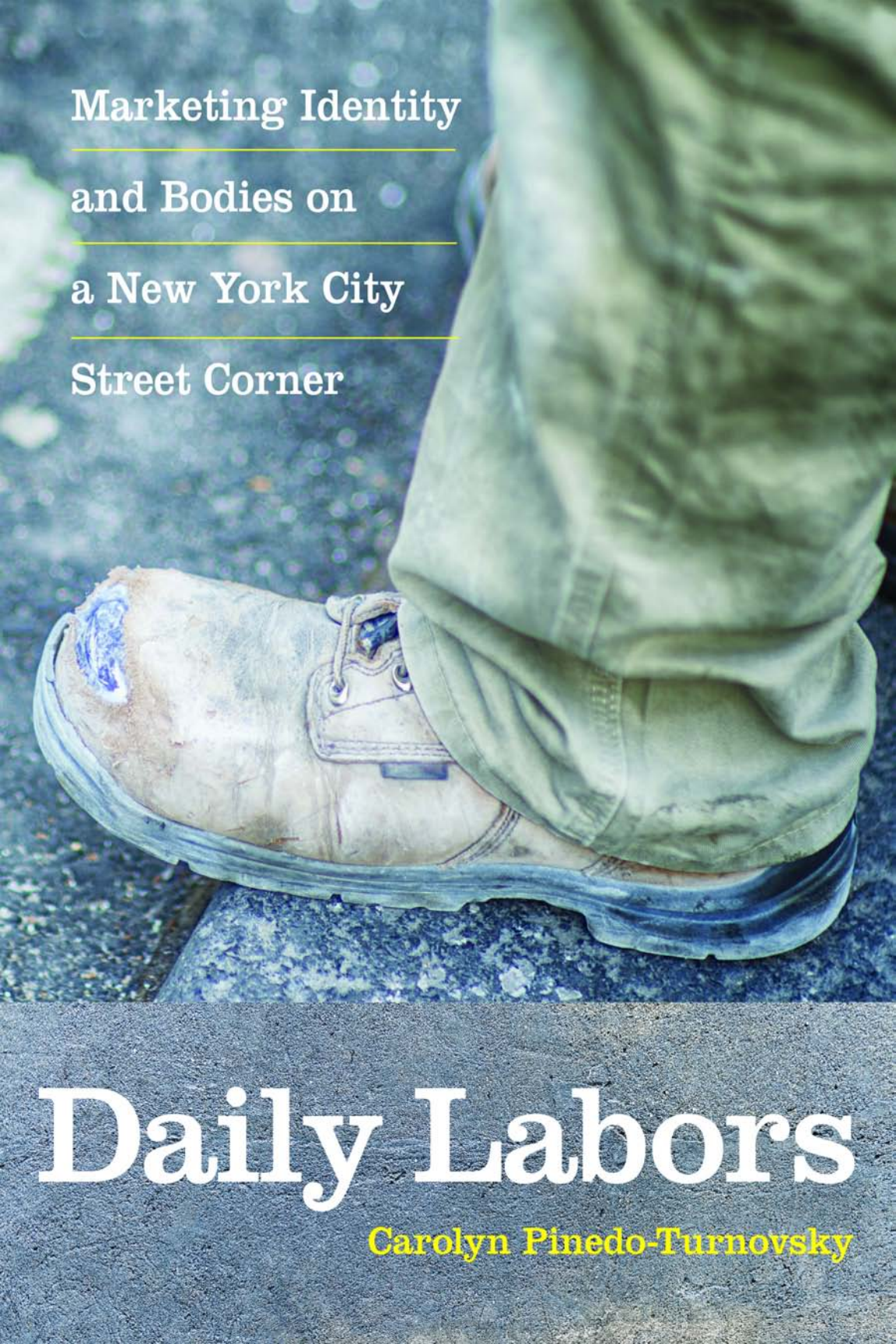
Marketing Identity
and Bodies on
a New York City
Street Corner
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*Marketing Identity and Bodies on a New York City Street Corner*

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# Contents

# Acknowledgments

Ethnography is complicated. In research, in fieldwork, and in writing about the intimate lives of people, the work ultimately revolves around a complex, delicate, and messy set of activities and unrefined ideas. For me this describes, at the very least, the ongoing scrutiny and revision that consumed my efforts to learn as much as possible about the workers on a Brooklyn street corner and to faithfully communicate their narratives. To all of the workers who agreed to talk with me, teach me, and inform my fieldwork on the corner—in particular, those quoted in this book—I am humbly indebted. Without their support, data collection would have been difficult, if not impossible. I can only hope that this snapshot of their lives will provoke thoughtful discussions among readers, advance policy discussion for their better treatment and inclusion, and enhance our knowledge about their life stories.

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# Daily Labors

# Introduction

*It is 6:00 A.M. in New York City. While some are out for a morning run or navigating the rush hour commute, and children prepare to ride the bus or subway to school or remain in bed, still fast asleep, a man arrives at the corner of an intersection in Brooklyn. Others will soon join him. The peak hour is 8:00 A.M. Another man smokes a cigarette and leans against a fire hydrant. He speaks with his peers as they stare down the avenue, waiting.*

*Ronaldo arrives early on the corner—usually by 6:30 A.M.—with a thermos of Café Bustelo in hand and waits for Luis and Santiago.*[1] *At this early hour, William should be riding the W train to high school, but today he has skipped class and will spend his morning alongside the others. He waits for Franklin, who will likely cut his classes, too. Until Franklin arrives, William sits on top of a dumpster cart outside an auto-body shop. Meanwhile, Kaspar sits on the curb quietly reading* Dziennik Nowojorski*, one of the city's Polish daily newspapers.*

*The men stand or sit patiently while they wait for someone looking to hire un buen trabajador (a good worker) for the day to pull up along the curb. Some pass the time making conversation, perhaps about the latest fútbol match in La Liga Mexicana. Others play card games or read the newspaper. Many of them—mainly the Polish and Russian men—smoke. Some make good use*

*of spaces along the way, resting on building stoops near the laundromat, leaning on fences that surround the nearby train yard, or just sitting on the pavement outside the corner bagel shop and deli. When a car pulls up along the curb, conversations stop. Heads look up from newspapers. Those sitting now stand. Bodies lean forward, and faces look curious as they wait to hear a call from the driver.*[2]

Various terms—"day laborers," "street-corner men," or "jornaleros" and "esquineros" in Spanish—describe people searching for work regularly in public spaces that are informally identified as hiring sites. At these sites, workers sell their labor by the hour or by the day.[3] The only national study estimated that there are more than 100,000 day laborers looking for work on any given day across the United States.[4] With more such markets springing up across the country (on corners, in parking lots, and near home-improvement and construction retailers, highway underpasses, and workers' centers), day laborers have become visible symbols of changes in the nature of work and the demographics of workers in the United States. These sites also display diverse efforts by the state to enforce regulations and impose power and control over low-skilled, low-status workers, immigrants and citizens alike. Just as meaningful, though less obvious, are the actions of the workers who negotiate daily work practices such as standing for long periods of time on street curbs demonstrating their interest in working; risking job loss by negotiating better hourly wages for themselves or young newcomers on the corner; or pooling resources for the upkeep of their temporary homes. Concurrent practices such as these illustrate the diversity of the men's actions and behavior on the corner and how they adapt to—and challenge—the structural forces that have produced their circumstances (Meléndez et al. 2014, 2016; Theodore and Peck 2012; Theodore et al. 2015; Varsanyi 2010; Visser 2016, 2017).

*Daily Labors* is an original ethnographic study of a community of day laborers who sought work at an intersection in Brooklyn, New York. For nearly three years, from summer 2001 to winter 2004, I visited with the men, most of whom were Latino immigrants. This book challenges conventional perceptions about this particular street-corner community and how day labor functions in the lives of these individuals. The men's accounts compel readers to regard them as active participants in their social and economic life—as people who work not only for wages but also to institute change, create knowledge, and reshape their social world. I not only examined the men's work experiences and the structure of operations at the street

corner in detail but also explored how the men understood their participation in this labor-market sector in relation to men of other racial, ethnic, and national origins.

Compadre, an older Panamanian day laborer, shared with me his understanding of the dynamic in play when men were hired from the corner:

> The people [employers] who come here, with one look, they know everything: we are men looking for work; we are Mexican; we're illegal; we're drunks; [we] have no family. We're criminals—no good. Right?

Compadre was right, to an extent. His compelling statement captured some of what passersby might say about the men standing on the corner. Most of them were, in fact, Mexican; the majority were undocumented immigrants; and not all had families. And, yes, some engaged in criminal behavior. However, Compadre's description did not entirely capture the truth for reasons that were not so visible to the naked eye, as I discovered on the day I first stepped onto the corner—or, as the men called it, "la parada."[5] One look—or even two or three—was not adequate to justly capture the intimate daily labors of the different men on the corner.

*"1010 WINS News Time, 8:30 A.M. The high today, 97. There's a heat advisory in effect." The report from the radio in the corner deli is not surprising; I'm already fanning myself. I look around and see William at the far end of the street corner speaking with Octavio. The humid air makes everyone's face glow, and I can see wet patches appearing on the backs of shirts. William's T-shirt is already off and hanging on his shoulders. Octavio, a young man from Buenaventura, Colombia, waits for Compadre to arrive with his new cell phone—a bargain deal he was able to get from a former employer of his in Brooklyn's Chinatown. Beside me are Luis, Santiago, and Ronaldo. While sitting on the oil-stained pavement in front of the nearby auto-body shop, they tell me that they may not look for work today: one-day jobs tend to be scarce on days like these. In any case, Luis and Santiago plan to leave early to shop for a birthday present for Santiago's brother in Puebla, Mexico. But their plans change quickly as a wood-paneled station wagon approaches the corner.*

*Groups of men gather at the driver- and passenger-side windows. The men's words become less discernible as their voices compete in volume and their bodies nudge each other along to present themselves to the potential employer.*

*The driver exits his car and approaches Luis and Ronaldo, who look at each other for no more than a few seconds before Luis accepts the job. In need of one more worker, the driver walks past William and Franklin, two African American men, and approaches the group of Latino workers, where he picks up one more, Ignacio. William and Franklin wave their arms dismissively at the man and return to sit on a building stoop and await the next opportunity.*

Workers gathered daily on the corners of the intersection. Although the number of men varied, there was never a shortage of workers for anyone in search of a day laborer. That said, on any given day, potential employers would arrive and pass over day laborers who were African American, Puerto Rican, Polish, and Russian in favor of hiring immigrant Latino men. Ronaldo, from Ecuador, clarified the meaning of these events by saying, "People like to hire Hispanics. They say that we work hard, and I agree." William, who, as noted earlier, was African American, shed further light by explaining that Mexican men were hired over him because "they're illegal, so [employers] can pay them whatever."

By sharing the accounts and experiences of these men, marginalized workers whose economic and social lives are highly precarious, this book aims to deepen our understanding of the situations of both Latino immigrant men such as Luis and Ronaldo and African American men such as William and Franklin in a place where race, gender, nationality, and the law create a complex and stratified labor market in which they are both excluded and included. Drawing on Judith Butler's seminal *Gender Trouble* (1990), which conceives of bodies as vehicles for instructing and reinforcing normative messages, I show that laboring bodies on the street corner reflect and reinforce widely shared ideas about race, gender, legality, and nationality. These ideas are more than just interpretations of what day labor is and who engages in it. More critically, they point to a grander dominant narrative that relies on and reinforces the ideology that created the street-corner day-labor markets, as well as the existence of those who labor in them. In the daily activities that take place on this corner, Compadre, Luis, and men like them are not just looking for work. Through race, gender, immigration status, and other social constructs, they are laboring to construct an identity as the *ideal* day laborer—a concept about which, in public and academic discourse, there may be strongly held ideas that have gone unrecognized.

