Changes in the social geography of cities are among the most definitive indicators of the industrialization of Western urban life over the past two centuries. During the initial phase of this transformation, the concentration of industrialized production in cities exacerbated environmental pollution and housing congestion at a time when the increasing dependence of production on the wage labor of migrants strained traditional responses to social problems. The earliest use of the term *slum* expressed anxieties about these negative consequences of industrialization. Neither unsanitary and congested living conditions nor residential segregation appeared abruptly with the industrialization of urban employment; however, industrialization changed the scale of these developments and provoked anxieties about the management of larger and more highly differentiated urban communities.

While many migrants came from the immediate hinterlands of industrializing cities, substantial numbers were also drawn from afar. In the United States industrialization was inextricably linked with foreign immigration, and by the late nineteenth century foreign-born immigrants and their native-born children constituted a majority of the populations of most northeastern and midwestern cities. For a long time migration and urbanization were associated with the diminution of ethnic loyalties and affective ties and the development of new social groupings based upon class interests or occupational status. This social transformation has proved to be both prolonged and varied. In the United States the complex migrations of Native Americans, Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans have created a population with a striking level of ethnic diversity. This diversity has itself changed both in relation to the varying chronologies of migration from different source areas and in relation to the rate and kind of assimilation amongst those who became immigrants. Migrants have been viewed as temporary sojourners and immigrants as permanent settlers, but many immigrants arrived as migrants and con-
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sequently the term migrants will be used broadly to include the migrant generation of immigrant groups.

From the broad perspective of generalizations about the social transformation of modern society, the persistence of both migrant ethnicity and minority status over several generations has been regarded as an exceptional or residual phenomenon. Some groups have maintained their ethnic identities by a process of redefinition, but the degree to which they are culturally distinct from American society at large or from each other remains a matter of debate. Other groups have encountered temporary, prolonged, or permanent obstacles to their economic advancement, and their predicament has been linked to their minority status.

The term ghetto has become a popular and evocative expression of the negative consequences of the residential segregation of ethnically defined migrants in the inner-city slums. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the poor were identified with the slums, and although there were speculations about the cultural and hereditary limitations of the foreign-born poor, these deficiencies were broadly applied to the poor in general. With the shift in the predominant sources of foreign migration from northwestern to southern, central, and eastern Europe towards the turn of the nineteenth century, the desirability of assimilating these “new” immigrants complicated anxieties about poverty. Applied initially to the residential quarters of East European Jews who arrived in American cities towards the turn of the nineteenth century, the term ghetto gradually acquired a more general meaning to describe the residential segregation of any minority group in the slums of the inner city. In its initial American usage the ghetto was regarded as a slum where the presence of newly arrived immigrants exacerbated social problems related to adverse living conditions and residential segregation. Today the term usually refers to the extensive concentrations of blacks and other deprived minorities in the inner sections of American cities.

The slum and the ghetto were more than definitional terms, for they also implied strong causal connections between the poverty and social problems of the migrant poor and their segregation in the adverse environment of the inner city. During the second half of the twentieth century this negative image of the ghetto has become integral to interpretations of the current residents of the inner city. In contrast, during the same period the validity of this image to describe the experiences of those East European migrants to whom it was first applied has been questioned. Reevaluations of the migrant experience have explored a more complex set of connections among poverty, ethnicity, and the urban environment. For some groups concentration in the inner city was a source of local political power, a basis of economic advancement, and the ghetto was a symbol of ethnic identity. From this perspective the original view of the
migrant experience formulated during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exaggerated the pathological social consequences of residential segregation in the adverse environment of the inner city.

