

Karen Brodtkin (2000). "Race Making." *How Jews Became White Folks*.

Main Point: Prior to the early nineteenth century, all Europeans were more or less considered white in the United States. Much of the division that occurred thereafter revolved around which groups performed unskilled labor. Groups that dominated unskilled occupations were often considered nonwhite. Even when whites and nonwhite worked in the same occupations, they were often segregated. Specific occupations tended to be dominated by certain ethnic groups as well, such as Jews in the garment industry. Unions also played a large role in which ethnic groups were admitted and thus which ethnic groups received employment opportunities. Whiteness was a key factor in the admission process, linking skin color to job degradation. For Blacks, slavery played a key role in the creation of the Black race amidst a diverse African population

Central Issues and Concepts

- Certain ethnic groups tended to dominate different occupations. Race and whiteness was inextricably linked to how skilled or unskilled the occupations that ethnic groups tended to hold.
- Another explanation as to why ethnic immigrants tended to dominate unskilled occupations is that there were more desperate and less knowledgeable about the value of their skills. Consequently, immigrants were more willing to work for less money and at menial jobs.
- Definitions of race have mattered a great deal in determining employment opportunities.
- Jobs were often labeled skilled or unskilled based on which group dominated the occupation

Two Key Quotes:

"The degraded jobs of the nonwhite workforce in the garment industry stand in sharp contrast to the artisan-like conditions that prevailed in building trades, where white unions, with explicit approval from the government and tacit consent or enthusiasm from employers, policed both the conditions of labor and who was allowed to work" (p. 63).

"Race did more than divide and conquer—though it certainly did that. Blackness and whiteness separated, segmented, and segregated the ways of *being* working class" (p. 71).

Two Questions:

1. Why did certain ethnic groups tend to dominate certain occupations?
2. How does Brodtkin argue that the Jewish experience shatters that myth that ethnic groups got worse jobs because they were less skilled?