One critical practice of note here is the widespread use of the word "illegal" to refer to people whose migrant status does not afford them legal per-

mission to live and work in the United States. Living in the United States without legal authorization and documentation is a civil, *not* a criminal, offense (Golash-Boza 2010). I therefore use the accurate descriptors "undocumented" and "unauthorized" rather than "illegal" or "illegal immigrant" in this book, except when I am quoting others. Although "illegal immigration" may correctly point to one form of unauthorized border crossing, the labels "illegal(s)" and "illegal immigrant(s)" are dehumanizing and discriminatory. Further, as this book went to press, the current U.S. administration was continuing to deliver on its promises to sanction and punish immigrants and refugees by barring their entry into the United States and increasing arrests, detentions, and removals of those who are already here. The United States is in grave danger of committing an injustice toward these communities and all those intimately linked to them, including U.S. citizens. In part, it is precisely the perception that all day laborers are "illegal" that enables passersby, and even other day laborers (such as William, remarking earlier about low wages), to reinforce the relationship between illegality and exploitation, in turn shaping work experiences across the various groups of day laborers on the corner.

What, then, can we learn from the men who look for work on this street corner? How do they constitute and support a dominant narrative about day laborers and undocumented workers? How does this narrative shape distinct work experiences for, say, Luis and William and reveal a dual frame of legality that works counterintuitively, in which men are simultaneously distinguished and marginalized as they seek employment? What roles do race, ethnicity, and gender play in shaping ideas about who *should* or who *can* work as a productive day laborer? Scenes such as those described in the opening narrative from my field notes occur every day on street corners across New York City and in other U.S. cities; they are a burgeoning and visible reminder of a vibrant informal economy and a strong immigrant metropolis. Drawing on immigration and labor studies about immigrants' participation in segmented labor markets, this ethnography focuses on day laborers and asks: What does it mean to look for work from this corner? How does the experience of looking for work differ for men such as Luis, Compadre, William, and Franklin? How do workers understand their chances of finding day labor? And just as critical, how do workers strategize and negotiate these understandings to improve their chances of finding work?

Many sociological studies of labor markets ask similar questions, but they are often based on reports from employers and lack direct observations from workers' viewpoints. The Brooklyn intersection I observed is more than a geographical locale in which people cross from one street corner to

the next; it is a site where meanings of this social construct, "day laborer," play out—meanings that explain, for instance, why Luis is taken seriously as a day laborer while William is not. As the opening narrative shows, men such as Luis and Ronaldo were often perceived as good workers, while men such as William and Franklin were passed over. Compadre, Luis, and Ronaldo; Kaspar, the young Polish immigrant; and William belonged to different racial/ethnic and national groups. However, the diverse experiences that led them to seek work on the Brooklyn street corner also brought them together, in that they all sought opportunities to achieve a different, and better, life for themselves and their families.

Building on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism associated with Erving Goffman (1959) and Herbert Blumer (1969), *Daily Labors* analyzes differences and normative forces in the relationships I uncovered in daily interactions among individuals on the street corner—among workers, as well as between workers and employers and nearby residents. Blumer argued that social life is a dynamic process that is always being redefined in response to a changing environment; because individuals have selves, they have the capacity for self-interactions. Defining and redefining actions while engaging the reactions of others enables individuals to mask or accentuate parts of the self in different contexts. Whereas the "other" is absent from Blumer's work, Goffman's research asserts that individuals' daily interactions are performances that modify while engaging other people's views (1966). At my field site, the result of these interactions was a social hierarchy that reflected an order based on the employers' *and* the day laborers' constructed social meanings of identity, anchored in ideas about race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and (migrant) legality.

Butler's scrutiny of the performativity of bodily acts informs the analyses throughout this study, particularly in Chapter 4, which is keenly focused on gender. For Butler (1990), discourse creates subject positions for the self to occupy: linguistic structures help construct the self. The structure or discourse—particularly for gender—is corporeal, as well as nonverbal. The critical implications of Butler's theorization of gender in this study rest in her argument about the formation of subjects that presupposes identity as a possibility, a role that is chosen and construed in a specific way. For Butler, gender as performative points to how a particular master narrative—that of the "Real Day Laborer"—is a subject formation, an identity that is performative in its repetition of oppressive and marginalizing norms about race, gender, nation, immigration, and legality.[6] In addition, performativity concerns the flexibility that day laborers practice in contesting those norms. Neces-

sarily so, they find themselves managing or working the (identity) location, the master narrative, on the street corner (Stinchcombe 1990).

The functioning of the master narrative employs power that is not solely driven by the workers on the corner but also stems from actions in institutional settings that derive legitimacy and power from the state. The discourses that construct the master narrative of the Real Day Laborer are constituted by powers of the law and the state. Although this study concentrates on how immigrants' and U.S. citizen workers' social actions traverse the terrain of race, ethnicity, gender, nation, migration, and (il)legality, the analysis still points to how situated knowledge produced in law and state practices is intertwined with and becomes apparent in the activities on the corner. The working lives of these men intimately inform us about what we learn from the seminal works of Michel Foucault (1972, 1995) and Mae Ngai (2004), respectively, about how hegemonic discourses of the nation are produced and how racialization and illegality produce the immigrant subject. Sharing analytical arguments with sociolegal theorists such as Susan Bibler Coutin (2000, 49, 55), this study's findings support learning about the functions of varying kinds of power that shape knowledge situated in official law. The outcomes in the pages that follow may center and draw on the men's experiences, but by treating those experiences analytically, we engage a more comprehensive understanding of both the visible and less visible practices that construct the Real Day Laborer master narrative (Ong 1991).

Building on these literatures, *Daily Labors* sheds light on a master narrative that reveals how and why particular groups of workers on the corner had more or less success in finding work from the corner. As an ideal, the Real Day Laborer is anchored in cultural constructions about race, gender, nationality, and legality;[7] the outcome is a conflation of the term "day laborer" and the identity "Latino/Mexican, male, immigrant, undocumented, unskilled worker."[8] The Real Day Laborer was often described as diligent, hardworking, possessing few or no skills, desperate, and willing to do low-wage or low-status work—traits that were perceived as embodied in immigrant workers and, almost exclusively, in Mexican immigrants and other Latinos perceived to be Mexican. Interviews with workers, employers, and community residents illuminated the currency of this narrative. The idea that Mexicans are *naturally* hard and willing workers reinforces their identity as Real Day Laborers, both cultivating and reproducing the master narrative. Whether real or perceived, these qualities conveyed an important instruction to all of the workers on the corner: that becoming, or getting work as, a day laborer involved more than just learning how to work as one.

Ideological interpretations of these categories shaped the behavior and strategies men used on the street corner to maximize their chances to be hired and recognized as a Real Day Laborer.

The contribution of this book is not to assess whether these workers were, indeed, "good workers" or Real Day Laborers. Rather, I analyze how the workers negotiated the ideas and cultural constructions of the Real Day Laborer identity to effectively navigate the hiring process on the street corner. By showing how the cultural meanings mattered to differently situated groups of men, and how they were negotiated by these particular day laborers, *Daily Labors* exposes the power and complexity of hierarchies of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and (il)legality.

Ironically, the master narrative that designates undocumented immigrant Latino workers as Real Day Laborers bestows a privilege on them in the form of a preferential demand for their labor, which affords them an economic advantage in the short run. However, this privilege simultaneously marginalizes them, as they must return day after day to the corner to market their social and economic vulnerability and their exclusion from the formal labor market. Ultimately, then, their privileged status on the corner limits their mobility in and integration into the U.S. labor force and reproduces the social inequalities that subordinate and discount their labor. At the same time, the master narrative identifies African American and Puerto Rican workers as *not* Real Day Laborers; it constructs their labor as inadequate and unskilled and, in fact, undesirable. Consequently, it also limits their mobility and social and economic integration (Braverman 1974). In the street-corner market, a racialized, gendered, immigrant illegality is thus accorded value and power in ways that undermine the value of citizen workers in terms of acquiring jobs and feeling a sense of community membership.

Documenting the men's experiences revealed the street corner as a useful site for examining how workers, immigrant and U.S.-born alike, learn about how they do or do not conform to norms and understand why they are or are not "desirable" members as workers and ultimately as citizens. These practices result from activities that shape the social order the state desires to manage its populace. Examinations of such processes have garnered attention in sociohistorical, anthropological, ethnographic, and cultural studies (Auyero 2012; Chatterjee 2006; Chavez 1998; Goldberg 2002; Lipsky 1980; Piore 1979). In Foucault's (1995) terms, the "social technologies of governmentality" explain how decentered state activities regulate and construct self-disciplining citizens. As workers, day laborers experience such disciplin-

ing practices in the everyday techniques on the street corner that define so-called good and poor workers, reinforcing norms about good and poor citizens. Moreover, workers instruct and reinforce these practices among themselves to be identified as good workers. Street-corner practices are critically meaningful for understanding the daily functions of this labor market—that is, how the workers understand why they are or are not hired and their actions during the period of waiting for work. Their responses to becoming good workers, as actions or non-actions, support or resist the power of the state.

This ethnography further informs us, then, that day labor is, literally, *daily labor*. How the men wait, what they do while they wait, and why they wait for work explain the productive efforts the men, as well as the state, exercise on the corner. This is an important finding: workers recognize the macro-level forces that shape both their entry and their exit from the labor market, as well as what brought them to the corner. In their daily efforts to make ends meet, they simultaneously and creatively act to contest these forces, intuitively and purposefully. Part of the challenge involves complicating the narrative of the Real Day Laborer to encompass not just skill levels but also identities such as race, ethnicity, and citizenship, and then to learn from what young U.S.-born black men such as William and Franklin say and do based on their experiences on the corner. Take, for example, the following statements they shared with me:

*William:* We are young, black, and therefore wrong in every way.

*Franklin:* There's no second chance for us in this world. Not really.

On the surface, we might understand these remarks as an assessment of the self. However, both expressed their identity not as black youth who had done something wrong or were locked out of "decent" jobs in the formal labor market because they lacked skills. Instead, they clarified that they were casualties of much grander forces:

*William:* I need that second chance. People are racist—that's just the truth of it. You gotta come clean with that shit. They [the employers] don't get up in my face and tell me so, but why do you think they drive away? You see it here; you see it everywhere. But I'm just like them [the immigrant day laborers]. I need to find work. I need help, too.

*Franklin:* There isn't enough work, and whatever disgusting, cheap-ass work there is here, it ain't going to us. It's going to them [the immigrant day laborers].

William, Franklin, and other young African American men on the corner felt they were targets of racism and prejudice against racialized urban youth, as well as marginalized citizens in a labor market that exploits an immigrant group's vulnerability. Their presence on the corner was a visible marker not of their deviance but of the state's flawed immigration system and an inadequate and discriminating labor market. At the same time, it was also an assertion of their right to economic justice, opportunity, and membership. In fact, this is true for all of the workers on this corner. Although the men may not be in a position to articulate such contestations in official proceedings—say, in a courtroom—they do engage the state in a public way that is visible and candid: by showing up on the street corner to seek work. Nonetheless, their actions are constrained by a system of power that permits no immediate resolution to the negotiations they manage daily on and off the corner. In all, waiting on the corner confirms the subordination of citizens and noncitizens in complex ways.