These retrospective reinterpretations of the migrant experience in American cities during the era of mass immigration have revealed the degree to which the cultural resources of ethnic groups alleviated many of the immediate problems of the urban environment, but the degree to which the changing structural environment of American capitalism also obstructed or facilitated the material advancement of these groups is less fully documented. In contrast, the original negative definition of the immigrant slum apparently had a prophetic validity as a description of the predicament of the deprived minorities who dominate the inner cities today. This prophetic validity is itself a matter of debate, and recent discussions of the slum and the ghetto have become part of a broader dialogue described as the “urban question.” This question confronts the degree to which the environmental constraints and social problems of the inner city are integral parts of the structural inequalities of the capitalist political economy. Both cultural and structural approaches to migration have questioned the relationships between the migrant poor and the inner-city environment, but these relationships were also a matter of dispute during the course of the experience of the mass immigration between about 1840 and 1925. Specifically, the precise definitions of the residents and their urban environment and the directions and the amplitudes of the connections between them were debated in relation to three different responses to the social problems of the city. Each of these responses claimed a validity based upon a “scientific” approach. Their different perspectives were, however, rooted not only in the rapidly accumulating body of observations on social problems but also in changing conceptions of poverty and the social order of the city. These changing conceptions were grounded in essentially geographic considerations of relationships between the migrant poor and their urban environment.

The relationships formulated

These responses form the subjects of the three chapters of Part I of this book. The first response is derived from those antebellum reform movements that proposed moral diagnoses of poverty. The slums were places where the most extreme manifestations of poverty and pathological living conditions were concentrated. Since the virulence of contagious diseases was linked to moral as well as environmental deficiencies, these highly publicized slums were the focus of most attention. Old assumptions about the endemic nature of poverty were abandoned, but confident assumptions about the “reformability” of the poor were initially based
upon concepts of moral influence. The mission and the asylum were the means by which immoral influences were removed. Their presumed effects were based upon the same concepts of contagion as those upon which fears of epidemic diseases were based. As the affluent had moved into their own exclusive residential areas, so had the poor been left to the contagious influences of the most depraved amongst them. The slums were the sources of this immoral contagion. The mission was a bridgehead of personal influences within the slums, and the asylum was a refuge to which those in need of more deliberate institutional influences could be removed.

Unsanitary conditions, however, extended far beyond the limits of these notorious slums and included most poorly drained sections of the city. Room overcrowding and lot congestion compounded the effects of poor sites, although it was only later in the nineteenth century that housing reform became the dominant focus of environmental improvement. As fears about congestion replaced those about contagion, a greater proportion of the blame for slum conditions was attributed to environmental defects and a lesser proportion to the moral defects of the poor. Massive investments in the improvement of the sanitary environment did diminish the impact of site conditions on living conditions, but the vast expansion of inadequate and often overcrowded housing created a more extensive and contiguous area of slums increasingly identified as the “social abyss” of the inner city.

This new scale of slum developments elicited a second response described as “scientific philanthropy.” Most urban social problems were concentrated in cities and especially the inner cities, but most of these problems were directly attributed to the environmental disabilities of the slums. It was assumed that once the environmental obstacles to self-improvement were removed, it would be possible to identify a “residuum,” or lowest stratum of the poor, for whom only punitive social policies were appropriate. Frequently, the social problems of this lowest stratum were judged to be derived not only from their degraded environment but also from their damaged heredity. The limited gains of moral reform provoked inquiries into the relative contributions of environment and heredity to the moral and physical disabilities of the poor. In the United States changes in the composition of foreign immigration compounded these anxieties about a residual impoverished and defective population. Newly arrived immigrants from southern, eastern, and central Europe were considered less compatible with the host society than were established immigrants from northwestern Europe. Under these circumstances the poor were defined by indicators other than income and were subjected to informal and institutionalized discrimination. When ethnic or racial prejudice exacerbated the social problems and environ-
mental disabilities of the slums, the term *ghetto* was employed to describe slums in which minorities were segregated from the remainder of urban society. Like the term *slum* in the antebellum period, the term *ghetto* was not used with any consistency to describe segregated residential quarters until after World War II, when it was used to describe the extensive concentrations of blacks in northern cities.

