January 2006

Differences That Matter: Social Policy and the Working Poor in the United States and Canada

Dan Zuberi

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/books

Thank you for downloading an article from DigitalCommons@ILR.

Support this valuable resource today!

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the ILR Press at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Book Samples by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact catherwood-dig@cornell.edu.

If you have a disability and are having trouble accessing information on this website or need materials in an alternate format, contact web-accessibility@cornell.edu for assistance.
Differences That Matter: Social Policy and the Working Poor in the United States and Canada

Abstract
[Excerpt] In a global era, when branches of multinational franchises are opening in cities around the world, it is vitally important to understand the impact of government policy on the lives of low-income service-sector workers and their families. Social policies directly affect the quality of life and levels of material hardship experienced by working-poor families. The findings of the Global Hotel study reinforce the importance of a multidimensional analysis of equality involving more than income. The findings also contribute to the study of urban poverty.

Keywords
poverty, government policy, United States, Canada, working poor, social policy, public welfare, low-income, worker, service-sector, global hotel, urban poverty

Comments
The abstract, table of contents, and first twenty-five pages are published with permission from the Cornell University Press. For ordering information, please visit the Cornell University Press. http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/books/26
Differences That Matter

Social Policy and the Working Poor in the United States and Canada

DAN ZUBERI

ILR Press an imprint of Cornell University Press
Ithaca and London
To the memory of my mormor,

Marta Höckert, 1908–2002,

who taught me that loving and car
are the most important things in li
To the memory of my *mormor*,

Marta Höckert, 1908–2002,

who taught me that loving and caring
are the most important things in life.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments, ix
1. Introduction, 1
2. Poverty and Policy in the United States and Canada, 13
3. The Story and the Setting, 24
4. The Union Difference, 48
5. Health-Care Differences, 67
7. Public Investment and City-Level Differences, 113
8. Subjective Perceptions and Future Outlook, 138
9. Improving the Lives of the Working Poor, 151
10. Conclusion, 166
   Appendix: Methodology and Background, 177
   Notes, 193
   References, 211
   Index, 225
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although for some research can be a solitary process, I feel fortunate that my research allows me to meet and talk to so many interesting people. One of the ironies of qualitative research methods is that those who I would most like to thank for their help with this book—the hotel-industry workers and others I interviewed—must remain anonymous in order to protect their identities. At times, their struggles broke my heart. Their strength amazed me. Their quiet fortitude, sense of humor, and openness to sharing their stories, hardships, achievements, fears, and hopes was heartwarming. They may toil invisibly behind the scenes in windowless back rooms, in jobs that are repetitive and at times demeaning, but their conditions of work do not lessen their humanity. They taught me a lot.

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people for their help with this book. First and foremost, I extend a huge thank you to Katherine S. Newman at Princeton University. She was incredibly supportive of this research project from the beginning. Kathy Newman helped me develop the research design and supported me through the fieldwork, analysis, writing, and rewriting of this work, reading several drafts of each chapter and providing invaluable feedback every time. I am fortunate to have had the chance to work with and get to know such an outstanding scholar. I could not have completed this book without her help and inspiration. She provided the academic model and resources for me to pursue such an exciting project, even when I lived on the other side of the continent.

I also thank William Julius Wilson at Harvard University, whose scholarship on urban poverty has long been an inspiration for me. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to get to know him personally and work with him at the formative stages of my academic career. Mary C. Waters, also at Harvard, provided immeasurable help with my research, offering valuable feedback and revisions that have improved the quality of the book. I also learned from her excellent research on immigrants and debates in the immigration literature as well as from her insights about qualitative research. I extend a special thank you to Jeffrey Reitz at the University of Toronto, whom I was lucky enough to meet while planning the Global Hotel study. He introduced me to Canadian scholarship on race, ethnicity, and immigration and has been a steadfast supporter of my research since then. Together, these four scholars have had the greatest influence on this book.

Many others helped me with useful advice and support. I particularly thank Christopher Jencks at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government (KSG), who
recommended I study the hotel industry. I also thank at Harvard: Mary Jo Bane, Mariko Chang, David Ellwood, Marshall Ganz, Jason Kaufman, Jane Mansbridge, Brian Mandell, Pamela Metz, Gary Orfield, Orlando Patterson, James Quane, Edward Walker, Rick Weissboard, Julie Boatwright Wilson, and Sidney Verba. Although, sadly, I never had the opportunity to get to know her personally, a presentation at the Inequality Summer Institute 2000 at the KSG by Susan C. Eaton of her groundbreaking research on staff at nursing homes inspired me to interview low-wage service-sector employees.

At the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Neil Guppy’s sponsorship during the fieldwork stage of my research made it possible for me to complete my interviews and participant observation in Vancouver. Kate Bush provided excellent transcription services, and Karen Fang provided some wonderful Chinese language translating. At the University of Washington, Jennifer Edwards provided tremendous help when I was setting up to interview hotel employees in Seattle. I also thank Debra Minkoff, Barbara Reskin, and Stewart Tolney at the University of Washington. I was lucky to meet Timothy Smeeding of Syracuse University, and David Reisman of Harvard University, at the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) during summer 2000. They and the LIS staff, especially David Jesuit, did a stellar job of teaching me to use LIS data to compare the United States and Canada.

Through the Inequality and Social Policy program at Harvard, I was fortunate to meet many wonderful scholars from across the United States who study poverty and inequality. I particularly enjoyed meeting Kathryn Edin and Frank Furstenberg of the University of Pennsylvania, who provided early positive feedback about my research design.

When I was studying for my master’s degree at Oxford, Michael Noble and my advisor, George Smith, strongly encouraged me to continue to pursue my doctorate and sociological research as a career. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, at Princeton University, is the original source of my academic inspiration, and her passionate commitment to helping improve the lives of the urban poor continues to motivate me.

I am fortunate to have Clyde Hertzman, director of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) and professor in the Department of Health Care and Epidemiology at the University of British Columbia (UBC), as an enthusiastic mentor and supporter of my research. I thank him for the incredible opportunity of a postdoctoral fellowship, co-funded by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, which allowed me to focus on revising this book while starting an exciting new research project on Vancouver’s eastside elementary schools. The HELP staff and affiliates at UBC have also been wonderful to work with. I especially thank Hillel Goelman and Paul Kershaw as well as Jacqueline Smit Alex, Catherine Coxall, Barry Forer, Eileen Grant, Alison Holley, Lori Irwin, Keely Kinar, Veronica Lapointe, Wendy L Meagher, Mari Pighini, Brenda Poon, Iraj Pooyan, and David Wu. I reserve special thank you to Revelle Haig at HELP, who made and remade the reviewed several draft chapters, lending valuable and geography. His enthusiasm for the project over neighborhood where he grew up was. Tragically, Peter passed away in the summer of twenty-six, devastating all of those fortunate.

I appreciate the support and encouragement of Bruce Baum, Alexia Bloch, Gillian C. Brian Elliott, Nancy Gallini, Amy Hanser, Gre Fuller, Laura Janara, Thomas Kemple, Darrin MacDonald, Charles Menzies, David Pokot Gerry Veenstra, Sabrina Wong, and Elvin Wyl Froeschauer, Arlene Tigar McLaren, Jane Pul Travers at Simon Fraser University and Hosp Marcy Cohen for their encouragement.

I thank my peers at Harvard for their encouragement, Chaudry, Leslie Cintron, Carrie Conaway, Tomás R. Jiménez, Andrew Karch, Peter Mosi Mario Small, Arjumand Siddiqi, Natasha Wa Wolfers.

