



## Making a Living in the Streets of Los Angeles: An Ethnographic Study of Day Laborers

Daniel Melero Malpica  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the social organization of Latino migrants who openly sell their labor at the street-corner, labor markets in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. In contrast to the characterization of day-labor sites as competitive or unstructured, this study demonstrates that these markets have a variety of structural forms that provide the organizational basis for bringing together prospective employers and seekers of work, the *esquineros*. Like all other markets, the day-labor market has customs and rules that apply as participants seek efficiency in dealing with each other and with their clients. The rules are unwritten and based largely on practice or precedent, but they govern many aspects of the work relationships, including the wage relationship. This study found that day-labor markets respond less to competition and more to informal work rules and to the role of customary relationships.

*Keywords:* 1. international migration, 2. undocumented migration, 3. day laborers, 4. labor markets, 5. Los Angeles.

### RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la organización social de migrantes latinos que abiertamente venden su fuerza laboral en los mercados de trabajo de las esquinas del área metropolitana de Los Ángeles. En contraste con la caracterización de los sitios de trabajo de los jornaleros urbanos como competitivos o desestructurados, este estudio demuestra que estos mercados tienen una variedad de formas estructurales que proveen la base organizativa para reunir a empleadores potenciales y a quienes buscan trabajo, *los esquineros*. Como todos los demás, este mercado de trabajo tiene costumbres y reglas que se aplican cuando los participantes buscan eficiencia en su trato entre ellos y con sus clientes. Estas reglas no están escritas y se basan en gran medida en la práctica y el precedente, pero gobiernan muchos aspectos de las relaciones de trabajo, incluyendo la relación de salario. Este estudio encontró que el mercado de trabajo de los jornaleros urbanos responde menos a la competencia y más a las reglas de trabajo informal y al papel de las relaciones de costumbre.

*Palabras clave:* 1. migración internacional, 2. migración indocumentada, 3. jornaleros urbanos, 4. mercados de trabajo, 5. Los Ángeles.

Fecha de recepción: 2 de octubre de 2002

Fecha de aceptación: 6 de noviembre de 2002

*Introduction\**

The scene is a day-labor site in downtown Los Angeles. It is 6:30, the morning light is just a grayish tinge in the sky. Bundled up in jackets and sweat shirts, 22 men are standing at *la esquina*, in front of a hardware store on Pico and Main, breathing wisps of fog into the air.<sup>1</sup> For blocks around, men slowly trudge toward *la esquina* as the rush-hour traffic blurs past. The men gather on both sides of the street, spilling over into the adjacent streets. They greet each other with handshakes, talking like old friends. They seem unworried by the dearth of jobs.

Among them is a short, chubby guy called Chespirito, who seems to be about 21 years old.<sup>2</sup> He's wearing two colored cotton T-shirts, paint-spattered khaki pants, and a nylon cap. His clothes are completely worn out from the work he performs. He carries with him a paper lunch bag, which he uses to sit on in the afternoons after he has eaten his lunch. He seems to be in high spirits and jokes with the other *esquineros*.<sup>3</sup>

Every morning, rain or shine, hundreds of hopeful laborers gather on these streets desperately in search of work, as they risk arrest, fines, exploitation, and even deportation. Unable to land a regular job, they seek work at these curbside hiring sites. If a car pulls over, they will rush to the vehicle, competing for the job being offered. The transaction is fast. Employers pull over to the sidewalk, and the *esquineros* do the rest, as they swarm to the vehicle, trying to win the job. But sometimes an employer is particular, and a lineup spontaneously occurs. Some employers go for obvious strength—*Greñas* (Mop Head), for example, gets many jobs simply because he is a big guy. Others have specific requirements—an employer doing a muddy, dirt-moving job might look for a man with boots.

The *esquineros* are mostly young, male, non-English-speaking, unskilled, and undocumented migrants, transplanted to *la esquina* from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and other countries. They come as early as 6:00 a.m. and wait until as late as 3:00 p.m. in the hope of being hired for a

\*I am greatly indebted to Edward Telles and Roger Waldinger for their unwavering support throughout this study. I also would like to thank Edith Chen, Robert Emerson, Steven Gold, Leslie Howard, Jack Katz, Ivan Light, Vilma Ortiz, Kristine Zentgraf, and the anonymous reviewers of *Migraciones Internacionales* for their helpful comments and suggestions on previous drafts. All errors remaining are, of course, mine.

<sup>1</sup> Although there are actually two corners along the strip where the workers wait, my informants referred to the location with a simple nomenclature—*la esquina* (the corner). This is how I will refer to it here.

<sup>2</sup> I have substituted pseudonyms for the names of the day laborers in order to maintain confidentiality.

<sup>3</sup> I will use the term *esquineros* (which roughly translates as street-corner men) to refer to those at *la esquina*. *Esquineros* refer to themselves or to other fellow workers using this noun. Another Spanish term, less widely used in this context, is *jornalero* (day laborer).



day or two or finding a lead for a job. Some have spent their last nickel to get to *la esquina* and are in desperate need. When the hour grows late, they begin to squat down.

Waiting and more waiting is the norm for the *esquineros*. While they wait, they talk and listen to the experienced men give advice. “They say that it’s best to get paid in cash, every day, not by checks, because some contractors have given ‘hot’ checks”, *Greñas* explains to me. Here at *la esquina*, they also make new friends; gamble by tossing dimes or quarters; share invaluable information about possible living arrangements or give tips to one another about the hiring process; read the Spanish newspaper *La Opinión*; make catcalls or wolf-whistles at the “*morras*” (“chicks”) passing by; and talk about the search for full-time work and future dreams.

From the safety of their cars, often with rolled-up windows and locked doors, passersby can see the *esquineros* leaning against the fenced parking lot of the hardware store, while others squat, read, gulp on beer or a cheap, sweet wine, which is shared among a few members. Those on foot who are unfamiliar with the area hurry past, feeling intimidated by the *esquineros*. Police drive by, glance at them indifferently, and go their way. The hours pass, and no one is hired... A few hours later, a black Toyota pickup truck, with two Mexican-Americans inside, cruises by. The one at the steering wheel is toying with an unlit cigarette between his lips, the one on the passenger side has a sparse but long moustache.

“*Necesito seis trabajadores fuertes para un jale [trabajo] a cuatro bolas [dólares] la hora*” (“I need six strong men for a gig at four bucks an hour”), the one with the moustache yells in broken Spanish as soon as the pickup comes to a stop at *la esquina*. “*¡Cinco bolas! ¡Seis bolas!*” (“Five bucks! Six bucks!”), shout about a half dozen *esquineros*. The employer accepts the first offer by stretching out his hand, indicating that he is willing to pay \$5 dollars.<sup>4</sup>

Before the Mexican-American can say how many workers he wants, *esquineros* have already converged on the pickup, surrounding it completely. About 15 guys jump onto its bed, while others, shouting, ask those in the cab where the job site is. The employers barely pay any attention. The driver opens his door and stares at those who have jumped into the back. He studies them, and points, “*Tú... Tú... Tú,*” (“You... You... You”), until he gets to five, “*el resto, bájense*” (“the rest of you, get down”). One by one, those who were not chosen jump to the ground, until only the selected ones are left. Meanwhile, the rest of the *esquineros* and I have become the spectators of this daily ritual.