It should be clear that the men's accounts and my observations and interpretations of their experiences do not simply reflect an examination of the forces that produce docile or passive members of society (Foucault 1995; Ong 1991). A qualitative understanding of the complex ways that marginality both constrains and assists in negotiating daily life is key to this study; the street corner grounds the macro-structural forces that control workers in the labor market, but it also provides opportunity and a means for survival (Burawoy 1991). The dialectical processes of how race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and legality are interpreted and treated on the corner explain these barriers and opportunities, socially and economically. However, they do not eliminate all meaningful choice and agency. Although inequality—as a result of legal status or race, for example—may indeed hamper the effectiveness of individual agency, the workers still can and do shape their own work lives. This ethnographic examination teaches us about the complexity of this community of workers' daily labors. It shows:

1. How the different groups of workers negotiate practices on the corner to attain recognition as a Real Day Laborer and thus acquire work.
2. How workers reinforce and challenge normative ideologies about race, ethnicity, gender, nationality.

3. How workers live through a duality of legality (illegal versus legal, citizen versus alien) that frames the workers' consciousness—that is, their perceptions of work experiences and sense of belonging on the corner.

Day laborers are a familiar sight in many urban areas, and many scholars have analyzed informal day-labor markets (see, e.g., Esbenshade 2000; Malpica 2002; Valenzuela and Meléndez 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006). However, we know little about how these markets work and what it is like to be part of them. The existing literature on the informal day-labor market predominantly employs survey methods to document the scope of the phenomenon, demographic characteristics of the workforce, typical pay, and working conditions (Esbenshade 2000; Malpica 2002; Valenzuela 1999, 2002, 2003; Valenzuela and Meléndez 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006). In particular, the national study of day laborers by Abel Valenzuela and his colleagues, whose significant findings were reported in *On the Corner: Day Labor in the United States* (2006), provides a comprehensive examination of the demographics, conditions, and processes that make up the informal labor market, especially the population of workers. *Daily Labors* uncovers the workers' viewpoints—their perspectives and lived experiences both as day laborers and as members, as migrants and citizens, of communities living in Brooklyn. Employers play an important role on these corners, and some are included here, but their behavior is mainly observed, described, and interpreted through the eyes of workers, including my own as a fieldworker (Hughes 1958, 1971).

Few studies have examined the intimate interactions and processes in which day laborers participate or the structures that constitute the day-labor market as presented here, on the street corner. Examining this day-labor market ethnographically provides us with knowledge about practices, interactions, and events that takes us beyond learning how immigrants are incorporated into the general labor market. Scholars using an ethnographic approach have analyzed the social organization that underpins temporary work and the informal labor sectors (see, e.g., Malpica 2002; Mirande, Pitones, and Diaz 2011; Purser 2009; Ramirez 2011), as well as the social needs that men fulfill through their presence in these workspaces (Pinedo-Turnovsky 2006). Few qualitatively detailed studies exist in the United States that address day laborers' subjective experiences;[9] as a result, we know very little about how day laborers perceive, make sense of, and cope with the precarious labor market in which they take part. By paying attention to both economic structures and social processes, my fieldwork makes the complexity of how identity construction and management operate in society explicit and shows how

those social processes are particularly visible among new immigrant groups attempting to situate themselves in American society. And because we understand little about how identities and interactions are negotiated and managed in the day-labor market, our understanding of the effects and outcomes of that market's operations is limited. For the men on the Brooklyn street corner, Luis told me one rainy day in late September 2001,

> work is a necessary experience of life. To work—this is who we are. El esfuerzo. Somos trabajadores. Somos inmigrantes tambien. Pero en todo eso, hay la dignidad; hay el respecto [The work, our effort. We are workers. We are immigrants, too. But in all of this there is dignity; there is respect]. This is *why* we are here [*he points toward the street corner*].

Thus, work was not just an activity or an occupation for the men at la parada. It was their livelihood. And it defined their social existence.

In *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (2000), which draws on interviews with working-class men in France and the United States, Michèle Lamont revealed that moral standards, as opposed to economic status, were the key principles of their evaluations of worth and perceptions of social hierarchy. Lamont's influential work has focused scholarly attention on morality as an "alternative measuring stick" by which individuals of low social and economic status judge themselves in relation to others (Lamont 2000, 147). It was apparent to me that, like Luis, the men on the Brooklyn corner found their self-worth in the ability to maintain work discipline and were living responsibly not only by carving out better lives for themselves in the United States but also, and more important, by sending economic and social remittances to their families in their home countries.[10] These resources, financial and cultural, as in changing ideas about gender roles, labor markets, politics, to name a few, can critically shape immigrants' effective integration in the receiving society, as well as play a role in changing the social, political, and economic life in sending communities (Levitt 1999, 2001; Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992).

An important thread that runs throughout this book is the daily labor the men undertook in observing and managing how race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and migrant identity articulated the moral boundaries of good workers and the construction of the Real Day Laborer. This book pays critical attention to the workers' daily lives, which cannot be divorced from their

daily struggles over race, masculinity, and legality. Significantly, to capture how they construct the Real Day Laborer identity, as well as how they experience daily life on the corner and in New York City, accurately and comprehensively, immigrant and nonimmigrant day laborers' experiences should be analyzed not via comparison but as constitutive and interdependent (Jaynes 2000). While one might argue that an in-depth study of the Real Day Laborer master narrative reinforces the "basic emptiness" of the categories of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and legal status (see Salzinger 2003, 25), that should not diminish what we learn about the power of the categories' malleability and variability for each man on the corner whose coherence was produced in labor-market outcomes and in the substantive ways he did or did not experience membership and belonging.

Historically, New York City has been a gateway for newly arrived immigrants. Earlier immigrant groups living in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, the neighborhood in which my field site was located, were Europeans who worked in waterfront industries—the shipyards, piers, and factories that were once part of the area's vibrant maritime economy, which encompassed the piers in Red Hook as well as the Sunset Park waterfront. Immigrants paved New York City's streets, dug canals, laid down rail lines, and built houses and churches. In the late nineteenth century, Italian and Polish immigrants settled in enclaves in northern Sunset Park, close to Greenwood Cemetery. Italian laborers gravitated toward the docks and longshore jobs. Other European immigrants to New York included Greeks and Russians, many of whom were Jewish. Each subsequent generation left marks that can be seen throughout Brooklyn's neighborhoods in the local storefronts and churches, the housing, and the makeup of children attending the local public and private schools (Hum 2014; Ment and Donovan 1980; Winnick 1990).

Although in the decades just before the 1980s Manhattan's Lower East Side and South Brooklyn's Williamsburg were predominantly Latino, and Brooklyn's Brownsville and Bedford-Stuyvesant were overwhelmingly black, all of these neighborhoods soon reflected the changing demographics that marked Sunset Park. Beginning in the 1980s, Latino migrants began arriving from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South American countries such as Ecuador and Colombia. According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—formerly the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service—more than 141,000 immigrants entered Brooklyn between 1983 and 1987. In more recent decades, Sunset Park's vitality has been appar-

ent in its changing infrastructure, which now encompasses the thriving commercial area of Brooklyn's Chinatown, Muslim mosques, chain hotels such as Holiday Inn and Days Inn, businesses that cater to the financial needs of the Orthodox and Hasidic Jewish population in nearby Borough Park, and high-rise and condo developments that house young professional New Yorkers seeking both relief from Manhattan's skyrocketing rents and the allure of living in a changing Brooklyn (Hum 2014; Winnick 1990).

Immigrant day labor, however—from Irish laborers to African American domestics and Italian longshoremen (see, e.g., Anbinder 2016; Chin 2005; Corcoran 1993; DiFazio 1985; Kwong 1997; Waldinger 1986, 1999; Waldinger and Lichter 2003)—is not unique to New York City. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, employment options were limited for newly arriving immigrants, and many were occupied in low-paying, unskilled work, such as day labor (Anbinder 2016). Traditional gateway cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago also have long-established histories of day labor. Many people found work in "shape-ups," or on street corners, as they do today.[11] Meeting places between people seeking work and those seeking workers were not uncommon in the nineteenth century (Anbinder 2016; Martinez 1976).[12] Similar in significance is the diversity among newly arriving immigrants who are undocumented and have had long immigration histories in the United States. They include immigrants from the Americas, as typically represented in popular discourse, as well as those from Europe, who are less examined (Corcoran 1993; Kwong 1997).

Day-labor sites are still an important, and growing, sector of the U.S. economy, but they are increasingly concentrated as street-corner markets, where the majority of workers are of Latino ethnicity and do not have official residency status in the United States.[13] The day-labor market is growing particularly fast in New York, where Abel Valenzuela and Edwin Meléndez's 2003 study estimated there were 5,831–8,283 day laborers in the metropolitan region.[14] This estimate likely fell short of the true number, because Valenzuela and Meléndez could not account for those who did not seek day labor on a particular day or for work sites that went undiscovered. Their casual makeup contributes to the likelihood that many day laborers' work sites are not widely known.

Across the United States, cities and towns both large and small are experiencing a rise in informal labor. At the same time, local governments are being called on to solve the many challenges posed by informal labor markets, particularly those on street corners, which are the most publicly visible. Studying day labor in New York City therefore offers a unique opportu-

nity to challenge conventional perceptions about day labor and about the populations who participate in it.

Contemporary studies of migration—specifically, of undocumented immigration to the United States—have used the state (or metaphors of the state) to explain the production of exclusion, illegality, alien status, and liminality, as well as the detention of immigrants. While such state actions are precisely and acutely captured in the example of the U.S.-Mexico border, how these actions are experienced can be captured more broadly by examining how they are diffused across locales in different times and spaces as people migrate (De Genova 2002; De Genova and Peutz 2011; Willen 2007). Such expansions are integral to the production of migrant legality and illegality, which can be captured in being identified as a day laborer on the corner, in the experience of working as a day laborer on the corner, and in day laborers' management of these productions on the corner. It is crucial that we contextualize undocumented or unauthorized migration not as the manufacturer of street-corner communities but as an outcome itself that results from a demand for disposable labor (De Genova 2002). Consequently, an important trait of unauthorized migration is its necessary inclusion: it should not be ignored that immigration laws have created undocumented migrant workers, and scholars have argued that illegality fosters both vulnerability and discipline (De Genova 2002). The damaging effect is migrant vulnerability that persists almost unconditionally.

My task was to identify the prevailing and contradictory meanings that were practiced on the corner in Brooklyn to better understand how the state produces not only day laborers and workers but also migrants and citizens, which reinforces migrant illegality and disciplines them. This ethnography may not provide a comprehensive record of the institutional measures that brought this specific group of men—immigrants and U.S. citizens—to this intersection to look for work. However, it does capture in detail how the state is involved in coercive interactions with day laborers' work, the community's work, and even my work. It is critically important that ideas about race, gender, and legality be examined over time to assess their rigor in daily social life, as well as to learn about how they change. For me, the course of ideology that shaped the macro- and micro-level factors that came together on this street corner were ones read in ethnographies of the past and the present.

