely has been contingent on their contributions to the economy.

In light of the historical link between women's civic rights and economic participation, it is critical that we understand the impact that industrial restructuring may have on gender demarcations. Over the past decade, there have been conflicting interpretations of the growing prevalence of women in the labor market. Some observers minimize the novelty of women's paid employment by pointing out that they have always worked both within the home and outside it. What is new, these analysts note, is not the extent to which women are economic actors; rather, what is new is the recognition that women too are economic actors, something that earlier ideologies that defined women as domestic beings would not permit.

Others argue that, although women have always worked, the extent to which they have pursued paid employment since the 1960s merits further explanation. In this view, changes in consciousness do not explain merely a new conception of women in the labor force, but also the relatively recent influx of women into the labor force. Propelled by feminist ardor, according to this view, women who pursue employment are seeking personal fulfillment outside the home. An interesting variant of this perspective is found with respect to the traditional, patriarchal societies of less developed countries, where, as a result of new opportunities created by economic liberalization and export-oriented industrialization, women are said to be less subordinate to men.


52. See generally Alice Kessler Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview* (1981) (providing a historical overview of women's work experiences inside and outside the home in the United States).


54. See Susan S. Green, *Silicon Valley's Women Workers: A Theoretical Analysis of Sex-Segregation in the Electronics Industry Labor Market*, in *Women, Men and the International Division of Labor* 273, 322 (June Nash & M. Patricia Fernández Kelly eds., 1983) (noting that the introduction of capitalism into traditional Third World societies may give women greater control over their own lives as they gain employment, but also supporting the argument that there are limits to the role...
While both views are correct that changes in consciousness are significant, such changes are but one of many aspects of a complex process rooted in the changing structural requirements of contemporary capitalism. Whether as a result of historical coincidence or of structural connections only partially understood, it is true that the emergence and diffusion of feminist ideologies have coincided with economic internationalization. Changes in consciousness, however, cannot fully explain the rapidity with which women have strived for paid employment in the latter years of the twentieth century.

Instead, factors in the changing demand for labor have to be considered. In advanced and in less developed countries, employers seek to employ women because they offer certain advantages over men. Particularly when investors are seeking any edge in fiercely competitive international markets, women's subordination to men as wives, mothers, and daughters makes them an attractive source of low-cost labor. Thus, rather than abolishing older patriarchal definitions, economic internationalization has exploited and transformed them to meet the requirements of the new global competition.

More fundamentally, globalization has altered the relationship between capital and labor, one built upon the premise that men are providers and women are housewives. Since the nineteenth century, industrial production has been concentrated in the advanced countries, and real wages have risen as a result of the successful political mobilization of predominantly male workers. These factors led to a crisis of profitability in the advanced countries, and provided the impetus both for technological change and for the relocation of manufacturing to less developed countries. Relocation has allowed employers to exploit large wage differentials abroad and elude rising workers' demands at home. In response to this increasing attention from United States business interests, host governments in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean have provided incentives that have led to the growth of export-processing zones, where millions of workers, mostly women, now assemble products for the world market.

that capitalism can play in diminishing entrenched patriarchal structures).

55. Id. at 320-21 (discussing the interplay between capitalist and patriarchal systems in making women an attractive source of low-cost labor).


57. See *supra* note 21 and accompanying text.
But it is important to realize that economic transformations do not yield uniform and entirely predictable results. Complementary, and at times contradictory, sub-processes accompany them. For example, in some types of manufacturing, the internationalization of production has coincided with the rise of automation at the expense of blue-collar jobs. In other types of manufacturing, the internationalization of production has tended to coincide with the growth of subcontracting as a means of diffusing the economic and political risks of production. Accompanying the rise of services and the decline of manufacturing have been such undesirable phenomena as increasing class and income inequalities; massive plant closings, particularly during the 1970s and early 1980s; staggering drops in the rates of unionization; and the cognizable deterioration in the standard of living for many working-class Americans. In many sectors of the economy, these phenomena are linked to the increasing employment of international migrants, many of whom are undocumented aliens and many of whom are women.