<sup>4</sup> The ethnographic present of this article is 1992, when the minimum wage in California was \$4.25 per hour. Despite the fact that fieldwork was conducted in 1992, most of the findings in this article are still relevant today.

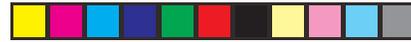
About 3:00 p.m., the group begins breaking up little by little, everybody going in different directions. Chespirito says that he's going to a shelter where they provide people with food and a place to sleep. He bids farewell to his three companions, shaking the hand of each one, and he remarks to the group, "*Mañana será otro día*" ("tomorrow's another day"). Those not employed will be back tomorrow. And so the day closes on a sight that is part of the permanent landscape of most Los Angeles area cities.

Who are these *esquineros*? Where do they come from? How do they know about *la esquina*? Are all the *esquineros* at the site seeking work? Are the *esquineros* sojourners or permanent settlers? How do these characteristics influence work orientations? How does one become an *esquinero*? How is the hiring done? What is the relationship between employer and employee? These and other questions have brought the author to the streets of Los Angeles in search of answers.

In most cities in the Los Angeles area the increased use of Latino day laborers began in the 1960s, but only at the end of that decade and in the early 1970s did it become a subject of journalistic interest. The press devoted considerable space to the issue, describing the risks and exploitation to which these workers were subject, moving the readership and attracting the attention of politicians (Cervantes and Hicks, 1994; Bacon, 1998). However, except for frequent journalistic accounts illustrating aspects of day labor, most people know little about this phenomenon. Even today, when day-labor sites have become a permanent feature of the Los Angeles area, social scientists have yet to study them in a systematic way. A noticeable exception is the important work of Abel Valenzuela (2001; 2002), who presents demographic and general characteristics of day-labor sites based on survey work with 481 day laborers at 87 hiring sites throughout Southern California. Despite the advances resulting from Valenzuela's work, we still know very little about the social organization of day-labor employment and the social norms and values that govern this particular occupational niche and culture.

This article examines the social organization of young Latino migrants who sell their labor at the street-corner, drive-by labor markets in the Los Angeles area. The academic literature on day-labor markets is scarce, and studies on the social organization underpinning this informal labor niche are even rarer.<sup>5</sup> This study seeks to fill that gap. At first sight, it appears that day-labor sites are completely disorganized, even chaotic. A sense of randomness prevails, no clear boundaries exist, there are no entry or exit requirements, rules or norms appear to be absent, and status hierarchies and unions are lacking. In general, no organization is

<sup>5</sup> The academic literature on Latino day laborers is generally scarce (see Malpica, 1992; 1996; Quesada, 1999; Valenzuela, 2001; 2002).



apparent on either side of the market. Moreover, the labor supply seems extremely elastic, competition is keen, and there is no legal enforcement of the statutory minimum wage. Furthermore, simple supply and demand appear to determine wages, much as occurs with the prices of stocks and bonds. That is, every market participant knows each bid and offer or the terms of each transaction and may alter his proposals in the light of this information. In short, the day-labor sites could be characterized as competitive or unstructured.

An understanding of labor markets requires recognition that the workplace is a social organization, at least informally, and that labor markets take on significant social characteristics that do not characterize commodity and financial markets and that are not readily encapsulated in ordinary demand-and-supply analysis. The social aspects of labor markets are particularly significant to the operation of day-labor sites because day laborers' social characteristics help to provide those markets with their institutional forms. For any labor market, it is possible to specify the institutional forms within which buyers and sellers generally operate. The day-labor market is no exception.

This study is thus an effort to explore the elements of order in the ostensibly disorganized day-labor market. This article begins by introducing the research methods and the ethnographic field sites. It continues by presenting a general background of the history of day-labor markets in the United States, and it describes the changes that have occurred in the labor-market experience of Mexican migrants in the United States.<sup>6</sup> It then discusses the labor-force characteristics of the day laborers. The next section spells out the conditions of the "structureless" model for labor markets as it applies to the California harvest labor market, which is the best illustration of an unstructured occupational labor market. This conceptual framework is then used to view the day-labor markets in the Los Angeles area. Specifically, this study will attempt to demonstrate that the apparently disorganized day-labor sites may have a complex and well-established organization of their own. A significant portion of the article examines in detail various elements of this informal organization.

### *Research Methods and Ethnographic Field Sites*

This study is based on fieldwork conducted from September 1990 through December 1991 at Pico and Main (downtown Los Angeles) and from January 1992 through April 1992 at Sawtelle and Santa

<sup>6</sup> Day laborers are not all Mexicans. Although Mexicans are the most numerous and have the longest migration history, the day-labor scene in Los Angeles also comprises significant numbers of other Latino migrants. This article focuses on Mexican day laborers.

Monica (West Los Angeles). I base this article on participant observation<sup>7</sup> and in-depth interviews with 10 *esquineros* at Pico and Main and 11 *esquineros* at Sawtelle and Santa Monica (Weiss, 1994; Lofland and Lofland, 1995). In addition, I gathered extremely useful information from six key informants, who came from both sites. During months of informal conversations, I queried them extensively on an array of subjects. These methods have been invaluable to my research because I was able to observe the daily activities of the *esquineros* and the interaction with their employers.

Given the undocumented legal status of most *esquineros*, I employed a gradual approach to fieldwork. While I was in the field, the effects of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (known as IRCA) were at their height (Cornelius, 1992). The U.S. Congress had passed IRCA to discourage the influx of undocumented migrants into the United States, and through one of its major provisions—sanctions against employers of undocumented immigrants—make working without legal documentation much harder. Because IRCA resulted in a scarcity of employment options for Latino immigrants, many turned to day labor to survive. At the same time, *esquineros* selling their labor in the streets of Los Angeles became even more vulnerable, making it necessary for them to live with the fear of being deported by *la Migra* (the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service) as they awaited work or being exploited by unscrupulous employers (Amado, 1989; Vidal, 1992). I thus chose to conduct the in-depth interviews toward the end of the study, when a foundation of trust had been established. To achieve that trust, I initially immersed myself in participant observation: I spent many months with these men, observing and listening to the way they went about getting jobs, establishing networks, disseminating information about living arrangements and counterfeit documents, learning the ropes of day-labor work, and more.

### *Pico and Main*

I first conducted fieldwork along a busy, one-block strip on Pico, between Main and Broadway, in downtown Los Angeles. This is an important day-labor site—one of Los Angeles's oldest and most frequented, on the outskirts of the garment district. This is an area where Latinos predominate in general and almost everyone speaks

<sup>7</sup> Several factors facilitated my task as a participant observer. First, since Spanish is my mother tongue, I was able to interpret nuances in speech, the tone in which a statement was made, and even silence. Furthermore, I was able to phrase questions in a manner that was comfortable and meaningful to my informants. Secondly, my age helped immensely in this research, since I was about the same age of most *esquineros*. Thirdly, *la esquina* is a male-dominated world so my gender enabled me to fit in easily.



