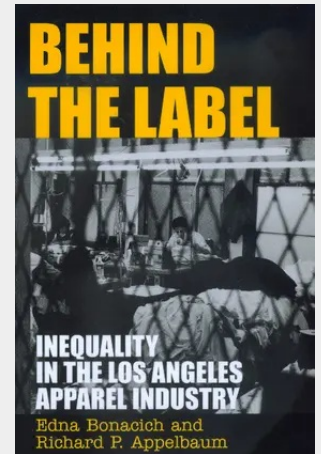


Behind the Label

Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry

In a study crucial to our understanding of American social inequality, Edna Bonacich and Richard Appelbaum investigate the return of sweatshops to the apparel industry, especially in Los Angeles. The "new" sweatshops, they say, need to be understood in terms of the decline in the American welfare state and its strong unions and the rise in global and flexible production. Apparel manufacturers now have the incentive to move production to wherever low-wage labor can be found, while maintaining arm's-length contractual relations that protect them from responsibility. The flight of the industry has led to a huge rise in apparel imports to the United States and to a decline in employment. Los Angeles, however, remains a puzzling exception in that its industry employment has continued to grow, to the point where L.A. is the largest center of apparel production in the nation. Not only the availability of low-wage immigrant (often undocumented) workers but also the focus on moderately priced, fashion-sensitive women's wear makes this possible. Behind the Label examines the players in the L.A. apparel industry, including manufacturers, retailers, contractors, and workers, evaluating the maldistribution of wealth and power. The authors explore government and union efforts to eradicate sweatshops while limiting the flight to Mexico and elsewhere, and they conclude with a description of the growing antisweatshop movement. Los Angeles Times Best Nonfiction Book of 2000



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