*Daily Labors* enables a scrutiny of daily practices that inform us about how and why immigrant and citizen workers literally embody dominant

discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, nation, immigration, and (il)legality. That said, my study's qualitative focus centers its analyses not on the state per se but on the workers, contributing knowledge about less visible activities and meanings that can also creatively challenge prevalent cultural constructions about day laborers, whether they are undocumented Latino male immigrants or African American male citizens. Ethnographic studies are critically advantageous in reaching vulnerable populations—in particular, undocumented migrants. Intensive studies of undocumented migrants and localized labor markets in communities are needed to comprehensively understand the dynamism of this labor force and answer questions, if not uncover new ones, that are missed by large-scale aggregated data studies of immigrant employment and incorporation (Cornelius 1982).

## Overview

Part I, "Making Good Workers," explores how the day laborers in my study narrated their daily experiences of finding work from the street corner, paying particular attention to the impact of race, ethnicity, nation, gender, and citizen-versus-alien and legal-versus-illegal status on their identity and success in being hired. In Chapter 1, "Street-Corner Workers," I introduce the different groups of workers who made up the street-corner community I examined. The workers are divided into two groups, "Regulars" and "Temps," based on how often they arrived at the street corner to look for work. The chapter also provides a more in-depth introduction to the main participants whose lives provide the lens for the observations and analytical contributions that follow. Finally, it introduces discussion about my entrée into the field site and my own positionality as a U.S. citizen, a Latina, a woman, and an academic with respect to the study's participants.

In Chapter 2, "With One Look," I examine a ranking social order on the street corner that not only shaped hiring patterns but also helped construct the master narrative of the Real Day Laborer. The chapter describes the process of finding work from the corner and how the men's perceived and actual backgrounds provided them with a set of competencies and attitudes that rationalized their location and belonging on the corner. It illustrates the segregation of the workers as categories of work were mapped onto categories of race, gender, and legal status, as well as their efforts to manage their self-presentations to improve their chances of being hired. The examination of the production of the Real Day Laborer is theoretically important because it shows the complexity and interdependence of such labor-

market mechanisms as employers' preferences, social networks, culture, and ideology. In this context, the workers labored to make sense of who they were and what they did as workers and developed complex and contradictory perceptions of themselves as they faced marginalization and constructed new social identities in the United States.

Chapter 3, "Sergio and William," centers on the duality of legality—that is, how ideas about legality and illegality shaped the consciousness of workers, immigrant and citizen alike, on the street corner. Although studies have examined how law shapes undocumented workers' consciousness, they analyze undocumented and immigrant workers in isolation from others. This book, by contrast, examines the interaction between undocumented immigrant workers and U.S. citizens and shows how ideas about (il)legality affect both groups. The findings show that the meaning and effects of legality vary: on the street corner, migrants' illegality was accorded value and power in ways that undermined the value of citizen workers. Whether or not a man's (il)legality was real or perceived, the prospect for being hired that it carried helped workers rationalize and justify the immigrant's (e.g., Sergio's) and the citizen's (e.g., William's) experiences and their place on, or removal from, the corner.

Chapter 4, "Daily Masculinity," scrutinizes the integral role gender played in social processes on the street corner. Although only men sought day labor at my field site, the absence of women did not diminish the meanings and effects of masculinity there. Socially constructed meanings of gender continually shaped interactions on the corner and reinforced the link between being a good worker and being a good man, constructions that were influenced by the men's own cultural and class perceptions of masculinity. Their social identities as hard workers and good citizens were deeply linked to their identities as family men, which, in turn, rationalized their persistence in laboring on the corner as fulfilling a familial and financial responsibility (Gomberg-Muñoz 2010). The chapter analyzes how the men conducted themselves to attain the desired status of Real Day Laborer, which relied on normative beliefs and behavior linked to being good men. Yet while ostensibly being a good man elevated a man's status when it involved doing hard work to fulfill the role of provider, it could simultaneously marginalize him if he took on duties that were considered "women's work" and challenged his manhood. In expanding our comprehension of how gender operates, these findings point to the less visible work undocumented immigrant men carry out each day, both on and away from the corner, to uphold their masculine identity and reinforce gender ideology.

Part II, "Making Community," explores how the workers attempted to cultivate a sense of membership in the community, even as they dealt with the many challenges they faced living in New York City. The title of Chapter 5, "Entre Nosotros" (Among Us), is drawn from a common response to how things worked out on the corner among the Latino day laborers. While observing the processes on the corner that eventually took these men to jobs at homes, small businesses, and large construction sites, less apparent social practices were taking place on the corner. I learned about the varied social orders that involved not only labor but also dynamic exchanges of cultural and social meanings of identity based on race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and legal status. Aside from work, the men shared parts of their daily lives with me so I could better understand the unexplored meanings and purposes of the corner that highlighted how they cultivated an economic and social life in the community for themselves.

Chapter 6, "Street-Corner Community," closely examines the social order of the corner to broaden our understanding of how regulations and protections are enacted even at informal work sites, where the structures that, social scientists argue, are needed to formally monitor and regulate abusive workplace practices and prevent deviance and corruption are absent. The chapter reveals how the workers transformed a public place—the street corner—into a space that served their specific economic and social needs. They created a support system to assist and mentor their peers and doled out punishment and penalties when necessary. It is important to understand how this context of order and rights was upheld on the corner, outside any enforcement or intervention by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or community advocates. It is equally significant to understand how these workers—men who had no formally established legal rights to live and work in the United States—maintained a stable work environment to fulfill their status as good workers and good community members.

Chapter 7, "Methodology and Assessment of Doing This Fieldwork," informs readers about the process of doing fieldwork and shows how fieldworkers and participants are both observers and informants. To understand this diverse street-corner community, I spent nearly three years visiting, standing alongside, socializing with, and working with the men. I conducted in-depth interviews with the workers on the corner, in their homes, and in public spaces such as restaurants and parks. I also interviewed some family members, employers, small-business owners and employees, and community residents. But *Daily Labors* provides more than just a portrait of

those seeking work on a Brooklyn street corner and their race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality. It captures the workers' and the fieldworker's understandings of the identities that were constructed and the practices that were employed to shape the organization of labor at the field site. As a result, the chapter also introduces the fieldworker as one of the workers on the corner and interrogates the implications of the mutual undertaking between the men and me of observing and interpreting social behavior in the workplace, a discussion that challenges common understandings of the diverse elements and processes that inform and contribute to the ethnographer's work.

What, then, are the different constructions of collective identities on the street corner? How did the men on this corner envision their belonging, or lack thereof, to the community of day laborers, to the surrounding community in Brooklyn, and to the larger United States? And how did they struggle, similarly and distinctly, over the meanings of their identity as good workers and good men in daily life? These are the concerns that I summarize in the Conclusion. I have structured this story about identity construction and labor experiences around shared and contested ideas about race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, immigration, and legality, all of which inform what I call the master narrative of the Real Day Laborer. *Daily Labors* focuses on how working in an informal labor market influenced the study participants' understandings of themselves as workers; as immigrants; as undocumented; and as black, Latino, or Mexican. The activities and meanings I uncovered illustrate a master narrative that elevates the status (and possible integration) of undocumented immigrant workers but simultaneously marginalizes all day laborers, immigrant and U.S.-born alike.

The findings are my interpretations of this street-corner community, but they are anchored in historical accounts and examinations of how prevailing ideas about race, ethnicity, gender, immigrant, and (il)legal identities shape how we think about who fits particular forms of employment. The different narratives about being "Latino," "Mexican," "black," "illegal," or "American" are fraught with analytical considerations in a multitude of ways. Indeed, these analyses inform us about how we identify desirable members of these working communities; more important, however, they can share insights that connect to ideas about citizenship and membership. Understood as narratives (if not lives) that intertwine and are interdependent, rather than as narratives in conflict, the analyses can motivate actions for collective claims making by immigrants and U.S.-born workers. The implications for this are manifold and anchored in social justice. The men on this Brooklyn street

corner provided information about their working lives that can help in the development of informal and formal practices and policies to meet the needs of immigrant workers, as well as other vulnerable groups of workers. And given the close proximity of black and immigrant workers in low-wage work in the United States (e.g., in health-care, food-processing, hospitality, and other service industries), organizing campaigns among these workers, while active, requires bringing the two groups together in a meaningful way that moves beyond conflict—across barriers of race, language, and immigration status—to solidarity.

A work site such as the Brooklyn street corner I studied can facilitate communication across vulnerable groups. As organizers, scholars, advocates, and community residents, we need to learn more about how these workers teach and learn from one another and how (and, possibly, why) they are socially and economically marginalized in distinct and similar ways in the United States. Such a study would contribute to deeper discussion among those of us who seek not just to learn and teach about these workers' problems but also to *stand with them* and share *their* experiences and goals for resolving conflict with employers, negotiating a restrictive legal and labor system, and becoming community members as accepted and valued residents, if not citizens of New York.

# I

# Making Good Workers

# 1

# Street-Corner Workers

The New York Day Labor Survey (NYDLS), conducted by Abel Valenzuela Jr. and Edwin J. Meléndez and published in 2003, identified fifty-seven sites where day laborers gathered in New York City and the surrounding suburbs. The study reported that the majority of day laborers were Latino men, although women made up 5 percent of day laborers looking for work in New York City.[1] Latinos constituted the majority of these workers, with one-third coming from Mexico. This was a representative picture of the men who looked for work at my field research site. The diverse population of men included immigrants and U.S. citizens. The majority were Latino men, immigrants from Mexico, as well as from Central and South America.[2] Another group of men were immigrants from Poland and Russia. I became friendly with some of the Polish men who spoke English, but our exchanges were modest compared with those I had with the Latino men. As a result, my contact with the group of Eastern European day laborers was limited. Together, these workers made up a group I call "Regulars," because they arrived at the corner almost every day in search of job opportunities. In addition, there were young African American and Puerto Rican men who were U.S. citizens and who looked for work infrequently compared with the immigrant workers. I refer to these workers as "Temps." On average, thirty Latino men gathered at the intersection throughout each day alongside a smaller group consisting mostly of Polish men. They ranged in age from sixteen to thirty-

two, although most were in their mid-twenties. The majority had lived in the United States for fewer than five years and were undocumented; as noted earlier, though, a small group of African American and Puerto Rican U.S. citizens also day-labored on this street corner.[3]

Participation in the project was voluntary. To encourage their cooperation, I assured the men of complete anonymity in our conversations on the corner and in the personal interviews.[4] Because the majority of men who worked on these corners did not have legal residency status, they understandably tended to be suspicious of onlookers—including me. Interviews covered a range of areas of the men's lives in New York City and, for immigrants, their native countries.[5] A flexible schedule of questions and key topics guided in-depth interviews to document their personal life histories that lasted from two to three hours.[6] These histories included the circumstances surrounding their migration experience; their employment experiences in both formal and informal work; their living situations, including familial and nonfamilial relationships; and their expectations and concerns about the future.

Although workers constituted the population of participants in the study, I also interviewed twenty-two individuals who hired men from the corner; the format of those interviews ranged from casual, open conversations to formal, structured ones. These individuals were typically private homeowners and local small-business owners and employees who hired men for home improvement/construction (e.g., roofing, carpentry, painting, demolition, stockpiling materials, flooring, landscaping) and moving jobs; as auto mechanics; and to pass out flyers, to name just the most commonly offered jobs. I also spoke with workers' family members, local residents, other local business owners and employees, and organizers from advocacy organizations to gain deeper insights about the men as members of the neighborhood community. I followed debates and media coverage, local and national, especially after the attacks of September 11, 2001, when public discourse stoked fears over migration, terrorism, and national security.