Spanish, though one also hears some people mix Spanish and English with incredible creativity. On average, from 60 to 70 *esquineros* converge here, but numbers can range from 20 to 120, depending on the weather, police activity, economic conditions, and other factors. I estimate that half of the *esquineros* are Mexican; the rest are from various countries in Central America. On a good day, 22 *esquineros* can find temporary jobs, but the average is closer to 12. Those doing the hiring are Anglos, Asians, and Latinos. The *esquineros'* preference for Anglo employers is unanimous.

Between the two corners are a hardware store and a fenced parking lot, with an entrance on Pico and another on Main. Around both entrances, clusters of five or six young men gather, motioning to passing cars with an index finger, indicating that they are available for work. Others gather along the strip. *Esquineros* are hired on weekdays, between 6:00 am and 3:30 p.m., and on Saturdays, until around midday, but on Sundays, very few show up.

Visible from *la esquina* is a travel agency that posts a big sign: *Viajes Baratos en Autobús a México*. For the *esquineros*, this sign means more than what it simply says: Cheap Bus Fares to Mexico. The sign reminds the *esquineros* of the destiny awaiting them if they do not find a job soon. And going home without having sent back enough money to minimally break even with the expenses of their trip means failure, subjecting the men to ridicule in their hometowns.

A few doors down from the travel agency is a Korean-owned store that sells purses; down the street is a small hamburger stand that caters to the *esquineros*; a shop selling sundries; and beyond, a fabric store. Across the sidewalk on Pico, Osorio's lunch truck arrives at 7:00 every morning, staying until 2:00 in the afternoon, when most workers are either about to leave for home or have been picked up for work. The lunch-truck owner has a lucrative business that profits from the day laborers. Although most men at *la esquina* are seeking day-labor jobs, I learned that some use the corner for other purposes. For example, some work at night and come to interact socially. Others are there to sell cigarettes, alcohol, "hot items," or anything else that turns up. Finally, there are a few who are usually drunk and neither have a job nor want one.

### *Sawtelle and Santa Monica*

The second research site is at the busy intersection of Sawtelle and Santa Monica, five minutes south of the University of California, Los Angeles campus, close to the 405 Freeway. This corner attracts from 55 to 60 *esquineros*, all seeking a day's wage. The typical *borrachitos* (drunks)

are also present, but their numbers are small. “Here people are serious about getting work,” the *esquineros* regularly pointed out. Indeed, very few show up exclusively to socialize. On any given day, about 20 or more of these *esquineros* will earn a wage. In contrast to the Pico field site, hiring at Sawtelle and Santa Monica takes place seven days a week.

Most of these *esquineros* are Mexican (those from Mexico City, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, and Oaxaca predominate) and Central American. As they approach, those who can afford to buy coffee and croissants or bagels from a shop, which is part of a mini-mall that includes a 7-Eleven store. It is on the corner by the mini-mall that most of the *esquineros* congregate, although some position themselves at the other three corners of this busy intersection, with a few grouped a half-a-block away. At all of these locations, a substantial number of customers come to shop, conduct business, socialize at the several coffee shops, or wait for the public transportation.

Many of the *esquineros* pool their money to rent an apartment on Sawtelle, so that they can walk to the site. There are also those unfortunate few who live under the 405 Freeway. Others use public transportation to get to the site. Enrique, who lives in Boyle Heights, takes three buses and spends \$3.10 each day. On his way to *la esquina*, he passes several informal hiring sites, but he prefers Sawtelle and Santa Monica because “the police don’t bother us here, and nobody will work for under \$5. Moreover, there are fewer low-paying *Chinos* (“Asians”) and Hispanics at this *esquina*.” Here, most of the employers are Anglos or Middle Eastern immigrants. When Asians appear at this *esquina* seeking workers, few *esquineros* head towards the automobile. “Not only do they pay little money, but they work us like mules; worse yet, they leave us anywhere after we finish the work,” Perico complained to me. By far, the preferred employers at this day-labor site are Anglos.

### *Background*

The street-corner labor market is not a new institution in the United States. The tradition dates at least as far back as 1834, in New York City, where the statute books show that a “place was set aside on city streets where those seeking work could meet with those who wanted workers” (Martínez, 1972:8). Day-labor operations have existed in California, Texas, New Jersey, and Florida for many years, although the number of pickup points changes markedly from year to year (Fujimoto, 1968). An estimated 3,000 *esquineros* were in Los Angeles in the late 1980s (Grossman, 1989). A decade later, estimates place the number at 20,000 who are seeking work on a daily basis (Anorve, Osborne, and Salas, 2000). These sites have usually been strictly informal and not



operated or supervised by any government entity.<sup>8</sup> Historically, especially in California, day-labor sites functioned for agricultural workers, who were once drawn largely from skid row areas. Besides a congregation of alcoholics, hoodlums, and other outcasts, skid rows once served as a magnet for labor. Families and single workers, who lacked transportation to get to workplaces, sought employment from contractors who recruited at these sites.

Fred H. Schmidt (1964) describes a typical day-labor site in Los Angeles in the 1960s:

Essentially, it is an "on street" location in the central part of Los Angeles having several all-night cafes where workers can linger while labor contractors assemble to transport them from the city (between 4:30 and 6:30 a.m.) to the agricultural areas. The contractors or their drivers, the producers or their foremen, circulate among the workers describing the job, the rate of pay, the conditions of the field, and the distance from town (1964:38).

Similarly, Michael Harrington, in his classic work *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, describes this phenomenon in Stockton, California, one of the centers of migrant labor:

The workers 'shape up' at three o'clock in the morning. There is a milling mass of human beings down by skid row, and they are there to sell themselves in the market place. Those who are lucky enough to get work are crammed into unsafe pickup trucks and transported like cattle to the work site (1962:53).

As far back as the 1940s, the day-labor markets were not an uncommon sight in Los Angeles; skilled workers of every ethnic group squatted by their toolboxes waiting for construction work. Ever since, new street-side hiring sites have evolved as the region has developed.

During the post-war era, the U.S. labor market for migrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries was changing (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr, 1996; Roberts, Frank, and Lozano-Ascencio, 1999). Migration between 1942 and 1964, the period of the Bracero Program, was predominantly to work in agriculture (Calavita, 1992). Since then, although Latin American migrants still come to work in agriculture, many are increasingly seeking urban destinations and employment in industry, construction, commerce, and services (González Baker *et al.*, 1998; Waldinger, 2001).