I have enjoyed the opportunity to travel over the past several years to share my research findings and insights. I particularly thank Michelle Lamont and inviting me to present my research findings at several Research meetings, Successful Socio Development. I also thank Jacques Bertrand, Leanne Son Hing, Jane Jensen, Daniel Keatir Sewell, Dietlind Stolle, and Ann Swidler for receiving valuable feedback from presentation at Harvard University, the Department of An Urban Studies, and the University of British Columbia, and the D ethnology at Simon Fraser University. The also provided funding for me to present n Conference in Stockholm, Sweden. I benefit tition for Canadian Studies in the United Sta Fraser’s Harbour Centre campus and at the tional Sociological Association in Brisbane,
I also thank at Harvard: Mary Jo Bane, Marshall Ganz, Jason Kaufman, Jane Mans- z, Gary Orfield, Orlando Patterson, James board, Julie Boatwright Wilson, and Sidney l the opportunity to get to know her per-
ality. Summer Institute 2000 at the KSG by
research on staff at nursing homes in-
vice-sector employees.
Ambia in Vancouver, Neil Guppy’s sponsor-
y research made it possible for me to com-
ment observation in Vancouver. Kate Bush
vice, and Karen Fang provided some won-
p. At the University of Washington, Jennifer p when I was setting up to interview hotel
ebra Minkoff, Barbara Reskin, and Stewart
gion. I was lucky to meet Timothy Smeal-
d Reisman of Harvard University, at the un-
ing summer 2000. They and the LIS staff,
job of teaching me to use LIS data to com-
ial Policy program at Harvard, I was fortu-
nors from across the United States who study
ly enjoyed meeting Kathryn Edin and Frank
sylvania, who provided early positive feed-
ter’s degree at Oxford, Michael Noble and
 encouraged me to continue to pursue my
 as a career. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, at
ource of my academic inspiration, and her
 improves the lives of the urban poor con-
rtzman, director of the Human Early Learner-
 in the Department of Health Care and
British Columbia (UBC), as an enthusiastic
arch. I thank him for the incredible oppor-
p, co-funded by the Canadian Institute for
d me to focus on revising this book while
ject on Vancouver’s eastside elementary
tes at UBC have also been wonderful to work
man and Paul Kershaw as well as Jacqueline
 Forer, Eileen Grant, Alison Holley, Lori Ir-
win, Keely Kinar, Veronica Lapointe, Wendy Li, Aubrey Lim, Calvin Lo, Nancy
egher, Mari Pighini, Brenda Poon, Iraj Pouremsi, Kate Trafford, Michelle
iens, and David Wu. I reserve special thanks for Peter Schaub, the staff geo-
grapher at HELP, who made and remade the maps for this book and also re-
vieved several draft chapters, lending valuable insights about urban planning
and geography. His enthusiasm for the project, mapping, and the eastside Van-
couver neighborhood where he grew up was contagious and inspirational.
Tragically, Peter passed away in the summer of 2005 from a heart attack at age
 twenty-six, devastating all of those fortunate to have known him.

I appreciate the support and encouragement of other UBC faculty: Joan An-
erson, Bruce Baum, Alexia Bloch, Gillian Creese, Julian Dierkes, Liz Dunn,
 Brian Elliott, Nancy Gallini, Amy Hanser, Greg Feldman, Martha Poschi, Sylvia
 Fuller, Laura Janara, Thomas Kemple, Darrin Lehman, Judith Lynam, Robert
 MacDonald, Charles Menzies, David Pokotylo, Becki Ross, David Tindall,
erry Veenstra, Sabrina Wong, and Elvin Wyly. I also thank Daniel Cohn, Karl
 Froschauer, Arlene Tighe McLaren, Jane Pulkingham, Gary Teeple, and Ann
 Travers at Simon Fraser University and Hospital Employees’ Union researcher
 Marcy Cohen for their encouragement.

I thank my peers at Harvard for their encouragement: Irene Blemraad, Ajay
 Chaudry, Leslie Cintron, Carrie Conaway, David Harding, Matissa Hollister,
 Tomás R. Jiménez, Andrew Karch, Peter Moskos, Wendy Roth, Patrick Sharkey,
 Mario Small, Arjumand Siddiqi, Natasha Warikoo, Celeste Watkins, and Justin
Woflers.

I have enjoyed the opportunity to travel to many interesting conferences
over the past several years to share my research ideas and findings; this has
helped me immeasurably in thinking through dilemmas and generating new
insights. I particularly thank Michèle Lamont and Peter A. Hall, at Harvard, for
inviting me to present my research findings to the Canadian Institute for Ad-
anced Research meeting, Successful Societies: The Dynamics of Collective
Development. I also thank Jacques Bertrand, Gerard Bouchard, Peter Evans,
Leanne Son Hing, Jane Jensen, Daniel Keating, Ron Levi, Nancy Ross, William
 Sewell, Dietlind Stolle, and Ann Swidler for their feedback. In addition, I
received valuable feedback from presentations to the Sociology Department at
Harvard University, the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the
University of British Columbia, and the Department of Sociology and An-
thropology at Simon Fraser University. The Sociology Department at Harvard
also provided funding for me to present my research at the Aage Memorial
Conference in Stockholm, Sweden. I benefited from presenting at the Associa-
tion for Canadian Studies in the United States (ACSS) colloquium at Simon
Fraser’s Harbour Centre campus and at the annual meetings of the Interna-
tional Sociological Association in Brisbane, Australia; the American Sociologi-

Acknowledgments | xi
ical Association; and the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) in San Francisco. I thank the Sociology and Social Welfare section of the SSSP and the Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA) for their awards recognizing this work.

This research project could not have happened without the generous financial support from several sources. I am extremely grateful to the Canada-U.S. Fulbright Foundation for awarding me a Fulbright scholarship to carry out this research. I also thank the Harvard Frank Knox Memorial fellowship and a U.S. National Science Foundation Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship Grant (NSF No. 9870661) to Harvard for critical support. The Multi-Disciplinary Program on Inequality and Social Policy provided valuable academic and research support.

I especially thank Fran Benson of Cornell University Press, who has been a truly wonderful editor and supporter of this research. Her enthusiasm for this book and helpful advice has been wonderful for me and dramatically improved the final product. It has been great to work with Karen Laun, the manuscript editor, and Susan Barnett, the copy supervisor at Cornell University Press. Julie F. Nemer did an amazing job copyediting the manuscript. I also thank Peter Adler at the University of Denver and one anonymous reviewer, whose feedback guided me through the revisions of the manuscript.


Many great friends over the years have put the spark and laughter in my life while I have been researching and writing this book. Craig Winters was there right from the beginning, accompanying me on my first trip to Vancouver. Elena Mansour has been a wonderful friend through it all. David Pinto-Duschenisky wins the award for the most frequent visitor to the Pacific Northwest; while at the KSG, he helped me think through the idea of doing a Seattle-Vancouver comparative study, and I truly appreciate his friendship and helpful advice. David Alire Garcia wins second place for frequent visits to the Pacific Northwest, and I feel lucky to have a good friend who is also such a great writer and is passionate about progressive causes.

Jeremy Weinstein and Rachel Gibson have been one of my favorite couples for a long time. I want to thank Jeremy for his wonderful support and friendship from the first day of graduate school at the KSG, when we sat next to each other in the doctoral math enrichment class. His amazing and critically important research on Africa is also an inspiration for me. I thank Joiwind and Amit Ronen, who brought lots of laughter and Ty Terkel, the best of San Francisco, who I love. And Anand Das and Shilpa Patel, their friendship and commitment to helping.

I also feel very fortunate to have come to Canada and Alan Jacobs in Vancouver. Our hikes, camping and island adventures have been great. Look forward to many fun times in the future. The Festival of Shannon Daub and Ryan Duschesneau for letting me crash on his couch. I thank Daniel Wood, to change the world.

I thank my parents, Mo and Lilly Zuber, and support of my academic interests from: sources and opportunities that helped me get a better education. Although many parents have to I thank my fieldwork. I also thank the Bulman-Fleming, Amber Khan; Mark Koehler; Jon Pitts; Ric Trish and Noel Winston; and Daniel Wood, to change the world.