However complex the underlying processes, and whatever their cumulative results, changing economic conditions and employment patterns are fueling new gender role definitions while eroding the old definition of males as providers and women as submissive mates. Witness, for example, the rapidly increasing number of two-earner households, some of which consist of affluent professionals, but more of which comprise couples wishing to maintain or raise comparatively modest standards of living.

In some respects, patriarchal mores and definitions remain unaltered. Men generally have failed to assume responsibility for their share of child-care and other domestic chores, demonstrating that the reconstitution of gender definitions is far from complete. Nevertheless, no longer are women's responsibilities perceived to be limited to domestic and

58. See supra note 43 and accompanying text.
61. Howard N. Fullerton, New Labor Force Projections, Spanning 1988 to 2000, 112 MONTHLY LAB. REV., Nov. 1989, at 3 (noting increases in the participation of women in the labor force). Mothers in families with annual earnings below $20,000 comprise much of the increase of women in the labor force. Id. By 1988, 67% of mothers who were single parents, 65% of mothers in dual-parent families, and 53% of mothers of children under three years old, were in the labor force. Id.
reproductive functions. Most men and women in the United States now expect the latter to be able to support themselves as well as make substantial contributions to their households. While these expectations may reflect new value systems—for example, the imperative that every man and woman should at least be able to pull his or her own weight—they also correspond to new economic realities reflected in new production arrangements and new demands for labor.

Undeniably, the diffusion of feminist thought and the mobilization of the women's rights movement over the last two decades have helped to change our collective consciousness concerning gender definitions in the economy. This change in consciousness may have helped to propel and rationalize the growing participation of women in the labor force. More fundamentally, however, economic realities have conspired to trump political ideology in creating new demands for women as economic actors. This notion is best demonstrated by the fact that most of this new demand is being filled by women who are low-cost laborers.

CONCLUSION

In the introductory pages of this Essay, I proposed that citizenship is best understood as a potentiality emanating from grounded economic and political realities, and not as an expectation equally accessible to all those who share a national territory. As we have seen, industrial restructuring has had very different impacts on impoverished African-Americans and Hispanic immigrants. For that reason, they maintain two very distinct positions with respect to notions of citizenship.

Given high rates of poverty, and both residential and economic segregation, many African-American children face futures characterized by comparative isolation and separation from the larger society. As nominal citizens of what remains the wealthiest country in the world, however, they have expectations forged by membership in the larger society: well-paying and status-affirming jobs, stable working conditions, and increasing returns for their efforts. While they share the same consumer values and aspirations of the larger society, however, they lack the skills and social contacts necessary to fulfill those aspirations. Because they are endowed with the hopes and attitudes of all citizens, they are less likely to be the purveyors of exploitable labor. Other groups, including immigrants, and particularly female immigrants, provide employers with more exploitable labor pools. Thus, the quandary of impoverished African-Americans is redundancy in the labor market, not exploitation.

Hispanic immigrants, and particularly Hispanic women, are in an
antithetical position. Whatever citizenship status they may or may not possess, they are attractive to employers precisely because they have so little expectation of citizenship. Thus, they are more likely to welcome jobs deemed unsuitable by native citizens. As they continue to face the hardships of low pay as well as primary responsibility for the home, exploitation, not redundancy, marks the lives of these women.

How should society respond to the plight of the impoverished, urban African-American? The choice to become a mother in adolescence is correlated to the denial of access to resources associated with full citizenship. Why should the birth of a child in one of the most modern of societies hamper women’s full citizenship and participation? “Solutions” that focus on personal morality and reproductive control, which, in a world of impoverishment, represent at best ambiguous assets, fail to address this critical question. Any real solution to the problems of the impoverished, urban African-American and the Hispanic immigrant woman in the changing economy lies in the structure of opportunity.

Ultimately, regardless of parental shortcomings, society must make a commitment to the well-being of all children born into it. Demands for equity in the structure of opportunity must temper demands for individual responsibility, and must be made with equal fervor. Expanded access to resources and jobs may prove to be the best contraceptive. Finally, if women are to fulfill the promise of their status as citizens, society must acknowledge and support their work both at home and in the labor market.