Structural changes in the U.S. economy and urban populations have generated a growing number of low-paying, unskilled jobs for migrants. Large controlling centers of the worldwide economy, like Los Angeles, tend toward a polarized occupational structure that offers, at the one

<sup>8</sup> There are exceptions to this point. The City of Costa Mesa (only for *esquineros* with work permits), Glendale (all workers can solicit work regardless of immigration status), and some sites in Los Angeles area (all *esquineros* regardless of immigration status) have implemented city-operated hiring sites since 1989.

extreme, large numbers of low-paying jobs in labor-intensive services or in sweat-shop-type production (Sassen-Koob, 1985:255-65). The demand for labor-intensive services is increasing even faster than that for labor-intensive goods. Large companies compete savagely to keep the costs of goods and services down. Restaurants, garment workshops, and assembly factories cope with fluctuation in demand for their products or services by hiring and firing workers as needed.

Not surprisingly, jobs that do not offer stable income with which to meet family obligations are unattractive to many in the U.S. economy. Rather, they are filled by temporary Mexican labor—migrants who stay in the United States while jobs last and leave when work is no longer available. Single migrants, willing to lodge with friends or relatives or share a small apartment, have low subsistence requirements, which makes it possible for them to survive on the low wages earned. Moreover, the political vulnerability of the migrant worker, especially the undocumented who face constant threat of deportation, means that the traditional defenses provided by labor unions are usually inaccessible. Thus, the economies of cities like Los Angeles are structured to promote temporary labor migration.

Today, day-labor markets in Los Angeles offer Latino undocumented migrants a chance to gain a foothold in the urban economy (Malpica, 1992). For some, day labor is their first job in the United States; for others, it offers an opportunity to earn some money while temporarily laid off from a regular job. For still others, it is a way to complement a low salary earned in another job. Day-labor sites (often at street corners) are easy to locate, and they are accessible to all who are willing and able to fill the jobs being offered.

### *Esquineros*

Although some *esquineros* are U.S. citizens or permanent residents (called “green card holders”), the majority entered the United States without legal documentation. Most *esquineros* are young adults, which coincides with the conventional wisdom that undocumented workers are young men, mainly in their 20s and 30s. Many of the *esquineros* were unmarried; those who were married had migrated alone to the United States, leaving their spouses behind.

The *esquineros* are, invariably, men. As indicated earlier, day labor is “men’s work” and day-labor sites could be said to be “male spaces,” pervaded by a generalized, ritualistic sexism. While waiting at these curb sites, *esquineros* verbally accost women passing on the street. This is always followed by jokes and laughter among the men. Moreover, sexual talk is constant at *la esquina*. *Esquineros* constantly brag of their prowess and tell stories generally belittling women.

The Mexican immigrants at the day-labor site are primarily from Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas, and the Mexico City metropolitan area—places that historically have not seen significant migration—and also from Guanajuato and Michoacán, two states that traditionally sent many of their residents to the United States. This distribution of immigrants suggests that Mexican immigration to the United States is changing from being a regional phenomenon to a national phenomenon (Cornelius, 1992).

The majority of the *esquineros* are Latinos, and the Spanish language is undoubtedly one of the strongest bonds between them, providing an instant key to pan-ethnic identity. At the same time, clear divisions exist among different ethnic and national groups, with Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans forming their own cliques. It was not rare, during the fieldwork, to see men of the same ethnic affiliation frequently associate during lunch and while waiting for potential employers.

Most reported that it was their first time migrating and that they had only recently arrived. Because these migrants are not tied into established networks that assist in finding jobs, counterfeit documents, housing, and so forth, most of them literally take to the streets. Some work as street vendors, hawking fresh produce or flowers; others doggedly appear at the day-labor sites.

Men at *la esquina* have completed at least six years of schooling. This is above the average educational level (typically five years or less) reported for male migrants in the late 1990s (Bustamante *et al.*, 1998). The reason is that now more migrants come from urban areas, where education is readily available (Lozano-Ascencio, Roberts, and Bean, 1999). This runs counter to the widespread impression that Mexican undocumented migrants are mostly rural workers (North and Houston, 1976) and supports the findings of Wayne Cornelius (1992). Prior to migrating, most of the men I met had been manual workers in urban-based occupations, and they had no intention of pursuing farmwork in the United States. However, most cannot speak or read English, which severely restricts their access to desirable jobs.

The dominant image of undocumented migration is “impoverished masses overwhelming the border,” coupled with the idea that those who cross the gates to the land-of-plenty do so never to return (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). Empirical research suggests, however, that many undocumented migrants do return and that the process is complex, often involving cyclical entries and departures from the United States (Massey, Durand, and Malone, 2002). This pattern of back-and-forth migration more accurately describes the condition of the *esquineros*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This is less true of the Salvadorans and Guatemalans I met, who consider it very difficult to return home because of political issues. Central Americans of other nationalities did plan to return.

Although some Mexican migrants find more permanent jobs and stay on, most have planned to remain in the United States for only a short duration and will return to Mexico. Commonly called a “target earner” or “sojourner” (Piore, 1979), this migrant does not plan to settle permanently in the United States or remain an *esquinero* all his life. He views day labor as a job “to do for the time being,” and the sooner he can exchange it for a better paying, more stable job, the better. Even those *esquineros* who enjoy steadier relationships with certain employers and report being relatively satisfied with their jobs, do not view them as long-term vocations.

Some *esquineros* are skilled. Armando is a qualified carpenter, and Tepito and Lupe are excellent tile installers. Lupe also has experience working with marble. However, most *esquineros* take jobs requiring physical strength rather than acquired skills. In our informal conversations, *esquineros* stated that they work as assistants to skilled contractors or crew foremen. *Esquineros* work primarily in painting, construction, dry-wall installation, hauling, gardening, cleaning (of offices, houses, yards, pools, factories, and construction sites), and other manual labor. They also work for roofing, carpet-installation and moving companies, as well as working for home owners who are moving (especially on weekends) and for small landscapers. Some of the work these men do is highly dangerous (for example, climbing to trim trees) as well as detrimental to their health (for example, asbestos removal).

Pay is low. Most *esquineros* earn \$5 per hour, that is, \$40 per day in 1992. A 40-hour week nets \$200, but such weeks are rare at best. Valenzuela reports that that in 1999, *esquineros* were earning \$6.91 per hour, that is, \$55.28 per day (2002:23). Most are able to work between three and four days per week, depending on the economy, the weather, and a worker’s age and personal luck. This vulnerability is characteristic of *esquineros*, as has been all too obvious during economic recessions. When *esquineros* work by the day, they are paid by the day. If a worker has a close relationship with an employer, and he is employed for over a week, he will be paid each Friday. Sometimes workers are paid with personal checks that bounce. More common is underpayment, when, for example, a man works a 60-or 70-hour week for the same \$200 he was promised for 40 hours of work.

### *The “Structureless Labor Market” Model as a Conceptual Tool*

Though we may speak of “the labor market,” in reality, many markets exist that differ in size, composition, character, and most importantly, structure. Orme W. Phelps, for example, distinguishes between unstructured and structured labor markets. For the purposes of this study,

I shall use the unstructured labor market as the primary model of reference. Phelps' definition of an unstructured labor market is particularly useful: "one which contains few, if any, established institutions by means of which people obtain market information, move into and out of jobs, qualify for advances in rank or pay, or identify themselves with any type of organization—either employer-sponsored or employee-sponsored—for purposes of security or self-support" (1957:403).

