

*Work for Hire* is a photo essay on the changing face of the immigrant workforce in New York. The city has been forever the gateway and home in America to both legal immigrants and illegal aliens anxious to survive, eager to succeed, and whose energy and motivation were welcomed in equal proportions by employers on the lookout for the next best deal in the labor market.

Commuting from Brooklyn, the Bronx, Staten Island, Queens, Long Island and Westchester, workers from Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and parts of Western Europe come into Manhattan by subway, train, bus, car, van, and bike to keep the well-oiled city machinery humming. The newly arrived open the shops in the early morning, close them in the late evening, bake bread and croissants, serve coffee, drive cabs, are subway conductors and bus drivers, sell fruit and halal meals on the streets, send faxes and make photocopies, cut hair, give manicures and pedicures, bus tables or are wait staff, cook lunches and dinners, deliver take out, are maitre'ds or sommeliers, stock store shelves, work retail, do construction work or carpentry, pick up laundry and dry-cleaning, clean houses, baby-sit, instruct yoga or offer massage therapy, become home healthcare workers, are nurses and doctors, are researchers and scientists, are employed by banks and financial institutions, become managers, open small businesses, create corporations, study ESL, go to universities, teach, work in IT and computer technology, become creatives or graphic designers, dance, sing, perform, land jobs on Wall Street, sell real estate, become executives or entrepreneurs, receive unemployment or go on welfare—ultimately pulling up stakes in their homelands and embracing a new and not the same life in America that newcomers before them experienced.

In 1946 Fortune Magazine published a photo essay called “Labor Anonymous” by Walker Evans. The photographer documented the workingman, often a newcomer to the United States, who worked with his hands and dreamed of a better life for his sons and daughters. It seemed that immigrants learned the methodical steps to succeed, the ropes, and American-born children benefited from the families’ trials and tribulations in the new world. In short, first-generation Americans enjoyed the fruits of their parents’ labor, which may not necessarily be the case today.

Journalist Tom Friedman’s flat world theory suggests that technology is creating a global leveling plane—and adapting to the information age is key to success in the new world. As technology thrusts us deeper into the Computer Age, industries, organizations, careers, individuals, and immigrants’ potential for social mobility are equally affected and transformed. As the world and people in it scramble to learn the new vocabulary of technology, electronic communication, and the portable Internet, we adapt to a virtual world: A seemingly make-believe sphere in which manual and other labor is relegated to the lowest bidder, regardless of where the worker comes from and the kind of work that he does. Against a backdrop of low minimum wage and immigrant labor is a cornucopia of wealth in the hands of a seemingly small but diverse group. The economically challenged and the affluent stride alongside one another on the city streets often unaware of who the have and have nots are in the flat world.

My mission is to capture journalistically the faces of America's newcomers, the newbie laborers and talent of New York, and consequently discover what is different today about the USA economy and its increasing dependence upon an immigrant workforce and outsourcing.

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