My wonderful sisters are simply the best. urban poverty scholar in her own right as a University, has been a wonderful confidant. I have lived a global life worth spiration to be creative and his love of his uncle, Gunilla and Peter Tamms, Akbar Kian Hockert, as well as my cousins for the.

In Vancouver, I am fortunate to have been Campbell Robinson and Helen Robinson countless meals and enjoyable outings. Can perfected from publishing so many letters.
Amit Ronen, who brought lots of laughter and fun times into my life; Molly and Ty Terkel, the best of San Francisco, who have been good friends to me and my family; and Anand Das and Shilpa Patel, who have kept me inspired with their friendship and commitment to helping others.

I also feel very fortunate to have become close friends with Antje Ellermann and Alan Jacobs in Vancouver. Our hikes, trips to the pub, eagle walks, and camping and island adventures have been great escapes I have cherished, and I look forward to many fun times in the future. I also appreciate many wonderful evenings with Shannon Daub and Ryan Blogg; at dinners and folk music festivals, it has been great getting to know them. Kyle Horner and Kyla Tienhaara took me snowshoeing—a Canadian tradition—for the first time; they are now missed but fortunate to be studying in Amsterdam. I thank Robin Duschesneau for letting me crash on his couch many times over the course of my fieldwork. I also thank the Bulman-Fleming family; Josh Flax; Aslam and Amber Khan; Mark Koehler; Jon Pitts; Richard, Barbara and Ricky Tatum; Trish and Noel Winston; and Daniel Wood, who pushes his students to write to change the world.

I thank my parents, Mo and Lilly Zuberi, for their strong encouragement and support of my academic interests from an early age. They provided the resources and opportunities that helped me get my dream job as a researcher and professor. Although many parents have to help some of their children financially through an extended adolescence that includes four years of college, few endure periodic requests for emergency loans for another eight postgraduate years. My dad and mom helped me out time and again and made sure I always had everything I needed to keep going as I pursued my dream and completed my doctorate and this book.

My wonderful sisters are simply the best. Anita Zuberi, who is becoming an urban poverty scholar in her own right as a doctoral student at Northwestern University, has been a wonderful confidant and friend. Sofia Zuberi, whose globe-trotting has had her living in Nice, Antibes, San Francisco, Grenoble, Rome, and London, has shared with me her friendship, her international adventures, and her comparative insights.

My grandfather—or morfar in Swedish—Karle Erik Höckert, is ninety-five-years-old and has lived a global life worth emulation; I thank him for the inspiration to be creative and his love of travel. And I also thank my aunts and uncles, Gunilla and Peter Tamm, Akhtar and Farida Zuberi, and Göran and Kian Höckert, as well as my cousins for their support.

In Vancouver, I am fortunate to have become part of a new, second family. Campbell Robinson and Helen Robinson have become great friends, sharing countless meals and enjoyable outings. Cam used his finely honed editing skills, perfected from publishing so many letters to the editor in The Globe and Mail.
to provide some excellent editorial advice on an early draft of this book. Leslie Robinson, Ken Hildebrand, five-year-old Kate, and just-born Graham have been a pleasure to befriend; their kindness and companionship are much appreciated. Michelle Robinson, Charles Lepoutre and new addition Georges have always been kind hosts and taught me a lot about Quebec. Toni and David Owen and Jean Vivian have always been very generous and welcoming every time I have had the pleasure of seeing them. And of course, I thank Dante, for being good company while I write.

My biggest thanks goes to my partner, Joanna Robinson, who has been incredibly supportive of me throughout the process of researching and writing this book. I feel so lucky that we met as volunteers for a UN conference on civic participation in Vancouver. She read and provided invaluable feedback on many drafts of each chapter. Joanna also taught me a lot about social policy in Canada, about the growing international struggle against poverty and war, and about the importance of protecting the environment. But, more important, she provided the light in my life, and I treasure our long walks through city streets and the forest, warm moments alone and with friends, sitting out on our balcony until late in the night, delicious dinners, and swimming together in oceans and pools. I love sharing the journey of life together with her.
al advice on an early draft of this book. Leslie
-year-old Kate, and just-born Graham have
kindness and companionship are much ap-
harles Lepoutre and new addition Georges
ught me a lot about Quebec. Toni and Davi
ys been very generous and welcoming every
ing them. And of course, I thank Dante, for
partner, Joanna Robinson, who has been in-
htout the process of researching and writing
set as volunteers for a UN conference on civic
read and provided invaluable feedback on
also taught me a lot about social policy in
ational struggle against poverty and war, and
g the environment. But, more important, she
I treasure our long walks through city streets
one and with friends, sitting out on our bal-
us dinners, and swimming together in oceans
ey of life together with her.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It is 5:30 a.m. on an early spring morning in the northwest, squawk, and whistle outside bedroom windows. Twenty miles to the north, the sun hits the peak. The first buses carry drowsy passengers on their way to Vancouver, British Columbia, delivering streets as the workers on the morning shift prep.

Both cities are carved out of the Pacific Ocean's misty rain from the frontier beginnings of these cities. Emerald to olive—has defined their development. From the mountains, the residents of both cities enjoy the postindustrial mid-size global cities where the edge of urban development.

Sujita Hassam and Karen Hsu are ethnic in the Globe Hotel — a major multinational in the major. Their stories illuminate the bottom of the labor market, offering few rewards, for a firm that straddles sharply demarcates two contrasting social paces with its comparatively weak welfare state. Canada, with its history of strong safety nets, offers divergent contexts through which the

Sujita's Story

Sujita Hassam is a forty-one-year-old ethnographer from Fiji in fall 2000. As sh
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It is 5:30 a.m. on an early spring morning in the Pacific Northwest. Pigeons mutter, squawk, and whistle outside bedroom windows on Capitol Hill. One hundred twenty miles to the north, the sun hits the peaks of the North Shore mountains as the first buses carry drowsy passengers on their way to work. In Seattle, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia, delivery trucks roll down largely empty streets as the workers on the morning shift prepare for the new day.

Both cities are carved out of the Pacific Ocean rainforests—flourishing in frequent misty rains—in valleys surrounded by towering snow-capped mountains. From the frontier beginnings of these cities, the forest—in shades of green from emerald to olive—has defined their development and life. Living amid the forest and mountains, the residents of both cities enjoy a wonderful quality of life compared to many other North American urbanites. Seattle and Vancouver, thriving postindustrial mid-size global cities where east meets west, are often on the cutting edge of urban development.

Sujita Hassam and Karen Hsu are ethnic minority immigrants who work for the Globe Hotel—a major multinational hotel chain—in Seattle and Vancouver, respectively. Their stories illuminate some of the major themes of this book. They work at the bottom of the labor markets of each country, in jobs that offer few rewards, for a firm that straddles an international border that sharply demarcates two contrasting social policy regimes. The United States, with its comparatively weak welfare state and laissez-faire tradition, and Canada, with its history of strong safety nets and interventionist social policy, offer divergent contexts through which the working poor must navigate.

Sujita's Story

Sujita Hassam is a forty-one-year-old ethnic Indian woman who moved to the United States from Fiji in fall 2000. As she described it to me, life in Fiji was fraught with difficulties and hardships. After finishing high school, Sujita
Hassam went to work in a garment factory where she labored under difficult conditions in order to make ends meet: “I didn’t go on to university because my father was very poor,” she told me. “I was getting like $1.45 per hour and every week we get the wages, a check, [for] $50 per week. It was very hard for us.” (In this book, all dollar amounts are presented unconverted in the currency of the hotel worker’s current residence, unless otherwise noted).

After working at the garment factory, Sujita Hassam began a new job as a cashier for a clothing store, earning only slightly more money than in the factory: “I was getting $1.60. When I was cashier in the shop, I was getting there like one week $70.” It was not enough for her to make ends meet.