During the prolonged depressions of the midseventies and midnineties of the nineteenth century, interpretations of the slums explored not only the environmental but also the economic predicament of the poor. Only after the turn of the century did those public policies described as “progressive” attempt to confront economic insecurity. Although there was no lack of public initiatives to address the social problems of industrialization, progressives judged these earlier efforts to have been inadequate and misguided. Consequently the inner-city slums came to symbolize the social costs of laissez-faire policies during the expansion of industrial capitalism. By 1900 the necessity for a more ambitious and professional level of public intervention was apparent, and social reform was increasingly dependent upon a cadre of trained professionals. These specialists no longer attempted to restore the unified moral order of the past but rather attempted to confront the complex interdependencies of the modern city. Initially this third response to the slums explored some of the ways in which migrants coped with their adverse environment and the degree to which this environment was itself derived from structural sources of poverty. In their efforts to avoid single-factor deterministic explanations like those of their predecessors, many progressives lost sight of some early insights into the structural nature of poverty. Instead they viewed social problems as the product of an infinite number of complex interdependencies that required lengthy investigations before action could be contemplated. New public policies were formed to harness the methods and findings of science, but debates about the policies themselves were often less critical than were discussions of the degree of independence an expert bureaucracy would have from legislative direction and popular sentiments.

Throughout the nineteenth century the obstacles to the self-improvement of the poor were increasingly attributed to the deficiencies of the urban environment, and eventually the progressives included among these obstacles the unregulated impact of industrial capitalism. Until about 1920 interpretations of the migrant experience had been inextricably connected to these debates about the level and kind of public and private intervention. Thereafter, this connection between problems and policies diminished, and despite spasmodic revivals, generalizations about migration and urbanization have subsequently been grounded in theories of social change that reveal a growing confidence in the poten-
tialities of the second stage of industrialization as a source of social mobility and higher living standards. In the second half of the nineteenth century a preoccupation with the environmental deficiencies of the slums had obscured the structural obstacles to self-improvement. Similarly, the decentralization of employment and the material gains symbolized by the vast expansion of suburbs in the twentieth century have obscured the structural sources of social mobility.\(^3\)

The inner-city slums were now judged to be temporary residential quarters of the migrant generation, and eventually the role of ethnic resources in coping with the adverse environment was elaborated. The environmental obstacles to mobility were judged to be less critical than the need for slum residents to assimilate to the host society. Ethnicity rather than poverty became the leading issue in interpretations of the migrant experience. The ghetto was a temporary phase of a social transformation that began with emigration and ended with assimilation. Part II examines how reinterpretations of the migrant experience have viewed the urban environment and specifically the immigrant slums as expressions of cultural and structural processes. Chapter 5 explores the development of interpretations of migrant experiences that stress the complexities of assimilation and the changing role of ethnicity in that experience. Chapter 6 discusses interpretations of migration that have amplified the degree to which ethnic resources facilitated adaptations to the urban environment, but as part of a broader interpretation of the relationships between ethnicity and the sequential, uneven structure of industrialization.

The relationships reformulated

The Chicago School of urban sociology set the agenda for the reconsideration of the migrant experience in cities. Its interpretation of urban society, like that of the progressives, was more complex than its critics have acknowledged. The Chicago School rejected the scientific claims of earlier reformers and argued that its own style of detached academic research was necessary to avoid the moralism of investigations motivated by reform objectives. In fact, the first generation of the Chicago School owed much to the insights of earlier reform perspectives.\(^4\) The most perceptive of the progressives had qualified assumptions about the pathological aspects of the migrant experience, and the Chicago School certainly tempered its focus on the blighted environment of the inner city by an awareness of ethnic community.\(^5\) Its interpretation of the ethnic social order of the inner city was, however, based upon residential propensity, and accordingly the suburban dispersal of ethnic groups was viewed as a measure of assimilation. Although its interpretations of
assimilation and suburbanization have been questioned, the Chicago School did recognize that the discomforts and exclusions of the inner city were not necessarily direct causes of pathological social conditions but rather a setting in which most migrant groups made remarkable accommodations. Initially these accommodations were thought to be derived from direct transplantations of the traditional social order of village life. These transplanted communities served as a decompression chamber for the migrant generation; however, for the second generation they often created obstacles to assimilation.