Work in the unstructured labor market is a strategy for making a living that lacks any degree of security relative to either income or employment. Employment is sporadic and transient; the pay for hours actually worked falls at or near the minimum wage; few benefits are granted to workers; labor unions are lacking; laborers frequently work under unhealthy and unsafe working conditions; and total income is diminished by frequent, extended periods of unemployment between jobs. The overwhelming majority of workers in these markets are unskilled. These temporary hands are employed in agriculture, artisanal production, small industries, petty commerce, personal and domestic services, construction, and day-labor work, performing useful and often essential tasks for the economy.

Lloyd H. Fisher's book *The Harvest Labor Market in California* (1953) is the classic case study of unstructured labor markets. Fisher characterized the harvest labor market in California as "structureless." He defines five traits indicating the absence of structure (1953:7-11):

- (1) no unions, seniority hiring, or other limitations on access to the labor markets;
- (2) no personal relationships or obligations between employer and employees (that is, a third party, such as a labor contractor, mediates employment);
- (3) uniformly unskilled employment, which is therefore accessible to a large, unspecialized labor force;
- (4) predominance of piece-rate payment schemes; and
- (5) little or no capital in machinery.

The structureless labor market, Fisher argued, was ideally suited to the needs of agricultural firms. Without restrictions on access to work or differentiation in the skills required for harvesting, agricultural employers could draw on workers from various sources to meet their highly seasonal and variable needs.

#### *Day-Labor Markets: An Unstructured Market?*

The day-labor market closely resembles Fisher's classic example of an unstructured labor market, devoid of laws, contracts, or formally adopted

managerial policy. Meeting the first criterion of Fisher's structureless market, the day-labor market is without unions that would exercise any sort of rule of preference that might block access to the labor market. One union objective in such a casual market would certainly be to control entry into the market through some device, such as a hiring hall. Furthermore, in the absence of labor unions, there is no formal seniority system.

Regarding Fisher's second point, there is little attachment between employer and employee in the day-labor market. The most common practice is for an employer to hire an *esquinero* directly. Although there are just the two parties involved, the relationship lacks any established obligations. An *esquinero* is simply offered a job by someone he does not know and to whom he has not been recommended. It is common for *esquineros* not to know the name of the employers for whom they have worked. There is, literally, no relationship upon which a claim to regular employment might be built. Therefore, little opportunity for promotion or job security exists.

Another form of hiring day laborers does involve a third party, usually a crew foreman. Typically, employers deal only with the foreman, which removes the employer even further from the workers. In contradiction to Fisher's second criterion, some *esquineros* have established a relatively steady relationship with an employer or a foreman. Consequently, they can count on regular employment more than those *esquineros* without such an arrangement.

With regard to Fisher's third point, at any given time, almost anyone willing to work at the going wage can find employment. Indeed, during a recession, increasing numbers of Anglos and Blacks show up at the hiring corners seeking work. Age, as well, does not seem to be a factor in preventing potential workers from trying their luck at the day-labor sites. I met *esquineros* as young as 16 years of age and some as old as 58 (Grossman, 1989:11; Valenzuela, 2002:17). Blind hiring of workers, whose productivity levels are unknown, coupled with the large variability in labor demand result in a highly casual labor market. Most are employed in unskilled, general labor, doing tasks requiring little knowledge or judgment. The *esquineros* are largely unprotected by law and at the mercy of individual employers. Such workers are an easily exploited group, since they are afraid of being reported to the authorities and, thus, are often willing to accept longer hours of work, unhealthy working conditions, and abuse at the work site. Moreover, these workers have no Social Security, no Workmen's Compensation, and no pension.

Fisher's fourth characteristic of an unstructured market—payment based on a unit of output rather than on an hourly basis—does not generally apply to the day-labor market. Fisher's fifth and final requirement—that the operation employ little or no machinery—does apply.

The use of machinery automatically imposes a structure of skill requirements on a labor market.

Thus, the day-labor markets in this study closely fit Fisher's criteria for an unstructured market. However, some structure indeed prevails, based on factors not considered in Fisher's model. First, although most jobs are open to anyone, women are excluded. These are definitely viewed as being "men's jobs." Second, there is an informal, though distinct, division between those who have "regular" employers, who rehire them frequently, and those who are hired on a one-job only basis (or who are not hired at all). Instead of a completely fungible labor pool, substitutability is reduced sharply, imposing structure.

Although Fisher's "structureless labor market" model is useful for understanding the day-labor market, its applicability is limited because it is not so much a theory of labor-market organization as it is a model that operates under certain, specific conditions. The day-labor market does not completely fulfill the conditions that Fisher lays out. Put more concretely, the existing informal organization in the day-labor market violates the assumptions of Fisher's model. These markets do not fit the smoothly operating institutions assumed by standard neoclassical economics. Day-labor markets have a variety of structural forms that provide the organizational basis for bringing together prospective employers and seekers of work.

### *Occupational Structure and Occupational Culture*

*Esquineros* are tied to one another by a unique occupational structure and occupational culture. The occupational structure serves to differentiate workers while the occupational culture binds them together. Both spheres provide structure to the day-labor market. The occupational structure orders the participants hierarchically whereas the occupational culture configures norms of behavior.

A status hierarchy among the *esquineros*, determined by the type of employer, informally organizes the day-labor market. This, in turn, determines how often an *esquintero* will be employed and what he will earn.

When I first went to *la esquina*, I thought that there was only one way of getting hired: have plenty of luck and the ability to be able to fight through the mob of competing day laborers. However, after spending time at the day-labor sites, I realized that there were two very different ways of getting hired. The first is depicted in the following field observation:

Unexpectedly, a blue Astro mini-van slowed down at *la esquina* of Broadway and Pico and pulled to the side of the street. The driver, who appeared to be Caucasian,

traveled alone and held out two fingers indicating that he only wanted two workers. Around twelve men rushed to the vehicle, trying to catch the attention of the patron but at the same time trying to be closest to the door so that when it opened, they would be the first ones in... The driver opened the door, and the mob of workers struggled to squeeze into the passenger's seat. Two young men finally managed to be victorious, escaping from the human mass. They immediately settled themselves in the car seat, grabbed the door's handle and seemed to have "sealed" it with a loud slam. A glow of satisfaction radiated from both of their faces. The Astro mini-van instantly departed, leaving the remaining workers somewhat disappointed.

That ethnographic observation paints a picture of the most common type of hiring, which occurs when the *esquinero* is offered a job by someone he does not know and to whom he has not been recommended. These employers, whom I will categorize as "unclaimed," usually need a couple of workers for a day or two. For the most part, they are homeowners or owners of small businesses, who can spare a few dollars in exchange for some help around the house or shop. Although the kind of work that *esquineros* perform for these employers can vary widely, most jobs involve painting, moving heavy objects from one place to another (especially on weekends), and landscaping or gardening. Individual "unclaimed" employers do not appear regularly, but there are so many employers of this kind that there is always work at the corner—though never enough.