## The Regulars

La parada was one of many sites across New York City that served as a living street-corner billboard for ready labor and undocumented immigrant workers. Although the men's objective was to seek employment there, they also engaged in public activities that reflected elements of public life that were generally frowned on, such as drinking and rowdiness. As a result, day laborers were often perceived as contributing to public disorder or even seen as criminals (Golash-Boza 2010). Yet even though this part of the men's lives

was visible, their plight—specifically, as members of the working poor—was virtually invisible, especially since the men rarely brought their needs to the attention of local officials or social service agencies because of their undocumented legal status.[7]

Many of the men understood that they risked earning less, or no, money by pursuing day labor; however, they could also earn the minimum wage, and often much more, if they were hired from the corner. Consistent with the findings from the NYDLS, the men received good pay for their work—$8–$12 per hour—compared with the state and federal minimum hourly wage of $5.15. A negotiated wage for one eight- to twelve-hour workday could range from $80 to $125. However, it is important to keep in mind that, although the opportunity exists to earn more money in day labor than in formal jobs, day-labor work is not steady and is largely seasonal.

Many of the men shared apartments to minimize their rent and utility costs; typically, their roommates were also men who day-labored on the corner. For instance, Santiago shared a small two-bedroom apartment with Luis, Jorge, and Ronaldo (four men I met at the outset of my fieldwork). They each paid $150 to cover the $600 monthly rent; the apartment's second bedroom was really just a small room that opened into the adjoining kitchen.

Unlike his roommates, Ronaldo was an infrequent worker on the corner. He was twenty-seven and had immigrated to the United States from Cuenca, Ecuador, via Mexico in 1999. After he finished his service in the Ecuadorian Army, he obtained a student visa to travel to Mexico; from there he traveled to the United States. He often wore loosely fitting khaki pants, sneakers, and a royal blue jersey with white letters tracing out "Brooklyn Kings," the name of his favorite local soccer team. Ronaldo was a huge soccer fan and had even trained for Ecuador's national team. That was before he left for the United States. He continued to play but didn't practice much because he was usually working. He had a job working twelve-hour shifts six days a week at a warehouse in Brooklyn. He worked on the corner on his day off to supplement the pay from his formal job. He explained:

> I like to come here. I make a little money, but at least I have a job and I can work every day. But I like to come here, too. I work less hours and I make more money. If there's no work, then I'll go play soccer. I'm not losing anything.

Ronaldo agreed to move in with Luis and Santiago after meeting Luis at a laundromat. In turn, Luis invited Ronaldo to accompany him to the corner

to find work. Ronaldo agreed to go on his day off and had kept to that schedule. Most of the men on the corner benefited in this way from their associations and friendships with others at la parada.[8]

Luis was from Atlixco, Mexico, and had been living in New York City for three years before we were introduced. He was also twenty-seven when I first met him. He was standing beside Santiago and reading an article from the Spanish-language newspaper *Hoy* out loud to inform Santiago, and others, about news he felt they should know. Over the subsequent months, I learned that sharing news was a routine part of Luis's interactions with Santiago and his other roommates. Luis described himself as an experienced guide for the men:

> I know a lot. I know all the people who pass by here. I've been working here for a few years already. You see, Santiago, he's young. I'm like his father in this country. Sometimes I like it. I try to teach him. The others, too. I tell them what I know, what I see. We have to help each other. Too many of the men want to do everything alone. That's good, but sometimes you need to ask for help and help others, too. So I try to do what I can. My family comes first, but I try to help some of these men, too. If I need help one day, then maybe he will help me, too. I know more than you think.

Luis supported his wife, his five-year-old son, and his parents, all of whom still lived in Puebla, Mexico. He was a stocky man who stood about five feet, three inches, tall and had a thick moustache that initially fooled me into thinking he was older than twenty-seven. Luis enjoyed living in New York City, but when I asked him whether he wanted to remain in the United States for the rest of his life, he was quick to respond:

> Para toda mi vida? [For all of my life?] NO! No, no, no. Eight years. I'd like to stay for eight years and then see what happens after that. But I want to go home. I miss my home. You should visit Mexico. It is so beautiful. No, I wouldn't want to live here for the rest of my life. I don't even want my family to come here. It's dirty here. And there are always problems with other groups of people. Too many people from different countries, too. That creates problems, just like here [at the corner]. The pay is good, better than in Mexico. But life here, it's difficult. And it costs a lot to have a life in this country.

Luis was certain he would return home but worried about Santiago and others who seemed not to know whether they wanted to forge a new life in New York or return to Mexico. Luis told me:

> You have to push him. Otherwise, he won't do it [look for work]. Sometimes he looks for work by himself, but he's lazy. I try to help him.

Luis met Santiago on the corner, and they looked for an apartment together soon after Luis's niece, who had been staying with him, returned to Mexico. Santiago learned about looking for work on the corner from a coworker at his job at a grocery store who told him that he could make more money in less time from day labor than he could at the grocery store. The coworker also assured him that there were people who were always looking for immediate help; that no one really cared about immigration status; and that day-labor employers even preferred men who did not have "papers."[9] Santiago said:

> He didn't lie to me. I get work, and I make more money. I didn't like working for that Italian man [the grocery store's owner]. So I quit, and now I come here. It's good. I don't have to work for anyone here. I want to work, but I don't have to if I don't want to.

Santiago was optimistic that he could make at least $60 a day; at that rate, he would be financially secure for the week after only a couple of days of work. He could continue to send money home and still have some left over for himself. Many of the other men had also left jobs in the formal economy to look for work at la parada, particularly because of the potential for higher pay and more manageable hours. However, Santiago was a bit naïve in believing that he would earn a steady income from day labor. Many of the men were aware of the risks of forgoing a steady income, however small, and knew they would certainly face difficult times looking for work on the corner. Luis commented:

> I used to work in the hotels by the airport. LaGuardia? But I didn't like that kind of work. So I left. But I knew it was going to be hard. This is not easy. And the work you get, that's not easy. Him [*he points at Santiago*]? He doesn't care. He still dreams. Look at him. . . . [A]re you dreaming Santiago? [*Santiago looks up curiously and nods at Luis so he will repeat the question. Luis laughs in my direction.*]

Santiago was nineteen when we first met. He had arrived in the United States in 1998 and began working on the corner when he was seventeen. He was one of the youngest Mexican men working there when I started my fieldwork. Like the other men, he always wore a cap. His favorite, which was plain and navy blue, had been given to him by his younger brother, Ignacio, before he left. Ignacio was also making plans to work in the United States, but Santiago was cautioning him to wait a year or two. Although Ignacio was only fourteen, a photograph showed that he was bulky and had a mature physique—quite a contrast to Santiago's thin, five foot, four inch, frame, which was usually disguised by his baggy clothes. Unsurprisingly, Ignacio's cap was a bit large for Santiago, but he didn't mind because it covered a small growth on the back of his ear that made him self-conscious.

Although Santiago gave in to immaturity at times, there were select moments in my fieldwork when I recalled him being serious about making plans for the future. For example, in early December 2001, Santiago's rent was going to increase because one of his roommates, Jorge, planned to return to Mexico. Santiago knew he could not afford a rent increase and was worried that he would have to move. Although he had relatives in New York who might have assisted him, he regarded asking them as a last resort. Instead, he began looking for additional work in the formal economy—for example, a warehouse job like Ronaldo's. He even called his family in Mexico to warn them that he might have to return. This was a call few men made, and they did so only under the direst circumstances, because an early return would not only result in the stigma of failure and disappointment but also, perhaps more devastating, worsen their families' already poor living conditions.

I met Gerry when he was twenty-one and working in his first year as a day laborer on the corner. It was too early for him to have thoughts of returning to Mexico: it was also his first year living in New York City, and after only two months of working on the corner, Gerry decided that la parada was where his days should begin:

> I used to work . . . where they sell the fruit and the vegetables. Then my friend told me to come here. That was in July. I came, and that was it. I left my job.

Why? I asked. He answered:

> Por que? No ves! [Why? Don't you see!] Look at how many came today. Come back on Monday . . . and look at all of us. You have the

> Mexicans here, the Russians and Polish. Over there you have the blacks and Colombians. They come here from everywhere.
>
> I make better money here than I did over there [at the fruit and vegetable stand]. Maybe not every day, but I make my money. And if I don't feel like working today, I don't have to.

Another worker, Jerome, said he enjoyed living in New York City very much but did not want to work on the corner for long. He preferred to have a more secure job, but because he did not have "papers," finding one was difficult. So he continued to work on the corner in the hope of finding a steady job. Jerome, who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in 1998, described how he arrived at la parada:

> It's now three years since I came to this country. I crossed with the coyote,[10] and it cost me $1,200. I made it to Arizona. Then they took me in a minivan from Arizona to Chicago and then on a bus from Chicago to New York City. There were twelve of us in the minivan. You don't believe me? You could never understand. Twelve of us. Imagine that!

Willie was one of the few men I met who had crossed the border with his family. He was twenty-seven when we met and had left Mexico in 1997 with his wife and four-year-old son. His wife was pregnant when they crossed the border. Willie commuted from Midwood, Brooklyn, about forty-five minutes away, to work at la parada. Sometimes he was hired for jobs that paid as much as $80 per day. "If you have a skill, it's even better for you," he said. "If you can tell them that you can do something, you'll make more money." This was one of the reasons he believed that he could get a job for good pay. Willie explained his skill as that he could fix any part of the interior of the house. He said:

> I know how to work. I'm very good. Do you know how I found my apartment? We live near Marine Park. I took a job with a Russian, very nice man. He wanted me to fix his bathroom. The tiles, the sink, the shower, everything. And so I did it—everything. He only wanted marble. Beautiful. He owns buildings, and he liked what I did for him so much that he gave me an apartment in his building. Now he's my landlord. I pay rent, but it isn't very much, and we have a nice home. And it's good because whenever he needs something fixed in

> the building, he asks me to do it. And he pays me. And if he knows about other work, he said he'll tell me first. I believe him.

Willie felt comfortable speaking some English, so he frequently assisted the other men in negotiating wages or describing the work requested by potential employers. He explained to me that the men's lack of English proficiency could create obstacles to finding and keeping jobs:

> If you don't know the language, you can lose a job sometimes. Either you cannot discuss the money they are going to pay you or you don't understand what they want you to do, so you lose the job. People of all kinds come here, and many of them don't speak any Spanish at all. You can understand the money, but that's about it. It's hard. You have a better life because you were born here. You know the language. It's something different if you cannot speak.

When I began my fieldwork, many of the men were recent arrivals, some having worked on the corner for only a few months and others for a little more than two years. There were some "viejos,"[11] men who had been working on this particular corner for as long as five years, and some who had worked at other day-labor sites. Rubén, one of the viejos, had migrated from Cuba to New York City nine years earlier and had been working at this specific site for five years.

Regulars such as Ronaldo, Luis, Santiago, Gerry, Jerome, and Willie were Latino immigrants who showed up almost daily to look for work from this street-corner market. They also ranked high in the social order of Real Day Laborers at la parada. Luis, for example, was held in high esteem not only by his fellow workers but also by a few of the employers who occasionally hired from the corner. One such employer was Sal, a young Italian man who worked for his father, a contractor who owned a home construction and repair business. Sal did not live nearby, but he was dating a woman who lived two blocks south of the corner. Sometimes after spending the night at her home, he would hire one or two men from the corner on his way to work in Coney Island. Sal favored Luis as a diligent worker:

> That's Luis? I call him Louie. Same thing, isn't it? Anyway, he's great. My dad really likes the work he does for us. And he's a good guy. Hardworking, respectable. He don't mess around. Quiet, you know. He's great with kids, too. I seen him with my nephew at the office. I think he misses his family.