No it was not enough [to pay the rent and expenses]. But we have to think about the money. We just get the wages, we think about the money, and then we think if we want to buy food, clothes. Then we have to go to shop... if we think anything nice, we want to buy, we cannot buy. We just think about that and come home. We just think a lot for the food.

Although she now laughs at the memory, Sujita Hassam spent five years working under these conditions to help support her family. During that time, her mother passed away and her father became ill. Because Sujita Hassam was single, she became the family matriarch, caring for her sick father and helping to raise her brother and sister-in-law’s children, with whom she lived. “It was very hard for me,” she said. Many of the immigrants working in the hotel industry in Seattle and Vancouver faced similar difficult economic circumstances in their home countries, before immigrating to North America.

One day Sujita Hassam met Rajiv Garithamy, a Fijian-American man of ethnic Indian background who was vacationing in Fiji. They soon fell in love, and he asked her to marry him and move to the United States—to California, no less—to be with him. It was a dream come true; a dream long deferred and finally given up on after thirty-eight years of matchmaking for others. Her first few months in California were wonderful. “It was really pretty great. It was very pretty. I like it.”

During the first few months of their marriage, Sujita Hassam noticed that a Mexican woman frequently visited. When she asked her husband “What is this? He say, my friend my friend.” Then, “one day I went to find a job, I stay my husband’s sister’s house. I said [to him] I’ll not come back [tonight], I’ll come tomorrow. But when I came [to] my apartment, I saw my husband was with her in my bedroom.” Rajiv Garithamy’s sister broke the news to her “that day, I catch him”; she discovered to her dismay that he already had a wife. “He was already married, and he did not tell me he got two kids... . He told me nothing. He had two kids, one was 5, one was 10.” When she asked his sister why she had supported their marriage when she knew her brother was already married, Rajiv’s sister told her, “they [his family] do not Indian girl we like.” They told her, “And we the gonna leave her. She [Rajiv Garithamy’s sister] never did.” Rajiv Garithamy’s family wanted him and so he had kept his first marriage a secret. So the whole world crashing down on her shoulder.

Angie Makora, a friend from Fiji who lives in Seattle and marries her brother who had met in Fiji ten years earlier. Five months earlier. After marrying Amit, Sujita Hassam fou- nicult machine-operator job in a Tacoma-area also worked. “Oh it was very hard job,” she said. Machine. Cut every kind of rubber and every- they use in the roofs.” She earned $8 per hour tines to work at the factory and also works a cafeteria as a custodian. His sixteen-year-old joined him in Seattle from Fiji two years earlier. Valley High in southeast Seattle, where many viewed in Seattle live. Many immigrants in this worked in low-wage factory jobs, for example kichens of ethnic-food restaurants, before g industry.

While Sujita Hassam was still on-call at the same time of work. First, she found a new Low-Cost Motel in Tacoma. She worked the $6.90 per hour. She disliked this job because 5 hours and did not receive a uniform. She also lan as really “stinky” rooms, particularly where she told me, “They bring dogs and kittens at when you go inside it smells very bad. Oh yeah other job.” “I applied to a lot of places, mostly I [the hospital] told me they are going to phone a long time, I cannot wait.” After dropping in the paper, she was called in to interview for Globe Hotel Seattle. She went through two interviews and surprised to get the job, starting at $7.75. Katharina Renaka—the chief housekeeper—experience and her family situation, includin ten. Why? Perhaps managers screen out poor problems accessing reliable child care. In be surprising to find that few of the hotel work
rent factory where she labored under difficult s meet: “I didn’t go on to university because ld me, “I was getting like $1.45 per hour and neck, [for] $50 per week. It was very hard for amounts are presented unconverted in the cur- rent residence, unless otherwise noted). factory, Sujita Hassam began a new job as a ng only slightly more money than in the fac- ty. I was cashier in the shop, I was getting there for her to make ends meet.

rent and expenses]. But we have to think about s, we think about the money, and then we think then we have to go to shop. . . . if we think any- annanot buy. We just think about that and come : food.

emory, Sujita Hassam spent five years work- p support her family. During that time, her r became ill. Because Sujita Hassam was sin- rch, caring for her sick father and helping to s children, with whom she lived. “It was very e immigrants working in the hotel industry in difficult economic circumstances in ginating to North America.

i Garithamy, a Fijian-American man of eth- acationing in Fiji. They soon fell in love, and ove to the United States—to California, no am come true; a dream long deferred and ears years of matchmaking for others. Her first aderful. “It was really pretty great. It was very

t heir marriage, Sujita Hassam noticed that a l. When she asked her husband “What is this? n, “one day I went to find a job, I stay my hus- a) I’ll not come back [tonight], I’ll come to partment, I saw my husband was with her y’s sister broke the news to her “that day, I dismay that he already had a wife. “He was ll me he got two kids. . . . He told me noth- e was to.” When she asked his sister why she n she knew her brother was already married,

Rajiv’s sister told her, “they [his family] do not like her, then we marry with an Indian girl we like.” They told her, “And we thought, you gonna marry, then he gonna leave her. She [Rajiv Garithamy’s sister] thought he will leave her, but he never did.” Rajiv Garithamy’s family wanted him to marry an ethnic Indian, and so he had kept his first marriage a secret. Sujita Hassam’s discovery brought the whole world crashing down on her shoulders.

Angie Makora, a friend from Fiji who lives in Seattle, encouraged Sujita Hassam to move up the coast and marry her brother—Amit Hassam—who Sujita had met in Fiji ten years earlier. Five months before we met, she did just that. After marrying Amit, Sujita Hassam found part-time work at a very difficult machine-operator job in a Tacoma-area factory where her new husband also worked. “Oh it was very hard job,” she recalled. “Everything do with the machine. Cut every kind of rubber and everything. Press things and everything they use in the roofs.” She earned $8 per hour for her labor. Her husband continues to work at the factory and also works a second part-time job in a school cafeteria as a custodian. His sixteen-year-old daughter, Maureen Hassam, who joined him in Seattle from Fiji two years earlier, is currently a student at Rainier Valley High in southeast Seattle, where many other hotel workers who I interviewed in Seattle live. Many immigrants in both Seattle and Vancouver had worked in low-wage factory jobs, for example, in garment factories, or in the kitchens of ethnic-food restaurants, before gaining employment in the hotel industry.

While Sujita Hassam was still on-call at the factory, she decided she wanted more hours of work. First, she found a new job as a room attendant for the Low-Cost Motel in Tacoma. She worked there for only three weeks, earning $6.90 per hour. She disliked this job because she was not able to secure enough hours and did not receive a uniform. She also hated cleaning what she described as really “stinky” rooms, particularly where people had pets living with them. She told me, “They bring dogs and kittens and they put inside the room, and when you go inside it smells very bad. Oh yeah.” So she decided to look for another job. “I applied to a lot of places, mostly I applied for the hospital. But they [the hospital] told me they are going to phone me in like 6 months. I said, ‘that’s a long time, I cannot wait.’” After dropping off a resume in response to an ad in the paper, she was called in to interview for a room attendant position at the Globe Hotel Seattle. She went through two major interviews and was pleased and surprised to get the job, starting at $7.75 per hour. During her interview, Katharina Renska—the chief housekeeper—asked her about her past work experience and her family situation, including the age of her husband’s daughter. Why? Perhaps managers screen out potential employees who may face problems accessing reliable child care. In both Seattle and Vancouver, it was surprising to find that few of the hotel workers were lone (single) parents.

Introduction | 3
Sujita Hassam said she enjoyed working at the Globe Hotel Seattle; she dreams of working as a registered nurse (RN) or of finding employment in a hospital again, “where the money is.” In California, she had worked in a hospital for a national food-service company. “I just work there for four months and they were paying me like $8.50 something, and they said after 3 months they going to put your [wage] rate up.” She recently met with a personnel officer at a Seattle hospital, who said she could get a food-service job in three months; this job also included the possibility of taking RN training courses. Sujita Hassam plans to wait and see.