In this hiring scenario, the level of competition is keen. Especially at Pico and Main, the number of *esquineros* seeking work is so large in comparison to the number of employers that only a few are actually hired each day. On average, for instance, 60 to 70 men will be looking for work at the intersection of Pico and Main. On a good day, 22 men will be hired for temporary jobs, with the average being closer to 12. Of those hired, fewer than half are picked by "regular" employers. Thus, the chances of finding work are low. In addition to this intense competition, payment is uncertain. Employers may offer as much as \$80 per day but pay much less when the work is done; some pay with checks that bounce. A few employers pay workers only in meals or clothing, rather than in cash, and still others avoid paying workers at all.

Over time, I noticed another form of hiring, which this field observation portrays:

[At] the intersection of Sawtelle and Santa Monica, a black Ford pickup truck pulled to where we were sitting, an area where hardly any would-be workers were located. Two workers immediately got up from their squatting position and headed towards the truck. Upon spotting the vehicle, the *esquinero* not reading the newspaper had patted his companion on the shoulder and exclaimed "*ya llegaron por nosotros*" ("they've arrived for us"). They walked to the truck and hopped in the back. It all appeared as if there was a previous arrangement, some type of informal agreement already established between the employer and the workers. The rest of the workers continued



eating their breakfast, reading their newspaper, or conversing, and did not even bother to stand up.

There are those *esquineros* who wait at specific areas of *la esquina* where few other *esquineros* are positioned, already knowing that they will be picked up by an employer with whom they have made previous arrangements. This type of worker-employer relationship usually originates after an *esquinero*, on his first job, impresses the employer with an effective, tireless performance. After a repeat performance, this worker may be in regular contact with the employer. If work is available, the employer will agree with the *esquinero* on the date, hour, and location to pick him up. Because work sites change rather frequently, *la esquina* continues to serve as the pickup point, even for *esquineros* working for “regular” employers. Because the *esquineros* know the employer, underpayment is much less likely, especially for those who are on good terms.

Thus, I identified two types of *esquineros* at *la esquina*: those hired by “unclaimed” employers and those hired by “regular” employers. This distinction results in differences in earnings, in attachment to the corner, and in their respective social status. Of course, some *esquineros* fall in between, in that they work for both types of employers.

*Esquineros* who are hired only by “unclaimed” employers need to seek other job opportunities to compensate for the unstable employment found at the day-labor site. They may be able to secure a variety of short-term, for-cash, odd jobs in the service sector, such as working as a mechanic’s helper in an auto-body repair shop, a warehouseman, a cook, or a musician. Such supplementary employment is necessary for economic survival.

In contrast, the work of *esquineros* hired by “regular” employers is relatively more stable. Still, they confront a seasonality in demand and temporary layoffs due to the weather, particularly in roofing, construction, and landscaping jobs.

We can further differentiate *esquineros* by the money they make. On average, those working for “regular” employers work three days a week for eight hours a day, at \$5 per hour. Because some have two or more regular employers, they may sometimes work as much as seven days a week.

In contrast, those seeking jobs with “unclaimed” employers work only irregularly. Occasionally, they may go for weeks without being hired. Many of them are seen as “still learning” and are considered inexperienced, while those employed by “regular” employers have “seen it all and done it all” and are regarded as knowledgeable and experienced. As such, they are expected to “socialize” the less experienced into the informal organization at *la esquina*. Deference at the corner is granted to those employed by “regular” employers and to those who display an extraordinary ability at their work; they are respected and may receive preferential treatment in the job-hiring process.

Although this definite occupational structure tends to differentiate the *esquineros*, a culture also exists that connects them as they help one another. This, too, imposes structure on the market.

Becoming an *esquinero* is usually not a deliberately planned, self-initiated move. Rather, it comes about as acquaintances or friends suggest the possibility. Many workers hear of the day-labor sites for the first time while living in temporary shelters in downtown Los Angeles (Diez-Canedo, 1984). During the first few weeks after their arrival in the United States, migrants search for regular work. Due to their undocumented status and lack of networks, most of the migrants interviewed were having a difficult time finding regular, permanent jobs.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, they were relying on casual day labor to survive (Cornelius 1988:1-2). Such is the case with Ernesto, who had just arrived from his native Zacatecas (Mexico) and who was without family or friends on whom to rely. His lack of networks coupled with his undocumented status presented a bleak future. Everyone asked him for “*papeles*” (“papers”—work permit), and the route to employment seemed hopeless. So when someone at La Placita<sup>11</sup> told him about “*la esquina*,” where hardly any employers asks for *papeles* and no recommendations are needed, Ernesto gave it a try. He started at Pico and Main, experimenting from there with finding work at other hiring sites.

For migrants who want to become *esquineros*, the main attraction is the ease of entry. To participate, a man need merely drop by and make his presence known. Initially, *esquineros* are cautious—suspicion of outsiders is pronounced—but after observing the newcomer’s behavior for a short period, discussing his background, and finding his characteristics acceptable, the group absorbs him. However, not all arrivals are equally welcomed because *esquineros* have their own sense of appropriate occupational behavior. Drunkenness, for example, is unacceptable because it attracts the police to *la esquina* and gives the workers a bad reputation, which cripples their hiring probabilities.

Another attraction of *la esquina* is the going rate of \$5 per hour for a minimum of four hours. This contrasts with “sweat shop” alternative, where a worker may not even earn the minimum hourly wage. Experienced *esquineros* can earn \$50 per day and may earn as much as \$80.

<sup>10</sup> My findings indicate that most men at day-labor sites are not tied into established networks. Indeed, one of the central but overlooked function these sites serve is to help workers who have weak social networks to develop them, so that in addition to finding jobs and employers, they also have access to networks that facilitate obtaining housing, buying fake “green cards,” and learning about agencies that provide services for low-income people. This finding differs from Valenzuela who argues that it is precisely social networks and friendships that channel migrants to day labor work (2000:20-21).

<sup>11</sup> *Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles*, better known as La Placita, is a Catholic church located near Olvera Street on the edge of downtown. This church has long been a magnet and refuge for Latino immigrants.



A salient characteristic in the process of becoming an *esquinero* is the lack of anticipatory socialization that the young novice receives before entering the occupation. All of the migrants at *la esquina* had had little idea before arriving in the United States about future employment opportunities there, and several of the *esquineros* interviewed had been unaware that day labor existed as a work alternative. This is consistent with Juan Diez-Canedo's (1984:98) research on Mexican migration, which indicates that a substantial number of contemporary Mexican migrants to the United States are what he calls "free floaters," workers who gravitate to the industrial area with no particular job in mind and no networks upon which to rely.

Newcomers have only vague expectations about their future role as *esquineros*. What little knowledge they have derives from their participation in the informal economy back home, their acquaintances with *esquineros* or *ex-esquineros*, information from friends who have interacted with *esquineros*, and brief glimpses of the actual day-labor sites.