I examine the "Real Day Laborer" label in more depth in the next chapter. I note briefly here, though, that the men's different racialized identities could generate tension around the Real Day Laborer identity. For example, Octavio and Compadre, both Latino immigrants, were also black, and their skin tone served as a visible racial marker. Employers often assumed that Octavio and Compadre were African American and consequently ranked them low in the social order of good workers and thus Real Day Laborers on the corner.[12]

Compadre, who had immigrated to the United States from Panama and, at thirty-five, was one of the older Latinos on the corner, was regarded as a leader of a small group of young, black Latinos who had come mainly from Colombia and Panama. Like the "old heads" identified in Elijah Anderson's *StreetWise* (1990), viejos such as Compadre attempted to provide guidance to the younger men and instruct them on how to succeed in the Real Day Laborer role.[13] "I stay with these boys. They need me," he told me. He helped them with work-related issues, often encouraging the men to accept (or discouraging them from accepting) a job. He was usually the first man to go to the curb to speak with a potential employer, while the younger men remained engaged in deep discussion. Compadre felt it was necessary for him to look after the young men on the corner so they would not miss out on a call for work. He often negotiated better pay for them and, like others at the corner, called out dishonest employers to help men avoid being robbed of the pay they deserved for their labor.

Compadre had no family of his own and sincerely took care of his men, serving as a surrogate father. Although he had his own apartment above a Chinese and Vietnamese café, he rarely stayed there. Often he stayed with a woman whom he never called his girlfriend; instead, he said she was "like a friend" who "helped me out a bit" and to whom he was "grateful." Sometimes, in hopeful moments, he would talk about his future children and how he would serve as a better father figure for them than his own father had for him. Compadre was a tall man whose looks charmed most women. He was well dressed on the corner and always remarked that his appearance was very important to him. He had little patience for unsightly behavior or unkempt clothing. He was different from his "boys," not just in age, but in his demeanor. He said:

> This is demeaning work, you know? But I'm not begging. I'm asking for someone to give me a chance to work. I'm serious. Poverty kills you, your spirit. But I'm not poor, so why do I have to look poor? That's what I tell them.

Octavio was one of Compadre's "boys." Most of the time, he wore an oversized black bomber jacket. Because it was unseasonably warm during the first October and November I was conducting fieldwork, he wore the jacket but left it open, exposing his usual fashion choice of a white string T-shirt over no-brand sweat pants. Octavio was twenty-five and had come from Buenaventura, Colombia, arriving in the United States only a year before I started visiting the corner. He rented a room in a building for $400 and lived by himself. This was not a typical living arrangement among the men. Octavio assured me he was able to get jobs that paid him $80 or more a day; because he spoke some English, he did have an advantage over some of the other men. He hadn't taken any formal classes but had learned English by watching television programs and trying to read newspapers. He explained that he was looking into taking classes at a nearby school, which would cost him $35 a week, but was not sure he wanted to incur the additional expense. He boasted about having a remarkable memory and said he was skilled in picking up words and phrases from conversation—something he was proud to show off to me by reciting words and phrases he had learned.

## The Temps

Spatial distinctions helped guide hiring processes between potential employers and day laborers—for example, a small-business owner could stop at the southeastern corner to hire Polish day laborers or ten yards ahead of them, on the same corner, to hire Mexican day laborers. This brings me to the Temps and their placement in the social order on the corner. The Temps were a group of young Puerto Rican and African American men—boyish, in fact, when compared with the Regulars—between seventeen and twenty-two, though most were around eighteen. They visited the corner infrequently but more often in the summer months. The Temps' self-presentation to potential employers was different from that of the Regulars. While the Regulars dressed casually in button-down shirts or in T-shirts and jeans, the Temps' attire followed fashion trends and included low-hanging baggy jeans and oversized shirts over their thinly framed bodies. They also wore backward caps bearing sports teams' logos.

While the Regulars passed the waiting time by reading newspapers or speaking with one another, the Temps behaved more animatedly, yelling at cars and trucks that drove by, for example, or mimicking one another and others. They greeted each other with a "pound"—that is, a fist bump followed by the bumping of shoulders. And they spoke in English, a language rarely heard among the men on these corners. Their vocabulary and dress,

representative of urban youth culture, therefore marked them as belonging to a different generation from the Regulars.

Richie, a twenty-year-old Puerto Rican man, often wore an American flag kerchief on his head; its patriotic colors matched the waistband patch on his low-rise Tommy Hilfiger jeans. "Gotta wear Tommy," he said when I remarked on the designer label. "They're the only jeans that fit me right." Richie had lived in Sunset Park since he was five. He visited the corner less often than William and Franklin, whose visits were already irregular, except during the warm summer months, when their daily presence on the corner was probable.

The day I met Richie started out like most mornings in the field. I walked to the intersection's northeastern corner to chat with Luis and Jerome. Following my routine, I then went to buy breakfast from the corner bagel shop and deli. As I was entering the shop, Richie, who was sitting on the hood of a car, yelled, "You all right, Miss?" My first thought ("Did he speak in English?") crossed too quickly with my second concern ("Is he a cop?"), so I merely glanced toward him without answering. He followed up by asking the same question, but this time in Spanish—"Estás bien, chica?"—and the following exchange ensued:

*Carolyn:* Yes. Sorry. I couldn't hear you very well.

*Richie:* That's all right. I ain't never seen you here before. That's why I asked.

*Carolyn:* Why?

*Richie:* Cuz you don't see too many women looking to make some money here. It's not my business, what you doing here and all, but I was just asking.

*Carolyn:* I've never seen you here, either.

*Richie:* Me? I come here all the time. They know me. Your peeps over there know me.

*Carolyn:* I've been coming here a lot, too, and this is the first time I've seen you here. Maybe we just missed each other.

*Richie:* Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah. I would remember seeing you here. It don't matter. How come you come here? One of them is your boyfriend or something?

*Carolyn:* No, they're my friends. They're helping me write a paper for one of my classes.

*Richie:* It's boring here, though. But it's your time, I guess. But I hear ya. It's all good. But you should talk to everyone here—like me, for instance. Get everyone's point of view, right?

*Carolyn:* Of course. We should definitely talk sometime then.
*Richie:* Hey, can you get me a coffee? Hold up. [*He hands me a dollar bill.*] Here's a single, and I want my change. [*He laughs at himself.*]

Leaving the shop, I gave Richie his coffee and change, and he crossed the street to meet a friend. I returned to Luis and Jerome, who had been joined by Santiago, Ronaldo, and Manuel. Manuel was an infrequent worker on the corner partly because he found work in factories in Brooklyn and Queens, typically as a machinist. The work was unsteady and part time, however, and he returned to the corner when projects for which he was hired were completed. I could see that something had upset them; they seemed aloof. Santiago sat down without acknowledging me, a rare non-greeting between the men and me. Luis and Ronaldo continued their conversation, and I quietly ate my bagel and worried about my next move. Had I interrupted a private conversation or done something else to upset them? When Ronaldo left the group to go to the deli, I asked Luis whether I had interrupted a private moment. He asked in return, "Why were you speaking to that man?" I explained that, like everyone else, Richie had wanted to know why I was spending time on the corner, and a conversation began. I asked whether my conversation with Richie had caused the awkward greeting I received from the others. Luis answered:

> No, it's just that you have to be careful about who you talk to here. There's no problem, but they [the Temps] play around here. They're not really looking for work. Sometimes they find a job, but most of the time they just waste time. The days pass and they don't find work and they're OK because they don't need the money. He's OK, but some of them are really bad. Sometimes they make it hard to find work. I come here, and I want to be in peace. Don't let them bother you. [*He glances at Santiago and Jerome.*] They're jealous, too. But I understand. Just be careful.

Richie never talked about holding a job in the formal economy. Instead, he described a few temporary jobs he had had in previous years, such as taking care of trash for a building's apartment manager and acting as a "messenger" for a friend who dealt drugs. Richie couldn't find a job that summer and wanted to try to day-labor. He had a high-school equivalency (GED) diploma and talked a lot about returning to school and getting a college degree. But in the nearly three years of my fieldwork, he did not enroll in any

college classes or fill out any college applications. When I asked Richie about his opinion of the Regulars, he said:

> I don't think about them. Besides, I'm not taking anything away from them. If someone comes by to hire a few workers today, I bet you that that car won't be stopping in front of me. But that's all right. I don't know if I really want to work today.

While we were speaking, a young white man pulled up in front of an apartment building where a group of Polish and Mexican men had gathered to see about the job. The men had been standing there for at least five minutes when a friend of Richie's said:

> No, they ain't getting it. Let me go over there.

Richie added:

> They taking too long. So he's going to see if he can help out. You see, we can speak English, but that don't help us. They come and pick up the Mexicans first, not me.

When I asked Richie how the Mexican and Polish men could understand what the prospective employers wanted, he laughed and answered:

> Oh, they understand. A lot of times, the man uses his hands to describe what he needs done. But a lot of them understand some English. Like this guy, I think he needs someone to mix cement for him because I seen him do this. [*He uses his hands to illustrate the motion of mixing cement.*] But I don't want to mix no cement, especially on a day like today. They'll pay you OK, but that's hard work, and then your body's aching after. It's not worth it.

William echoed Richie's feeling. William was a twenty-year-old African American man who grew up in the nearby Red Hook neighborhood. He had a single mother and two younger siblings and told me:

> I'm trying to do right by them, by my moms. It's hard, man. I messed up a lot in high school. But I'm in school, and I hope I can get my associate's degree. That will make my moms happy.

William was taking classes at a local city college. Even though he was enrolled during the summer sessions, I still saw him on the corner. He was also a charismatic character on the corner who enjoyed talking about himself. "I got that million-dollar look, man, I'm telling ya, million-dollar," he said. William's "look" included neatly ironed T-shirts and carefully creased jeans. After sharing that I rarely ironed, William joked about ironing my clothes, too, but noted that his patience and talent for the job would force him to charge me a fee.

William had only recently moved from Red Hook and did not yet feel comfortable with the people he met in Sunset Park or at college:

*William:* It's all good. I gotta get back on track, help my moms out. I don't hang out too much at school. There are some cool brothers out there, but they live too damn far, out in Coney Island and shit.
*Carolyn:* What about school?
*William:* I go when I can, but today I need to make some money.
*Carolyn:* But if you cut class, how are you going to pass?
*William:* Oh, I'll pass. It ain't that hard. I get by. What about you? You cutting class to be here?
*Carolyn:* No, I have classes in the evening.
*William:* Yeah, I should have done that. But I need my nights. Sometimes my mom works, so I gotta help out with my brother and sister. It's more for my sister. My brother can take care of himself. And you know, I gotta make time for my crew. They come first, after my family. They're my family, too.

I often saw William on the corner and wondered how many classes he could miss and still earn credit for the course. He assured me that he had everything under control. He was not very concerned about grades; he just needed credits. Finding "that extra cash" wasn't always easy, he said. For the most part, William just hung out with Franklin on the corner. They were offered jobs, but the number of opportunities to work paled compared with the number of opportunities accessible to the Regulars.

Though he was younger than the other Temps—sixteen when we first met—Franklin was frank when talking about how much he disliked spending time on the corner with "illegals." I didn't have conversations with him until the following summer, when he was seventeen. "It's a shame, man, a real shame I gotta be out here with these people. I'm an American," he told

me. Franklin was often upset during his time on the corner. He was never talkative, just outspoken.