Sujita Hassam was frustrated about the low wages paid at her hotel. She said she thought that her job at the Globe Hotel would be better if the hotel were unionized because employees would get regular pay increases: “Why I think if union it would be better? If they work hard and after 1 year or 2 and they are only giving you like $7 [per hour], you can probably use union for something like this.” At the same time, she realized how difficult it can be to unionize a workplace. The garment factory she had worked for in Fiji closed down as it was being unionized: “3,000 people working there, and they closed it because the union come, so no more job.” Only a small and declining percentage of hotel jobs in Seattle are unionized.

Life for the working poor is stressful in Seattle. The Hassam family rents a one-bedroom apartment. Maureen Hassam sleeps in the living room. Sujita Hassam described the apartment as “somewhat crowded,” with leaks and roaches. The landlord continues to promise, but not deliver on the promise, to spray the apartment for insect infestation. He charges them a $70 fine if they are even one day late on the $600 monthly rent. In the five months prior to the interview, the Hassams were late paying the rent four times—incurring $350 in fines—and had their phone cut off twice because they could not pay their bill. Their utility bills add up to $250 or more per month for electricity, garbage service, and water. There is no room in their budget for any unexpected expenses or extravagant expenditures. Sujita Hassam described paying the household bills as “very difficult.” These material hardships land on the Hassams, despite the fact that the two adults hold multiple jobs. They regularly borrow from Maureen Hassam, who works thirty hours per week at Burger Barn, a fast-food franchise. Amit Hassam also borrows money from Arthur Lowell, a white co-worker at the school cafeteria, although the family tries its best to pay him back quite quickly. At the time of the interview, Sujita Hassam said they had about $2,000 in the bank. She was not sure, but she thought her husband might have a little retirement savings. Living on the edge financially is not unusual among workers in Seattle, with many hotel employees reporting difficulties making ends meet.

Amit Hassam commutes to Tacoma by car; Sujita Hassam takes the bus to work. On a typical day, she gets up at 5:00 a.m. to prepare for her husband and step-daughter to leave to catch the 6:30 a.m. bus downtown to make their shift. Sujita Hassam estimates that last year she paid $23,000 in taxes and her husband earned $25,000 working in the city, but she tries to send money and gifts back home. Every few months, they donate to a church and a local hospital.

Sujita Hassam lacks health insurance coverage. She provides health insurance benefits, but she is struggling to cover her period. Her husband pays $50 per month for his dental coverage. Her step-daughter, who is a doctor, has no health insurance coverage. She is worried. Because I am thinking if I have to be treated, maybe someday I’m gonna go. And if I go, I’ll have to pay a lot without insurance.”

The family is very vulnerable to financial emergencies. Problems with health insurance are much more frequent for workers in Seattle. Sujita Hassam will qualify for medical assistance but not for the rest of the family. If she improves her wages—as she and many workers probably have to start again in terms of what such as health insurance coverage.

As with most Seattle workers without health insurance, Sujita Hassam has not received regular preventive care. Her doctor’s visit was her pre-emigration check-up, and she wants to go to the doctor, but without health insurance to afford medical and dental care. Her job for one week of paid vacation and six paid sick days are less generous in Seattle than in Vancouver’s labor policy that set different minimum standards.

Hotel workers in Seattle live in and around Vancouver. They experience more feelings of personal insecurity. Sujita Hassam, who lives in Seattle, close to Rainier Avenue, in a neighborhood Hassam has noticed some “sketchy in and out of town.” She has not seen a police officer in. In the past few months, the Hassams has
yed working at the Globe Hotel Seattle; she'd nurse (RN) or of finding employment in a way is.” In California, she had worked in a hospital. “I just work there for four months and something, and they said after 3 months they.” She recently met with a personnel officer at could get a food-service job in three months, lity of taking RN training courses. Sujita Has-

about the low wages paid at her hotel. She said Globe Hotel would be better if the hotel were said get regular pay increases: “Why I think if work hard and after 1 year or 2 and they are J, you can probably use union for something realized how difficult it can be to unionize a she had worked for in Fiji closed down as it she working there, and they closed it because Only a small and declining percentage of ho-

nessful in Seattle. The Hassam family rents a en Hassam sleeps in the living room. Sujita it as “somewhat crowded,” with leaks and o promise, but not deliver on the promise, to festation. He charges them a $70 fine if they monthly rent. In the five months prior to the paying the rent four times—incurred $350 at off twice because they could not pay their 50 or more per month for electricity, garbage 90m in their budget for any unexpected ex-
s. Sujita Hassam described paying the house-

material hardships land on the Hassams, s hold multiple jobs. They regularly borrow s thirty hours per week at Burger Barn, a fast-
borrow money from Arthur Lowell, a white although the family tries its best to pay him the interview, Sujita Hassam said they had not sure, but she thought her husband might living on the edge financially is not unusual many hotel employees reporting difficulties coma by car; Sujita Hassam takes the bus to work. On a typical day, she gets up at 5:00 a.m. so that she can shower and prepare for her husband and step-daughter to leave for work and school. Then, she catches the 6:30 a.m. bus downtown to make sure she is not late for her 8:30 a.m. shift. Sujita Hassam estimates that last year, she earned only $7,000 before taxes and her husband earned $23,000 working two jobs. Despite their low income, she tries to send money and gifts back to her relatives in Fiji whenever possible. Every few months, they donate a small amount of money to their church and a local hospital.

Sujita Hassam lacks health insurance coverage. Although the Globe Hotel provides health insurance benefits, she is trapped in the new employee waiting period. Her husband pays $50 per month for health insurance, a limited plan lacking dental coverage. Her step-daughter is covered by a Washington state health program, so she has been to the doctor and dentist in the past year. But Sujita Hassam has no health insurance coverage, which worried her: “Yeah, I am worried. Because I am thinking if I haven’t got any [health] insurance and maybe someday I’m gonna sick. And if I go to the doctor, I am going to have pay a lot without the insurance.”

The family is very vulnerable to financial catastrophe in the event of a health emergency. Problems with health insurance coverage and accessing health care are much more frequent for workers in Seattle than in Vancouver. After three months, Sujita Hassam will qualify for health insurance coverage benefits for herself but not for the rest of her family. If she switches employers in order to improve her wages—as she and many working poor hope to do—she will probably have to start again in terms of waiting periods for essential benefits such as health insurance coverage.

As with most Seattle workers without health and/or dental insurance, Su-

jita Hassam has not received regular preventative medical checkups. Her last doctor’s visit was her pre-emigration checkup in Fiji over two years ago. She wants to go to the doctor, but without health insurance she feels she is unable to afford medical and dental care. Her job benefits are meager; she is eligible for one week of paid vacation and six paid sick days this year. The job benefits are less generous in Seattle than in Vancouver, in part because of differences in labor policy that set different minimum standards for workers in each city.

Hotel workers in Seattle live in and around poorer neighborhoods compared to Vancouver. They experience more problems with crime and greater feelings of personal insecurity. Sujita Hassam’s family lives southeast of downtown Seattle, close to Rainier Avenue, in a neighborhood close to shops. Sujita Hassam has noticed some “sketchy in and out” activity next door as well as cars cruising up and down the block (enough to scare her and cause her to bolt the door). Yet she has not seen a police officer or cruiser in her area since moving in. In the past few months, the Hassams have been the victims of petty thefts,
which have left Sujita Hassam feeling personally insecure; for example, someone stole Maureen Hassam’s expensive pants from the dryer in the common laundry room.

