

Deindustrialization and Dynamics of 'Race' and Class in the US and the UK

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Introduction

De-industrialization refers to the loss of industry, particularly manufacturing, that has occurred in the US and the UK. The term refers not to a specific historical event, but rather to an ongoing process that marks not only a profound economic transformation, evident increased socio-economic polarisation and the rise of new forms of labour, but also a social and cultural process which radically changes communities.

Across the UK and the US, cities and regions have been irrevocably altered through economic restructuring, as both the meanings of work and 'community' are forever changed. Deindustrialization also interacts with other social processes such as the rise of post-Fordism, suburbanization, and the rise of neoliberal political ideologies and modes of governance, leading to a degree of heterogeneity in the experiences of communities experiencing such social changes.

Deindustrialisation marks the marginalisation of forms of social organization, social identity, and social relations as within these cities existing social and spatial relations, identities, and constructions of community are altered, particularly in relation to 'race', class, and gender. Patterns of social inequality and the representations of such differences are made and remade, informing understandings of 'us' and 'them', leading to new forms of 'boundary work' that variously serve to challenge and reproduce existing social divisions. This is experienced not just in relation to the present, but also the past, as deindustrialization marks a struggle in which the meaning and significance of the past is a source of ongoing tension and contestation. It is these changes that the research project aims to get to grips with.

Aims

1. To understand more fully the dynamics of 'race' and class within de-industrialised settings.
2. To examine the roles that 'race' and class play in constructions of 'community'?
3. To consider how individuals make sense of social change.
4. To compare the experiences of deindustrialization between the US and the UK, where modes of governance, urban geography, demography, and the nature of deindustrialization differ.

Methods

The study employs a broadly ethnographic approach, using observation, semi-structured life-history interviews, and archival research. The aim is to complete 60-80 qualitative interviews which, along with the data collected through archival analysis and observation of community meetings and more informal interactions, will provide an in-depth understanding of how deindustrialisation has impacted upon residents and their everyday lives.

The research also uses a case study approach, with Youngstown, Ohio and Burnley selected as the locations for comparison. Both locations share key experiences of de-industrialization and related social issues such as declining population rates, depressed housing markets and high rates of housing vacancy, socio-economic deprivation, high unemployment, stark levels of socio-economic polarisation, racial segregation, and disproportionately high crime rates. The use of case studies enables a more nuanced account of two specific settings and the impact of de-industrialization within them. It seeks also to situate these case studies within broader national experiences of economic restructuring.

The fieldwork is currently ongoing but it is expected to be completed by the end of 2011.



The demise of the neighbourhood bar, the now closed Riverbend Tavern, Youngstown, Ohio.