Subsequent research has revealed major adaptations among the migrant generation and slower rates of assimilation in the subsequent generations. The social fabric of ethnic groups was based upon both institutional and familial arrangements. This social order was not necessarily dependent upon highly concentrated residential patterns but rather upon discrete patterns of several clusters that served as nodes of more dispersed populations. In the short run these arrangements facilitated adaptations to an adverse environment, and in the long run they served as a “ramp” for economic advancement. The coping capacities of the vast majority of migrants modified the impact of those obstacles to self-improvement that had formed the basis of the original definitions of the slums. The selectivity in the rate at which the obstacles to social mobility were overcome was accordingly linked to the cultural resources of various ethnic groups. These ethnic communities have collectively been linked to an apparently “exceptional” American way of coping with industrialization. Some observers have demonstrated how ethnicity and neighborhood rather than class and employment were the predominant sources of political loyalties and actions. Others have argued that the ethnic adaptations of the migrant generation and the subsequent mobility of their descendants reveal a predominant commitment to a middle-class consciousness. In contrast, an adverse environment and residential segregation are major constraints on the advancement of the minorities who dominate the inner city today, but sometimes it is implied that limitations of ethnic resources magnify these constraints. This view of the predicament of current residents of the inner city resembles not only the original negative formulation of the immigrant slum but also the now rejected defamatory distinctions between the “old” and “new” immigrations, upon which the immigration restriction legislation of 1923–4 was based. The immigrant slum was initially defined as a ghetto at a time when the so-called new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were unlikely or undesirable candidates for assimilation.

Alternative approaches to these differences in the migrant experience have stressed the degree to which ethnicity is an expression of the structural relationships between migration and industrialization. A preoccu-
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pitation with the varied cultural adaptations of family and community has somewhat obscured broader class-based efforts to retain or obtain control of the workplace. From the structuralist perspective, environmental and social problems that have been attributed to the damaging impact of migration and urbanization are viewed as secondary consequences of the capitalist political economy. Like cultural interpretations of migration, structural interpretations of urban society rarely elaborate the contingent effects of the relationships between the migrants and their urban environment. The negative social consequences of capitalism do have an unusual virulence amongst some migrant groups and they do have an unusual intensity in the inner city, but they are not necessarily confined to segregated minorities. Cultural interpretations of the migrant experience have great difficulty in specifying the environmental restraints on economic advancement and assimilation, whereas structural interpretations consider these restraints at a level that discounts the varied consequences of ethnicity. Environmental constraints may, however, be redefined so that the immediate environs of the inner city are seen as part of a national economy within which the migrant experience was constrained by rates of regional economic development and decline, as well as by levels of residential segregation in a particular city.

The inner-city slums, as a distinctive expression of the uneven patterns of industrialization, were part of a more complex and contingent set of environmental restraints on economic advancement and assimilation. As migrants encountered the inner city, or any other generically defined destination, their ethnicity was redefined. The ethnicity of the immediate ancestral generations of migrants was an identity directly rooted in diverse local cultures. The ethnic traits of most of the descendants of the migrant generation do not differ markedly from each other or from those of the host society. In contrast, the “emergent” ethnicity of the migrant generations defined their capacities to cope with the disruptive consequences of industrialization. The uneven and varied course of industrialization altered the constraints of the urban environment and these structural changes amplified ethnic identities. For some groups this experience remains a source of ethnic pride, but as a fragment of a larger identity rooted in the host society. For other groups, this experience remains a persistent source of frustration, and their minority status describes their deprived relationship to the remainder of society.

Unlike those interpretations of the slum and the ghetto that were derived from the underlying ideas of contemporary reform movements, reinterpretations of the relationships between migration, industrialization, and urbanization have stressed their detachment from the presuppositions of public policies. Detachment has not, however, diminished the degree to which interpretations of social processes remain a matter of
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debate. In both the original formulations of the slum and the ghetto and the subsequent reevaluations of those original perspectives, geographic considerations of culture and environment and of people and place constitute a common thread in a shifting set of interpretations of migrants in the inner city. This book is about how changing conceptions of the relationships between migrants and their urban environment influenced interpretations of that experience.
PART I

The relationships formulated