Although her husband brings her to the homes of many other Indian immigrant families, the Hassams do not belong to any official groups or clubs. Sujita Hassam is more socially isolated in Seattle than she was during her brief residence in California: “Different there [in California], I was with my auntie, there was a lot of Indian people. Here I don’t have any friends, just my husband and my daughter.” She reports she is happy in her new marriage and is grateful because, she reflects, she was never really happy before. She has a positive general feeling about the Rainier Valley high school her step-daughter attends. She thinks her teacher is nice, and she has met with her occasionally.

Sujita Hassam dreams of buying a two-bedroom home. Her husband thinks they should move to a Tacoma suburb—closer to his job at the factory but a much farther commute for her. Despite their hardships and insecure financial position, Sujita Hassam is still optimistic about her future. She perceived her family as being squarely in the middle class of U.S. society, but her story illustrates the significant obstacles and hardships facing recent-immigrant, working-poor families in U.S. cities. Even with the support of family resources and working as many jobs as possible, many live on the edge of poverty in neighborhoods with a low quality of life, isolated from mainstream society. They also often lack access to health insurance and preventative medical care. Without a new rung on the ladder of the urban service-sector economy to provide stable living-wage jobs for recently arrived, low-skilled immigrants, the second and third generations of these families are at risk for downward assimilation into the growing ranks of the urban poor.

Karen’s Story

Karen Hsu is a forty-nine-year-old mother with two teenage children who lives with her husband and mother-in-law. She was born in Guangdong, China, and moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in 1980. When I asked why she had moved to Vancouver, she said, “My mother and my sister, my brother already here.” In China, she had completed only two years of high school. She quickly took advantage of educational opportunities after arriving in Vancouver; she took night courses in English as a Second Language (ESL) at Redwoods High School from 1980 to 1985.

Karen Hsu’s first job in Vancouver was as a seamstress in a factory. After toiling for several years—earning $3 per hour—in this difficult low-paying job, she met her husband, Lee Hsu. Lee Hsu currently works full-time as an electrician and takes on occasional handyman jobs. They were married in 1983. Soon after, she was laid off at the garment factory and began collecting unem-
ployment insurance benefits. A Canadian go-
vernment report about the situation and expenses to attend a six-month high school and she was unemployed. Many immigrant hotel counter reported benefiting from these federal courses work and, especially, internship place have lifted many from insecure poverty-wage jobs.

A close friend of Karen Hsu, Lucy Chen, ha-
Globe Hotel Vancouver. She recommended the dry cleaning Department, where a position had recently opened up at the Globe Hotel Laundry Dep-
artment—earning $6 per hour—and this time, the hotel began outsourcing me-
tors, and the staff scrambled to find job openi-
stressful, she said, “Everyone wants to go for th-

Today only two staff members continue to v-

Karen Hsu currently earns $14.84 per hour at and other benefits, including five weeks of pa-
ganizing rules in Canada and British Colum-

Karen Hsu had worked in th-
and planned to continue until she retires: “I’ve been years, retired.” Her union-based seniority pri-
to two or three days a week during the winter sl-
year. She described the job, “Yeah, it’s what the money, it’s okay.” Karen Hsu’s story sions in the service sector can provide wor-

Karen Hsu estimated that she and her hus-

Karen Hsu’s story contrasts with Sujita Hassar
eling personally insecure; for example, some

ting personally insecure; for example, some

eensive pants from the dryer in the common

er to the homes of many other Indian immi-

not belong to any official groups or clubs. Su-

ated in Seattle than she was during her brief

at there [in California], I was with my auntie,

dere I don't have any friends, just my husband

he is happy in her new marriage and is grate-

never really happy before. She has a positive

Valley high school her step-daughter attends.

d she has met with her occasionally.

ag a two-bedroom home. Her husband thinks

uburb — closer to his job at the factory but a

despite their hardships and insecure financial

omistic about her future. She perceived her

lidle class of U.S. society, but her story illus-

rd hardships facing recent-immigrant, work-

ven with the support of family resources and

; many live on the edge of poverty in neigh-

bors, isolated from mainstream society. They also

ence and preventative medical care. Without a

an service-sector economy to provide stable

ved, low-skilled immigrants, the second and

are at risk for downward assimilation into

-old mother with two teenage children who

r-in-law. She was born in Guangdong, China,

olumbia, Canada, in 1980. When I asked why

said, "My mother and my sister, my brother

pleted only two years of high school. She

onal opportunities after arriving in Vanco-

h as a Second Language (ESL) at Redlows

ver was as a seamstress in a factory. After toil-

r — in this difficult low-paying job, Hsu currently works full-time as an elec-

andyman jobs. They were married in 1983.

arment factory and began collecting unem-

ployment insurance benefits. A Canadian government program — through

Human Resources and Development Canada (HRDC) — paid Karen Hsu's tu-

ition and expenses to attend a six-month hospitality training course while

she was unemployed. Many immigrant hotel workers I interviewed in Van-

ouver reported benefiting from these federal training programs. Through the

ourse work and, especially, internship placements, these training programs

have lifted many from insecure poverty-wage jobs to more secure, living-wage

jobs.

A close friend of Karen Hsu, Lucy Chen, had recently begun working at the

Globe Hotel Vancouver. She recommended that Karen Hsu apply to the Laun-

dry Department, where a position had recently opened. She got the job and be-

gan working at the Globe Hotel Laundry Department at double her previous

seamstress wage — earning $6 per hour — and held that job for nine years. Dur-

ing this time, the hotel began outsourcing most of its laundry to subcon-

trators, and the staff scrambled to find job openings in other departments. It was

stressful, she said, "Everyone want to go for the other job."

Today only two staff members continue to work in the Laundry Department

of the Globe Hotel Vancouver. "And now everything go outside . . . it's more
difficult for the two people there." Fortunately, Karen Hsu’s hospitality cer-

ificate and selection privileges under the union contract helped her switch jobs

within the hotel and secure a position as a room attendant while maintaining

her seven-year seniority. After years of regularly scheduled wage increases,

Karen Hsu currently earns $14.84 per hour and has generous extended health

and other benefits, including five weeks of paid vacation per year. Union-or-

ganizing rules in Canada and British Columbia— in contrast to the United

States and Washington state — create a context in which a much higher per-

centage of hotel-industry workers are unionized in Vancouver than in Seattle.

When we met, Karen Hsu had worked in this establishment for twenty years

and planned to continue until she retires: "maybe work over there five or ten

years, retired." Her union-based seniority privileges allow Karen Hsu to work

two or three days a week during the winter slow season and full-time the rest

of the year. She described the job, "Yeah, it's a hard work but it's okay. If you

want the money, it's okay." Karen Hsu's story shows how stable unionized po-

sitions in the service sector can provide workers with a mainstream middle-

class quality of life and resources.

Karen Hsu estimated that she and her husband earn a combined pretax an-

nual income of $45,000. Although taxes are higher in general in Canada than

the United States, the income tax burden on the working poor is less in Canada,

especially for parents, because of generous tax credits. Karen Hsu estimated

they paid about $2,000 in taxes the previous year and received a $200 refund.

Karen Hsu's story contrasts with Sujita Hassam's in ways that reveal how work-

Introduction 17
ing-poor families in Seattle must rely much more heavily on personal resources to make ends meet than do those in Vancouver.

In 1987, Karen Hsu and her husband purchased a large five-bedroom home with a basement apartment about one block away from where they had been renting. In Vancouver, many single-family homes include a basement suite or small apartment, which homeowners rent out in order to help with their mortgage payments. The Hsus used to rent this apartment out for $600 per month; today, Karen Hsu's mother-in-law lives in the apartment. Their neighborhood is located southeast of the downtown core, close to Kingsway, and is similar to other neighborhoods where many other hotel workers I interviewed live. The Hsus live in a classic split level, probably built in the late 1960s. The rambling house provided what she describes as "just the right amount of space" for her, her husband, their two teenage children, and her mother-in-law. They have two cars, a 1997 Geo Tracker and an older 1989 Chevy Lumina, although she generally commutes to work by bus—a forty-five-minute trip each way. Karen Hsu appreciates the quality of life in her eastside Vancouver neighborhood and considers it a good place to raise her children. The impact of public infrastructure investment is obvious here. Karen Hsu's neighborhood boasts community centers and other family-friendly institutions. Both Karen Hsu and her fifteen-year-old son, Daniel Hsu, thought of their neighborhood as safe, and the family has no plans to move in the next several years.