As is the case with most peripheral occupations, day labor provides no formal on-the-job training. A novice learns to become an *esquinero* only through informal social interactions, mostly at *la esquina* while waiting for employers to arrive. A major form of informal training consists simply of watching other *esquineros* and learning from them. Neophyte *esquineros* indicated that they spend considerable time watching the established members, *los veteranos*, in action in order to pick up tips that will help them be more effective at being hired. Besides being observed by the newcomers, *veteranos* also give direct advice, mostly in casual conversations.

This informal training has two interrelated dimensions—one philosophical, the other interpersonal. The first imparts a value structure; the second, the "do's and don't's" of relating to employers and to other *esquineros*. Not all of the migrants absorb these teachings, and those who do, incorporate them to varying degrees.

### *Value Structure*

The transmitted value structure constantly reminds the novice that he is an "*indocumentado*" and, therefore, in a vulnerable position, always facing threat of apprehension and deportation. This vulnerability increases at the day-labor sites where the chances of being apprehended by *la Migra* are growing dramatically (Vidal, 1992).<sup>12</sup> In addition to the INS, *esquineros* have to deal with the police, who disperse them and

<sup>12</sup> Although few employers who hire from the corner ask for papers, the *esquineros* feel that the number asking for work permits is on the increase. Cornelius (1988:1) reports that "one-third of the most recent arrivals looking for work on street corners had acquired... [fake documents]."

cite them for loitering, and with angry merchants who complain that they block traffic, deter customers, leave trash, and urinate in the streets.

The vulnerability and uncertainty continues after a migrant is hired. Someone working for an “unclaimed” employer seldom knows the type of job he will be doing, where he will be taken to do the task, or if he will be returned to where he was picked up. Payment persists as an issue as well. There are instances of nonpayment, but payment of sub-minimum wages is somewhat more common. Grossman (1989:12), an immigration attorney, reports that 25% of the day laborers earn less than minimum wage. Payment is always after completion of the task; no one demands or even suggests getting paid upfront.

The *esquineros*' feelings of vulnerability about their undocumented status and uncertainty about getting hired and paid creates a sense of unity and an in-group solidarity among the workers—a feeling that “we’re all in this together.”

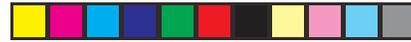
The fact that an *esquinero* has varying degrees of anxiety throughout the entire day-labor experience fosters a dependency on co-workers, which leads to a sense of solidarity that serves to reduce individual anxiety. A common bond is formed as *esquineros* share similar experiences—the hard work they endure, job hazards, waiting for long hours to be hired, dealing with the police, and ambivalence toward their employers.

At some *esquinas* (for example, Sawtelle and Santa Monica), the most important manifestation of solidarity is the informal agreement that no *esquinero* undercut the agreed-upon asking wage—\$5 per hour in 1992. Experienced workers always negotiate the pay rate as potential employers are picking them up. If below \$5 per hour, they inform the employer that no one will work for less than \$5 and for a minimum of four hours. If the potential employer refuses, the unwritten code is that the *esquinero* should walk away or ask to be dropped off at the next corner.

At other sites (such as Pico and Main), the large and constantly changing population of *esquineros* makes it more difficult to organize around an agreed-upon rate of pay. Some will work for as little as \$3 per hour. Despite considerable indirect pressure to accept this value structure of no-wage-cutting, some reject it, especially those only loosely connected with and not well established at *la esquina*. Enforcement of the established pay rate is virtually impossible because an *esquinero* usually agrees to the wage once in the employer's vehicle.

### *Interpersonal Relationships*

To be able to perform adequately at *la esquina*, one must learn the “rules” of interpersonal relations—the “do's and don't's” of interacting with employers and other *esquineros*. Several rules pertain to interaction



with fellow *esquineros*. The first is to honor established worker-“regular” employer relationships. Naturally, other *esquineros* covet these relationships, which lead to frequent jobs, pay \$5 per hour or more, allow reasonable breaks, and even provide meals for the workers. But there is an unwritten law against stealing a good, “regular” employer.<sup>13</sup>

A second rule is that certain areas of the strip belong to particular *esquineros* and that others cannot use those places as hiring positions without permission. It was not uncommon to hear of “Perico’s place” or “Armando’s place.” These spots are usually occupied by *esquineros* who have “regular” employers, who pick them up in the “usual place,” thus avoiding the mob at the corner where “unclaimed” employers pull up.

Third, there is an implicit understanding among the workers that there is no fighting as they swarm toward an employer’s vehicle. Being unintentionally bumped or struck by an elbow is “just part of the game.” It is indeed surprising that no fights break out.

There are also rules governing the interaction between *esquineros* and employers, which serve to limit the *esquineros*’ vulnerability in the face of potential employer cheating. *Esquineros* are exhorted to clarify the wage with an employer as they are picked up. Such an agreement, established before doing the work, reduces the likelihood of receiving sub-minimum wages. *Esquineros* also learn to insist on payment in cash because some contractors have written “hot” checks. Additionally, when *esquineros* are asked if they have specific skills for a job, they are admonished not to lie. If they exaggerate their skills and are unable to perform the work, it gives the corner a bad name. Workers can also get hurt when they lack knowledge or experience in operating equipment.

Besides these “don’t’s,” there are some “do’s” in a would-be worker’s relationship with an employer. For example, some *esquineros* recommend standing in a small group of three or four men, rather than a crowd, and including someone who speaks English to attract patrons. Others suggest making eye contact with potential employers as they go into the hardware store for materials. Some feel it is important to dress appropriately for work by wearing boots or tennis shoes, or a paint-splattered shirt to indicate availability for a painting job. Others feel that dress is not that important. Just looking strong is sufficient to get hired for some jobs.

Established *esquineros* are willing to give valuable advice to a novice as part of their “socialization” process. One might expect the established *esquineros* to guard the secrets of their success from potential competitors, but, for several possible reasons, they do not. A *veterano* may be asserting his social status by boasting about his “regular” employers

<sup>13</sup> Aggressively stealing a “regular” employer from an experienced *esquinero* is a rare act. Instead, an *esquinero* will seek a new “regular” relationships from the employer pool that includes regulars-to-be—those who do not yet have a steady relationship with anyone.

and commenting on how he acquires these good jobs. Alternatively, he may be revealing information in order to protect himself. By sharing trade methods with new *esquineros*, he may make them feel indebted to him, thereby discouraging them from attempting to steal his “regular” employers.

As newcomers learn about the difficulties of being an *esquinero*, the organization of *la esquina* gradually absorbs them. Once this happens, a worker can say, “I’m an *esquinero*.” He has earned the label.

### Conclusion

A major task for economists and sociologists is to analyze the nature, causes, and effects of departures from theoretical market models. By focusing on a little studied occupational setting, this study contributes to the conceptual and theoretical understanding of undocumented Latino workers in the U.S. labor market. The characteristics of the unstructured labor market model as applied by Fisher were used as a framework to view day-labor markets. While the *esquinas* at first appear unorganized, even chaotic, and do not meet several of Fisher’s criteria, they by no means fulfill all of his conditions. In these departures, we come to realize that beneath the surface appearances, there is, indeed, considerable structure and informal organization in the day-labor markets. In other words, the day-labor market is not structureless nor is it based on Darwinian competition driven by forces of supply and demand alone, but it is a market in which the human factor plays a central role in shaping all aspects of its functioning.