Franklin, who was African American, had lived in the Bronx for most of his life. His family moved to Brooklyn the year before he started high school because his parents had heard good things about Edward R. Murrow High School's math and science program. Although he could have commuted to the school from the Bronx, his parents were also concerned about changes in his attitude, which they attributed to his friends. As a result, Franklin said, his parents wanted to give him a "fresh start" in a new neighborhood with new friends. Franklin was accepted to Edward R. Murrow and attended classes during his freshman year. The situation changed drastically in his sophomore year: he no longer earned good grades, causing him to fall short of the credits he needed to move on to junior year. His parents were disappointed, and their relationship with Franklin was tense. Franklin dropped out of high school, though he told me, "I just stopped going for now, but I'll go back. I ain't no juvie. I just need a break."

One of Franklin's passions was drawing. Based on the sketches I saw in the pad he brought to our interview, he was an effective storyteller with a pencil. Franklin also told me that he painted in the basement of his family's house. Painting was not only a fun activity but also a way to show off his talent and communicate his aspiration for a career in the arts.

Marvin was clearer about his job prospects. A bit more soft-spoken than Franklin, he similarly complained that young black men like him were overlooked for day jobs. However, it bothered him less because he wasn't looking for work as seriously as were Richie, William, and Franklin. Marvin was eighteen and attended Pace University. He wanted to own a small business and had a number of ideas about it, ranging from a hip-hop bar to a store like Tower Records or Virgin Music where customers could sample video games instead of music. An apparent link across his ideas was music:

> If I could spend my day around music, I'd be a happy man. I make tunes, y'know. [*He looks toward the others with a humorous grin, inviting their feedback.*] But it's going to be how I make my money, one way or another. I don't need this, but I come here. I know these guys. [*He points to William and others.*] It's just to be social, for me, at least. Then I go to class in the afternoon and work at night. That's why you don't see me here every day. I got better things to do with my time. I don't wait for things to happen. I make 'em happen. [*He looks again toward the others.*]

Even though Marvin did not *need* to be on the corner, he was there around three out of five weekdays. He was easy to spot: if he was going directly to school or work after a morning on the corner, he wore button-down shirts over jeans or khakis. On other days, he was dressed casually in polo shirts. I rarely saw him wearing a T-shirt. Even when hot weather called for shorts, Marvin wore the short-sleeve polos.

Marvin lived with his mother and younger brother. His parents had divorced when he was young, and Marvin acknowledged that he did not make an effort to stay in touch with his father. He loved his brother tremendously and was determined to "be a good male figure in his life." Marvin strongly felt that his parents had socialized him in ways that would help him be successful. "My mother taught me everything I want to be, and my father taught me everything I didn't want to be," he said. "Both are important to have in your life."

There were other young American men I could include in the group of Temps, such as Oscar and Martin, who were present, though infrequently. Martin, a young African American man, was able to make money detailing and fixing cars at an auto shop in Red Hook, and sometimes in Coney Island. He explained that the work was necessarily part time, however, because of its sensitive nature. "The shop steals parts, plain and simple," he said. "I don't do it, and I say nothing, nada. And I get to work on cars that are slammin'! I'm a genius. They love me!" Others arrived not so much to seek work as to meet with others.

## The Fieldworker

Many classic ethnographies have acquainted us with the complex dynamics of a street-corner community, including the carry-out shop in Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner* (1967), Cornerville in William F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1955), Jelly's Bar in Elijah Anderson's *A Place on the Corner* (1978), and Sixth Avenue in Mitchell Duneier's *Sidewalk* (2000). Taking as its starting point Everett C. Hughes's (1994, 61) suggestion to study "the social and social-psychological arrangements by which men make their work tolerable, or even glorious," a qualitative examination of this community of day laborers is uniquely placed to reveal the daily operations of power, ideology, and inequality—structures that are ever present but often hard to see in practice. Studying la parada empirically further allows us to scrutinize the actions of the workers and institutions of the state outside formal workplace settings, which is significant for demonstrating the

breadth and expanse of power and ideology operating in the construction of the day laborer.

The principal reason I used the ethnographic method was that it enabled me to observe in detail and over time the complex web of social interactions between two processes: the search for employment from the street corner and the construction of identity among the men. One of my principal tasks as an ethnographer is to examine how individuals craft meaning and behavior—their own and others'. My research sheds light on the details of the men's social worlds and explains the processes that produce the multifaceted social identity that constitutes the master narrative of the Real Day Laborer.

More than a decade has passed since I conducted the fieldwork for this study, and it would be fair to ask whether the findings are still relevant. Indeed, this particular field site was situated in a specific place and time in which particular events may have shaped its day-labor market in distinct ways. However, my focus is on the construction of identity—the meanings attached to work that shaped the identities of the different groups of workers on the corner—and what I learned about what makes evident the good immigrant and good immigrant worker can be examined in other settings. What I hope to illustrate is the active role that these immigrant workers assumed in interpreting, evaluating, and responding to the day-labor market structure and community on the corner. An ethnographic eye can capture the nuanced experiences of immigrants' lives and lived histories. And with the changing context of the immigrant experience, which is increasingly tumultuous in these tenuous times, contemporary scholarship in immigration studies can discover much from examining life in the course of events as they take place.

Details about the fieldwork process and experience, which are integral to the fluid representations of the men's and my work experiences, are more critically discussed in a methodological comment in Chapter 7. However, it is important to identify here some elements of the study that inform how I came to learn what I share in *Daily Labors*. Beginning in summer 2001, naïve and anxious, I went to work on the corner alongside my participants. On hot, clammy summer mornings as well as in the brisk early hours of winter days, I stood and observed the interactions and processes among the workers, employers, and passersby that constituted a typical day on the corner.[14] I visited at least three times on a weekly basis and usually spent two to three hours on the corner between 8:00 A.M. and 12:30 P.M. This was the time of day that the majority of day laborers looked for work at the intersec-

tion, although many men arrived earlier (6:30–7:00 A.M.) and stayed later (2:00–3:00 P.M.). These earlier and later blocs were generally leisurely spent, varying according to the season: summer months brought more work activity than winter months.

My role in this setting was distinctive, and I was not identified solely as an ethnographer. Apart from women walking by or who worked for nearby businesses, I was usually the only woman present. Racially and ethnically, I am Latina; I was born in Brooklyn, and both of my parents immigrated to the United States from South America. My mother, who originally came from Guayaquil, Ecuador, immigrated as a teenager to Washington State before coming to New York City; my father traveled directly to New York City from Lima, Peru, as a young man. Although many of the men and I had a common ethnic background, the similarities did not eradicate our differences—a key one being the distinct New York City context that informed my cultural background and upbringing. So although many of the men called me "mi paisana" (my fellow countrywoman) and I self-identify as racially and culturally Latina, I also recognize that my immigrant family background is in conversation with an Americanized upbringing. This complex history created opportunities for interesting disconnects in our understandings and interpretations of particular events. This was evident not only in the field but also throughout my own upbringing and among relatives and family friends. As a result, my cultural background introduced stimulating breaks throughout the fieldwork that yielded rich understandings and interpretations of social behavior and relations in this setting.

## Borders

During the years of my fieldwork, the tragic events of September 11, 2001, had profound effects in New York City and were experienced acutely by the city's poorest and most marginal communities. An unknown number of immigrants, many of them undocumented, worked at low-wage jobs at the World Trade Center.[15] A representative from Asociación Tepeyac, an advocacy group that works with the families of many of these missing people, told me that close to one hundred families came forward soon after 9/11 seeking financial and other assistance. Many of them had either lost a primary wage earner or were without an income because their workplace had been destroyed. This was especially troubling when families lived outside the United States, carrying the implications of the tragedy far beyond the boundaries of New York City.

Among the day laborers I visited, the implications of 9/11 manifested in personal concerns for their own safety, the welfare of their families in the United States and abroad, and, at times, an anxious sense of permanence in a country from which many felt a sense of detachment, especially since they were not always viewed as desirable or deserving immigrants. In the months after 9/11, the number of men looking for work at my field site declined. The majority gathered in large groups on only two of the main intersection's four corners—most of the Regulars stood and waited only on the corners opposite the deli and the housing complex—while a small number strategically roamed the corners of two nearby intersections along the avenue. More often than not, the corner outside the deli was empty.

As spring approached, the opportunities to find day-labor work seemed likely to increase, especially since many of the men had told me that this generally happened when the weather warmed up. Although patrons and employees of nearby businesses such as the laundromat had occasionally mentioned they did not like it when the men waited directly in front of these establishments, this did not appear to be a serious concern. The employees at the corner deli were actually pleased because the men brought them business: people picking up workers on the corner often stopped in to buy coffee, breakfast, or lunch.

On a warm morning in March, a police car pulled up to the curb in front of a few of the Regulars and me. The officer told the men that they could not stand on this particular corner and that they should move across the avenue, near the park. As the car pulled away from the curb, I asked about the reason for the change, but the officers drove away without answering. Jerome pointed to the housing complex across the street and told me that the neighbors had filed complaints with the police, but he could not share other details about the situation because this was all that the police had told him and the others on prior occasions. This restricted the men's space to two street corners. Jerome was sincerely worried that he would have to find a new site to seek work if the situation continued, especially during the summer, when the chance to work was greatest.

When asked how long they planned to work in the United States before returning to their home countries, most of the men said five or ten years. Of course, there were some who returned, at least once, for short visits. Jorge, who at twenty-nine was one of the older Mexican men on the corner, visited his family in Mexico annually to celebrate Mexican Independence Day. But after 9/11, changes in security along the border made visits to the home country less feasible. In late December 2001, a few men told me that they

planned to return to Mexico by the end of the month, but in late January of the new year, they were still working on the corner. They told me that they feared being caught by "La Migra" while crossing the border.[16] A bigger fear was that they would not be able to return to the United States. Jerome said:

> My family in Mexico tells me that it's more dangerous to cross now. There's more security, and it's more expensive. More than $2,000—can you believe it! It's even worse for people coming from Ecuador or Guatemala. They have to cross Mexico first and then the U.S. What for? To work here. There's no work now. Better to stay there maybe.

Luis also told me what he had learned from his wife about recent border crossings:

> Now La Migra is everywhere. They are hungry to catch people. It is more dangerous to cross now. And the routes have changed. They are longer and it takes more time to cross the desert. Imagine that! Longer. I crossed the desert in one whole day. I walked from 5:00 P.M. to 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. You have to cross at night to avoid La Migra. That's nothing. And I paid $1,500 to cross with the coyote. Now it's more money and more dangerous. It gives me grief, a lot of grief for those persons.
>
> I came to this country with my niece and my friend. My niece is nineteen now. She didn't want to stay here. She is young and it was harder for a woman here. She went back to Mexico. She can't come back now, not now. It's dangerous. She should have tried to make her life here. I thank God that nothing happened to her when we crossed the first time, but now—La Migra, los coyotes, criminals, anyone. I am worried about her.

Ronaldo told me that a friend from his home town in Ecuador had crossed from Mexico into southern Arizona in early January 2002. He told Ronaldo that travel had become even more difficult and that he had a hard time finding transportation to New York City from Arizona. When I saw Ronaldo in March, he updated me on his friend's situation: he had taken a four-day bus trip from Arizona to Pennsylvania, but he was apprehended by the police, along with other undocumented men riding the bus, soon after he arrived. They were all sent back to Mexico. Later that summer, I saw Ronaldo again. He was on his way to visit his friend, who had finally made it to New York by

once again crossing la frontera, the U.S.-Mexico border, and securing a plane ticket from Los Angeles to New York City.