During our interview, Daniel Hsu sat at the kitchen table with us and helped translate some of the questions and answers for his mother. A tall, lanky young man, he was happy to share his opinions. When I asked if there was an issue with crime in their neighborhood, he said, "Nothing happened here, for the past four years." Karen Hsu is very proud of her son, who just gained acceptance to a gifted and talented enrichment program at his high school. He told me the school has "very high math standards." Daniel Hsu also takes courses during the summer months through a summer school program and finds time to do some volunteer work as well. They also have a twelve-year-old daughter, Lucy. Like many immigrants, the Hsu family relied on their extended family for child care when their kids were young. While Karen Hsu and her husband worked, her mother and mother-in-law, as well as other relatives, watched after the children. "My mother-in-law, my mother and cousin. My father-in-law. Everyone help. Everybody help me." When I asked if she had paid them, she replied, "No afford to pay. I don't want to pay." Daniel chimed in, "Calling favors."

Karen Hsu's mother-in-law is unfortunately now quite ill and requires regular dialysis; yet the family has never had to worry about health expenses because of Canada's universal health insurance. The Canadian universal health insurance system mitigates financial stress that otherwise might be provoked by health crises. The family's regular doctor's of Karen Hsu's home by car. She had recently visit but does not have any major health problems. that she visited the doctor four to five times. H and her daughter twice. Although Canada's put not cover dental work, all of them had recently cleaning. The Hsus report making small annu lumbia Children's Hospital.

Though her job is fairly low-skilled, Karen liv ing squarely in the middle of the middle class i subjective sense of class location. In 1999, the location touring China for one month. Her son "China, mosquito bite town." With a paid-off credit card debt, the Hsu's largest regular mort property taxes, $700–800 for food, $220 for h insurance, and $300 per month for piano less savings and some retirement savings as well, tied up in their own home. Karen Hsu's story tendants and other hourly employees who I in

Overview

How do social and labor policy differences a ships experienced by the working poor in the U ter 2 describes previous research on urban p as well as findings from comparative research o It also contrasts trend data on poverty and in tries since the mid-1970s to show how differ these macro-level divergences.

Chapter 3 tells the story of my research, on Global Hotel study. I describe my research d ecures that I used. Descriptions of the four f each hotel—Housekeeping, Maintenance En set the scene.

Chapter 4 focuses on the differences in l States and Canada and the impact of these d ployes in Seattle and Vancouver. First, labor those relating to union-organizing rules and differences have resulted in a dramatic diver in the past forty years: from the 1950s to the 1 the nonagricultural labor force in the United union; after forty years of divergence, 35
by health crises. The family’s regular doctor’s office is located ten minutes from Karen Hsu’s home by car. She had recently visited because of “shoulder pain,” but does not have any major health problems. In the past year, she estimated that she visited the doctor four to five times. Her son went to the doctor once and her daughter twice. Although Canada’s publicly financed medical plans do not cover dental work, all of them had recently been to the dentist for a teeth cleaning. The Hsus report making small annual donations to the British Columbia Children’s Hospital.

Though her job is fairly low-skilled, Karen Hsu perceived her family as being squarely in the middle of the middle class in Canadian society, reflecting a subjective sense of class location. In 1999, the Hsu family went on a family vacation touring China for one month. Her son Daniel jokingly remembered, “China, mosquito bite town.” With a paid-off home, rental property, and no credit card debt, the Hsu’s largest regular monthly expenses include $200 for property taxes, $700–800 for food, $220 for hydro (utility bills), $200 for life insurance, and $300 per month for piano lessons. They have about $3,000 in savings and some retirement savings as well, but the majority of their equity is tied up in their own home. Karen Hsu’s story is not unusual among room attendants and other hourly employees who I interviewed in Vancouver.

**Overview**

How do social and labor policy differences affect the quality of life and hardships experienced by the working poor in the United States and Canada? Chapter 2 describes previous research on urban poverty and the working poor, as well as findings from comparative research on the United States and Canada. It also contrasts trend data on poverty and inequality between the two countries since the mid-1970s to show how differences in social transfers explain these macro-level divergences.

Chapter 3 tells the story of my research, outlining the methodology of the Global Hotel study. I describe my research design and the sampling and procedures that I used. Descriptions of the four hotel sites and of the divisions of each hotel—Housekeeping, Maintenance Engineering, and Guest Services—set the scene.

Chapter 4 focuses on the differences in labor policy between the United States and Canada and the impact of these differences on hotel-industry employees in Seattle and Vancouver. First, labor policy differences, in particular those relating to union-organizing rules and procedures, are described. These differences have resulted in a dramatic divergence between the two countries in the past forty years: from the 1950s to the 1970s, approximately 30 percent of the nonagricultural labor force in the United States and Canada belonged to a union; after forty years of divergence, 35 percent of Canada’s labor force...
presently belongs to a union compared to less than 14 percent in the United States. What are the implications of this difference for hotel workers in Seattle and Vancouver? Directly, unionized hotel jobs provided better benefits, job security, and work conditions. Indirectly, higher levels of union coverage in Canada have translated into stronger labor policy and other social policies that help all low-income workers.

Chapter 5 examines the impact of the differences in the health-care systems of the United States and Canada on the hotel employees and their families. The large and growing percentage of uninsured people in the United States is well established. It stands at 14 percent of the population—over 44 million people—larger than entire population of Canada. Yet there has been little systematic research on how health-care policy differences matter for the working poor.

Maintaining continuous health insurance coverage is a problem for many hotel workers in Seattle, despite the provision of health insurance benefits by the hotel. The main culprit is the waiting period for health insurance benefits, which ranges from three to six months and often longer for family coverage. Despite the fact that the hotels provide health benefits, over 25 percent of the employees in Seattle did not have health insurance at the time of their interview. Each time they change jobs, low-wage workers face the prospect of a new probationary period, even if the employer provides health insurance benefits. Even with insurance, many found the employee health benefits inadequate to prevent financial catastrophe and fewer sought and received preventative care in Seattle. In contrast, the universal health-care system in Canada decouples financial considerations from most health-care experiences. The findings suggest that the problems of the current health-care policy regime in the United States go well beyond individuals simply lacking health insurance.

Chapter 6 focuses on how differences in social welfare policies between the United States and Canada affect the quality of life and material hardships of hotel workers and their families. What differences are most important? In Vancouver, unemployment insurance provides the most important protection for hotel employees against material hardship. In Seattle, unemployment programs fail the working poor. The low replacement rate of benefits prevents unemployment insurance from acting as an effective social safety net; unemployment benefits for Seattle hotel workers are well below the income that can be earned in a minimum-wage job.

Few hotel workers in either city reported relying on public-assistance benefits, with the exception of minimal support benefits temporarily received by recently arrived refugees. In Vancouver, other government programs prevent hardships by providing financial assistance directly or helping workers build up financial resources in order to protect themselves during economic downturns. These programs include paid maternity savings programs, workers' compensation, subsidized day care. A comparison of income parents with children, such as the U.S. Earned Income Tax Credit, reveals that the current Child Tax Credit, double the supplement to families in Vancouver in Seattle. In Seattle, without government helped family or personal resources and on work meet in difficult economic times. More also live ends meet.

Chapter 7 examines how public infrastructure, transit, neighborhood, and community institutions the hotel workers outside the workplace. The public investment in Canada, compared to the Un differences between families or individuals do the same degree in Vancouver as in Seattle. More positive about their neighborhoods, almost "nice." They had access to more institution-rich, ment-funded community centers. Seattle community centers and other neighborhood institutions more problems with crime, such as theft and injury.