A variety of structural forms provides the basis for bringing together prospective employers and seekers of work. Like all other markets that persist over time, the one for day labor has developed customs and rules as the participants seek efficiency in their dealings with one another. The rules at the day labor site are unwritten and are based largely on practice or precedent; nevertheless, they govern many aspects of the work relationships, including wages. Although not everyone conforms to these standards, they are the recognized norms.

Day labor markets respond less to competition and more to informal work rules and the role of customary relationships. In particular, these rules restrain the temptation to bid down wages. Instead, *esquineros* operate under an agreed-upon, “just” wage. The establishment of a socially accepted minimum wage counters the thrust of the migration literature, which suggests that in a market dominated by migrants whose attachment to work is temporary and where turnover is high, there would be no such minimum wage. At some *esquinas* (like Sawtelle and Santa Monica), the migrants agree that they will not work for less than

a specific amount. Experienced *esquineros* have succeeded in instilling these standards, even among the recently arrived. Consequently, for the most part, newcomers who might be willing to work for less than the agreed upon amount or even the legal minimum wage do not.

The study has also demonstrated another dimension of migration phenomenon—namely, the existence of migrants who come to the United States without kinship and friendship ties. In their discussion of migration, most authors go to great lengths to identify the functioning of networks and how they facilitate the migration process. Few, however, have noted this other dimension. These migrants, for the most part undocumented, are coming to the United States as “free floaters” (Diez-Canedo, 1984), workers who migrate toward industrial areas with no particular job in mind and no networks to rely on. Because these people lack ties to established networks, which would assist them in obtaining jobs, counterfeit documents, housing, and so forth, most of these men literally take to the streets. Some work as street vendors, hawkers of fresh produce or flowers, while others, as we have seen throughout this article, congregate at the street-corner, drive-by labor markets.

### Bibliography

- Amado, Pablo, “Achacan a la Ley Migratoria el aumento de los esquineros”, in *La Opinión*, March 22, 1989.
- Añorve, Raúl, Torie Osborn, and Angélica Salas, “Jornaleros Deserve Dignity”, in *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 2000.
- Bacon, David, “Standing on the Corner”, *LA Weekly*, October 9-15, 1998.
- Bustamante, Jorge, Guillermina Jasso, J. Edward Taylor, and Paz Trigueros Legarreta, “Characteristics of Migrants: Mexicans in the United States”, in *Migration between Mexico and the United States. Binational Study*, Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mexico City and U.S. Commission of Immigration Reform Washington, D.C., 1998, pp. 91-162.
- Calavita, Kitty, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the INS*, New York, Routledge, 1992.
- Cervantes, Nancy, and Joel Hicks, “A Case of Overkill to Curb Day Laborers”, in *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1994.
- Cornelius, Wayne, “Migrants from Mexico Still Coming—and Staying”, in *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1988.
- , “From Sojourners to Settlers: The Changing Profile of Mexican Immigration to the United States”, in J. A. Bustamante, C. W. Reynolds, and R. A. Hinojosa Ojeda (eds.), *U.S.-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992, pp. 155-95.

- Diez-Canedo, Juan R., *La migración indocumentada de México a los Estados Unidos*, Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984.
- Fisher, Lloyd H., *The Harvest Labor Market in California*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Fujimoto, Isao, *Is This the Dream?*, Working Paper, Department of Applied Behavioral Sciences, University of California, Davis, 1968.
- González Baker, Susan, Frank D. Bean, Agustín Escobar Latapí, and Sidney Weintraub, "U.S. Immigration Policies and Trends: The Growing Importance of Migration from Mexico", in Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco (ed.), *Crossings: Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 81-105.
- Grossman, Elliot, "El impacto del IRCA sobre la comunidad mexicana y centroamericana en Los Ángeles, California: El caso de los jornaleros", paper presented at the Seminar for International Migration in Mexico: Current Affairs and Perspectives, Morelia, México, 1989.
- Harrington, Michael, *The Other America*, Baltimore (Md.), Penguin Books, 1962.
- Lofland, John, and Lyn H. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings*, 3d ed. Belmont (Calif.), Wadsworth, 1995.
- Lozano-Ascencio, Fernando, Bryan Roberts, and Frank Bean, "The Interconnections of Internal and International Migration: The Case of the United States and Mexico", in Ludger Pries (ed.), *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, Aldershot (United Kingdom), Ashgate Publishers, 1999, pp. 138-61.
- Malpica, Daniel Melero, *La Esquina: The Social Organization of Day-Labor Sites*, M.A. Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992.
- , "The Social Organization of Day-Laborers in Los Angeles", in Refugio Rochin (ed.), *Immigration and Ethnic Communities*, East Lansing, Julian Samora Research Institute-Michigan State University, 1996, pp. 81-92.
- Martínez, Tomás, *The Human Marketplace*, New Brunswick (New Jersey), Transaction Books, 11973973.
- Massey, Douglas, Jorge Durand, and Nolan Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2002.
- North, David S., and Marion F. Houston, *The Characteristics and Role of Illegal Aliens in the U.S. Labor Market: An Exploratory Study*, Washington, (D. C.), Linton and Co., 1976.
- Phelps, Orme W., "A Structural Model of the U.S. Labor Market", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 10:402-23, 1957.
- Piore, Michael, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

- Portes, Alejandro, and Ruben Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 2d ed., Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996.
- Quesada, James, "From Central American Warriors to San Francisco Latino Day Laborers: Suffering and Exhaustion in a Transnational Context", *Transforming Anthropology* 8 (1-2), 162-85, 1999.
- Roberts, Bryan R., Reanne Frank, and Fernando Lozano-Ascencio, "Transnational Migrant Communities and Mexican Migration to the United States", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2), 238-66, 1999.
- Sassen-Koob, Saskia, "Capital Mobility and Labor Migration: Their Expression in Core Cities", in Michael Timberlake (ed.), *Urbanization in the World Economy*, Orlando (Florida), Academic Press, 1985, pp. 231-65.
- Schmidt, Fred H., *After the Bracero: An Inquiry into the Problems of Farm Labor Recruitment*, a Report Submitted to the Department of Employment of the State of California, Los Angeles, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Los Angeles, 1964.
- Valenzuela Jr., Abel, "Day Laborers as Entrepreneurs?", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27 (2), 335-52, 2001.
- , "Working on the Margins in Metropolitan Los Angeles: Immigrants in Day-Labor Work", *Migraciones Internacionales* 1 (2), 5-28, 2002.
- Vidal, Josefina, "De las esquinas a la economía sumergida: Odisea laboral del inmigrante latino", in *La Opinión*, June 8, 1992.
- Waldinger, Roger, *Strangers at the Gate*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001.
- , and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, *Ethnic Los Angeles*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1996.
- Weiss, Robert, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*, New York, The Free Press, 1994.