Chapter 8 describes the cumulative and intentional effects on how workers see themselves and their perceptions of what the future has in store for them. Vancouver perceived themselves to be far below the economic hierarchy than in Seattle. Workers were also somewhat more positive about their future.

Chapter 9 outlines policy recommendations. What kinds of policies and institutions that Hassam and Karen Hsu and the millions of other States and Canada? Specific policy reforms at provincial, and federal levels. This chapter goes icy changes—it is a call for action. It proposes a rethinking at the grassroots level to build coalitions for changes to improve the quality of life for a

Chapter 10 concludes the book with a sum discussion of their theoretical implications. In multinational franchises are opening in cities a portant to understand the impact of governn
ompared to less than 14 percent in the United States, this difference for hotel workers in Seat-
sonized hotel jobs provided better benefits, job security, and higher levels of union coverage in
onger labor policy and other social policies that shape the differences in the health-care systems.
act on the hotel employees and their families. The number of uninsured people in the United States is well
ent of the population—over 44 million people. Yet there has been little systemic analysis of health insurance coverage as a problem for many workers. The provision of health insurance benefits by employers is a waiting period for health insurance benefits, months and often longer for family coverage. Employers provide health benefits, over 25 percent of the workforce, health insurance at the time of their internship, low-wage workers face the prospect of a new employer providing health insurance benefits. The employee health benefits are inadequate to meet the needs of the workforce, health-care system in Canada decouples first-cost health-care experiences. The findings suggest a low-cost health-care policy regime in the United States simply lacking health insurance.

Differences in social welfare policies between the United States and Canada affect the quality of life and material hardships of workers. What differences are most important? In Vancouver, unemployment provides the most important protection for social hardship. In Seattle, unemployment protection is low, with the replacement rate of benefits preventing a person from acting as an effective social safety net. Unemployed workers are well below the income that can support a family, relying on public-assistance benefits temporarily received by them. Other government programs prevent the assistance directly or helping workers build to protect themselves during economic downturns. These programs include paid maternity leave, government-subsidized savings programs, workers' compensation, mandatory vacation benefits, and subsidized day care. A comparison of income supplements for low-income parents with children, such as the U.S. Earned Income Tax Credit and the Canadian Child Tax Credit, reveals that the current Canadian system provides nearly double the supplement to families in Vancouver than the U.S. system provides in Seattle. In Seattle, without government help, employees rely mostly on extended family or personal resources and on working multiple jobs to make ends meet in difficult economic times. More also live with extended families to make ends meet.

Chapter 7 examines how public infrastructure investment differences—in transit, neighborhood, and community institutions—affect the experiences of the hotel workers outside the workplace. The more egalitarian pattern of public investment in Canada, compared to the United States, means that income differences between families or individuals do not dictate the quality of life to the same degree in Vancouver as in Seattle. More workers in Vancouver were positive about their neighborhoods, almost uniformly describing them as “nice.” They had access to more institution-rich communities, such as government-funded community centers. Seattle employees did not report using community centers and other neighborhood institutions as much and described more problems with crimes, such as theft and muggings.

Chapter 8 describes the cumulative and interactive impact of these differences on how workers see themselves and their families in society and on their perceptions of what the future has in store for them. Fewer hotel workers in Vancouver perceived themselves to be far below the middle rung of the socioeconomic hierarchy than in Seattle. Workers in Vancouver with children were also somewhat more positive about their children’s futures. In Seattle, more workers expressed concern about their own place in society as well as hope in their predictions of their children’s futures.

Chapter 9 outlines policy recommendations based on the findings of this study. What kinds of policies and institutions would improve the lives of Sujita Hassam and Karen Hsu and the millions of other working poor in the United States and Canada? Specific policy reforms are discussed for the local, state/provincial, and federal levels. This chapter goes beyond arguing for specific policy changes—it is a call for action. It proposes democratic community organizing at the grassroots level to build coalitions to work across divides and fight for changes to improve the quality of life for all Americans and Canadians.

Chapter 10 concludes the book with a summary of the main findings and discussion of their theoretical implications. In a global era, when branches of multinational franchises are opening in cities around the world, it is vitally important to understand the impact of government policy on the lives of low-income workers.
income service-sector workers and their families. Social policies directly affect the quality of life and levels of material hardship experienced by working-poor families. The findings of the Global Hotel study reinforce the importance of a multidimensional analysis of equality involving more than income. The findings also contribute to the study of urban poverty.

An analysis of life in the postindustrial city also requires looking at larger forces outside of the city itself. Macro-level economic, social, and cultural forces intersect with state institutions and policies to shape the barriers and resources of people who are living, working, and striving to make ends meet. The systematic differences in the micro-level lived experiences of hotel workers, working in the same jobs for the same multinational companies in two different policy regimes, make clear that there is nothing inevitable about the globalization of the economy and rising levels of inequality and poverty. In countries experiencing growing poverty, what has been lacking is the collective will and imagination to live up to the democratic dream that can only realized on a foundation of equality of opportunity and outcomes.

CHAPTER 2
Poverty and Policy in the United States and Canada

Urban Poverty and the Focus on Pun
Much of the sociological research on urban poverty has focused on public-assistance recipients, particularly in the United States. As Mark Robert Rank describes (and in part, as Mark Robert Rank describes privileged,1 the pervasive myth that the poverty of the poor is due to poor tastes, and not a failure of the economy and society.2 Poverty can be reduced if the political will exists.

The U.S. official poverty line is set at an extremely low level, and it has been falling in recent years. Mark Robert Rank provides a useful comparison of the official poverty line with the median income:

Now imagine that, instead of the income you receive this month, next month you will be receiving only 71% of your income is suddenly gone. That
and their families. Social policies directly affect material hardship experienced by working-poor.

The global Hotel study reinforces the importance of a quality involving more than income. The finding of urban poverty.

A post-industrial city also requires looking at larger macro-level economic, social, and cultural institutions and policies to shape the barriers and regimens. Working, and striving to make ends meet. The micro-level lived experiences of hotel workers, the same multinational companies in two different cities, there is nothing inevitable about the global rising levels of inequality and poverty. In some poverty, what has been lacking is the collective to the democratic dream that can only realized opportunity and outcomes.

CHAPTER 2
Poverty and Policy in the United States and Canada

Urban Poverty and the Focus on Public Assistance

Much of the sociological research on urban poverty has focused myopically on public-assistance recipients, particularly in the United States. The reason is, in part, as Mark B. Rank describes (and explodes) in One Nation Underprivileged, the pervasive myth that the poverty problem is a values problem. Dating back even before the poor laws of Victorian England and the decrepit tenement houses described by Charles Dickens, the “blaming the victim” approach to poverty has a long and disgraceful Anglo history. According to this perspective, if only the poor would change their behavior and start following the rules—especially getting a job and getting married before having children—then poverty would be eliminated. Through the confounding lenses of race and segregation, arguments that the “poor are responsible for their plight” morphed into “culture of poverty” debates about urban poor ethnic minorities and ultimately transformed into welfare-reform debates. My Global Hotel study adds more empirical evidence, from a cross-national comparative perspective, to support Mark B. Rank’s reframing of poverty in the United States from a problem of individual failings of those living in poverty to one of the failure of government policies and institutions to keep up with changes in the economy and society. Poverty can be reduced dramatically in the United States if the political will exists.

The U.S. official poverty line is set at an extremely low level—and compared to median income, it has been falling in relative value since its creation in the mid-1960s. Mark B. Rank provides a useful thought experiment for readers not in poverty (although real enough for students living in temporary poverty):

Now imagine that, instead of the income you currently have coming in for this month, next month you will be receiving only 29% of your income. The other 71% of your income is suddenly gone. That 71% is the distance between your