These concerns subsided over time as the critical reasons that precipitated the men's initial migration to the United States resumed priority. The following summer, as the one-year anniversary of 9/11 approached, Octavio said he felt strongly that he would remain in New York as long as he was able to find a steady job or make money as a day laborer:

*Octavio:* I love this country.
*Carolyn:* Even now?
*Octavio:* Yes.
*Carolyn:* You're not scared about living in New York City?
*Octavio:* Why?
*Carolyn:* Well, with the chance for another terrorist attack?
*Octavio:* Oh that. No. That doesn't bother me. I don't think about that.
*Carolyn:* You weren't scared when it first happened?
*Octavio:* Yes, I was. Very scared. But not now. Nothing has happened since. I don't think about it. I have bigger problems. I need to work. I need money. Where I come from [Colombia], there's war every day in the streets. You don't know what's going to happen when you leave home. I'm not scared to be here.

Octavio's comments highlighted the prevailing outlook that these men and others had migrated, and would continue to do so, to meet their economic needs. Many of the participants said that they would never return to their home countries. This was especially true among recent arrivals such as Santiago. He, like Daniel, a twenty-two-year-old Ecuadorian, felt that a return trip would not be a visit but a one-way ticket to stay:

> Once I return, I won't come back, so I'll stay [here] for as long as I can or until someone tells me to go. I came a long way, from very far, to get here. Go back? For what? It's not bad here. I make my money. I have some friends. Maybe I'll find a nice American girl and get married. Anything is possible. If I go back, that's it. I'm done. But for now, I'm not going back.

Many new challenges followed 9/11, including a change in the political climate that encouraged a disquieting increase in the significance placed on national security and defense. Many of the men shared their concerns about

living in New York City, and in the United States more broadly, with me. For example, many of them worried that job opportunities might start to decline, and with the economy slowing down, their situations would become desperate. Their worry, in turn, often grew into considerable distress that reached beyond the geographical boundaries of New York City and the United States to those who depended on them in their home countries. Arguably, 9/11 had a double impact on these men—not only on their work but also on other aspects of their everyday lives.

Day labor was a form of self-employment that brought my participants benefits that went beyond monetary returns: it offered them a way to maintain dignity and agency in a situation in which the American dream was not fully available to them. Studying these men empirically in real time offered an opportunity to observe their activities and behavior, as well as the production of ideas that challenged conventional perceptions about immigrants and workers in the precarious realm of the day-labor market. What the men shared with me about the active role they played in their own daily social and working lives disrupts any rigid perceptions we might have about undocumented immigrants as low-skilled, docile bodies that are wholly constrained by structural forces. And while, indeed, this is not to argue that the men experienced upward economic or social mobility, the time I spent at my field site provided critical information about how these workers do not just respond but manage, and even strategize, in their daily navigation of life on the corner.

# 2

# With One Look

*Compadre's Corner*

It was Thursday morning, close to 10:00 A.M., and many of the men were still waiting. Some explained that the week had been difficult. Few potential employers had come by, perhaps because of the Easter and Passover holidays. No more than a few minutes after taking a rest on the nearest stoop, I heard from across the street the loud voices of men shouting over one another. A crowd of ten or so Latino Regulars had gathered on the corner.[1]

At a snail's pace they shifted away from the corner, maintaining their cluster. The men farthest out were moving in all directions, trying to make their way to the center. The men standing on the opposite corners, including the few standing with me, rushed across the street. The Americans—the Temps—realized what was happening and were soon among the others. Their determination and impatience—and, in some cases, their height—gave them an advantage. Then the formation broke, and a small Asian man walked out of the cluster's core. I thought that he could be Chinese, since Sunset Park has a sizable Chinese community. (It is, in fact, home to New York City's second Chinatown, a growing competitor to Manhattan's renowned Chinatown.) In a matter of seconds I saw him leave the corner, nodding continuously as he stepped away, accompanied by five Latino men. Sighs of frustration followed from the others.

Soon after, a station wagon parked across the street, directly across from me. The Hasidic man inside the car didn't have to wait long before another group, consisting mostly of Polish men, gathered at his windows. The sounds

were the same, though slightly quieter—that is, until the Temps arrived. The activity was similar: men nudged one another along to present themselves to the potential employer. This time I was not alone as the scene played out: Ronaldo, Sergio, Willie, and Luis, along with a few other Latinos, stood with me as we watched the Russian and Polish workers, men such as Peter and Kaspar, compete for the job. But the Hasidic man was not interested. Without a word to the men, he stepped out of the station wagon, crossed the street, and entered the bagel shop. As before, Peter and Kaspar walked away in frustration.

When the man exited the store, he approached the three Mexican men standing closest to me. "You want work?" he asked. They shook their heads and assertively stated, "No." In a hasty comeback, he said, "No? You don't want it?" The men shook their heads again and looked away, this time in silence. With an irritated sigh, he walked over to another group of Latino men at the corner. "Do you want it or not?" he asked. Following a quick exchange of short glances, they declined and also walked away. One last attempt brought the man across the street, near the abandoned auto-body shop where the Polish men stood. He didn't have much luck with them, either. Even the young African Americans, who had already sat down on a stoop, declined his offer.

The term "day laborer" describes a person who regularly visits a public space that is informally identified as a hiring site to sell her or his labor for temporary and inconsistent work by the hour or day. In this opening narrative, we begin to learn a little more about the workers, as well as about the meanings that circulate among them about how race, ethnicity, nationality, and legality shape work activity on the corner. On the surface, these scenes may look familiar or predictable; however, uncovering the subtler, hidden details of these micro-level interactions reveals shared understandings among the men—the workers as well as the employers—about the meanings, categories, and practices that made up this street corner's hiring process.

Existing studies characterize the labor market as a series of "ordered elements" (see, e.g., Reskin and Roos 1990) and examine differences and rankings in the matching of employees and jobs (see, e.g., Bean, Fossett, and Park 2000; Doeringer and Piore 1971; Espenshade 2000; Holzer 1996; Lieberson 1980; Reskin and Roos 1990; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Studies of immigrants to the United States as a source of unskilled labor examine how employers use ethnicity to sort people categorically into different types of

work (see, e.g., Braverman 1974; Espenshade 2000; Lieberson 1980; Reskin and Roos 1990; Waldinger 1996; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Sociologists have identified labor-market mechanisms—the hiring queue, social networks, and employers' preferences—as factors that explain the intersection of race and ethnicity and the social organization of work (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind 1999). These mechanisms remained evident in the social organization of labor—of workers and work activity—on this street corner. And even though day labor is relegated to studies of the informal economy, and my research covered a site that was not a formal work setting (such as a day-labor center) but, rather, an open street-corner market, I found organizational processes and structures that were similar to those in formal work settings (Sassen 1998; Sassen and Smith 1991). My research uncovered a segmented work structure at the field site that follows what research on segmented labor markets refers to as the "hiring queue," in which people are "ordered" in the hiring process by ethnicity, race, and legal status (Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Lieberson 1980; Reskin and Roos 1990; Waldinger 1996; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Observing the dynamics of this segmented work structure helped explain the rigor of the Real Day Laborer master narrative.

This chapter concentrates on how race, ethnicity, nationality (self-identified and perceived), and legality (self-identified and perceived) influence market processes (hiring queues) and produce powerful mechanisms that can alter the workers', employers', and our own understandings of the composition and operations of this particular workforce and market. The workers' accounts are the tools I use to bring together fields of study—studies in migration and race and ethnicity—to advance the treatment of race that may traditionally focus on constructions of black and white and neglect the breadth of the racial/ethnic landscape that is being affected by changing patterns of migration within the United States. Field research on the corner yields concrete evidence of the workers' understandings of employers' attitudes and behavior that rank-order day laborers based on perceived racial and ethnic identity and legal status. For instance, field research with the Temps, the young African American and Puerto Rican men looking for work from the corner, helps explain how black and brown urban youth understand a situation in which they often face employment discrimination. It also yields knowledge about the tensions and potential bridges that may be present in these labor markets across disenfranchised communities of color.

These insights lend credibility to viewing the street corner as a site that produces the master narrative of the Real Day Laborer and situates, quite literally, those to whom it does and does not apply. The chapters that follow

document experiences in the daily lives of the men on these corners. This chapter specifically examines the implications of the intersection of race and ethnic identity, as well as the social organization of labor in the hiring process, that shape hiring preferences and reinforce the racialization of the men themselves. My field research uncovered in explicit ways how the race and ethnicity of the men affected their chances of being hired. The implications of identity were important to understanding not only their economic circumstances but also their social situations. The street corner organized social identity in subtle ways, and, as the chapter's opening narrative suggests, the most apparent was a spatial organization of separate, though loosely maintained, groups by race and ethnic background. For example, Polish men might stand alongside the Mexican and Ecuadorian men gathered on the southeastern corner, while African American men might stand alone or alongside some of the Latino men on the southwestern corner.

The literature on hiring processes and preferences in low-skilled industries has tended to focus on how workers are matched with jobs by the influence of employers' perceptions and actions. My field research can help answer questions concerning employers' preferences in ordering labor queues in which immigrants are selected for jobs over native-born workers (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Studies suggest that identities linked to race, ethnicity, gender, nation, and legality are key to how these processes are carried out (Fernandez and Mors 2008). Some of these studies have further identified a relationship among hiring processes, migration patterns, and the social organization of work to explain the changing and segmented composition of the work force in low-skilled industries (Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Waters 1999). These studies have advanced the discussion in sociology and labor studies by uncovering factors that clarify employers' preferences and the participation levels of workers. However, they focus almost exclusively on the self-reported views of employers and supervisors.

Although the notion of the labor queue is central to our comprehension of the labor market, analyzing the street-corner market offers a unique approach to understanding the sorting mechanisms at play in organizing such queues and how identities of race, ethnicity, gender, nativity, and legality organize and produce them (Steinberg 1989). Ethnographic methods allow in-depth examination of how different groups of workers are sorted, as well as how they sort themselves, according to these hierarchical structures and their own understandings of these ideological formations. Moreover, they allowed me to witness how the workers either participated in

practices that reinforced these ordered queues or negotiated their actions to disrupt them.

However, I found that this particular informal labor market was dual-sided in that it spoke to both employers' and employees' preferences. In their model of hiring queues, Barbara Reskin and Patricia Roos (1990, 29) see "occupational composition as the result of a dual-queuing process: labor queues order groups of workers in terms of their attractiveness to employers and job queues rank jobs in terms of their attractiveness to workers." My field research examines the production of labor queues in real time by scrutinizing in more depth what I refer to throughout the book as "hiring queues." Finally, my field research helped identify a third factor that is absent from Reskin and Roos's model: employer queues, in which the men actively ranked potential employers in terms of their attractiveness to workers. Scenes like the one described at the beginning of the chapter were not isolated cases. I often saw employers stop their cars in front of Regulars such as Luis and Ronaldo and avoid hiring Temps such as William and Marvin. In this day-labor market, hierarchies were expressed in the juxtaposition of identity locations of race, ethnicity, nationality, migrant status, and legality with perceived principles of work ethic and even morality.

Further, these hierarchies were inseparable: potential employers held perceptions (arguably, moral judgments) based on experiences with and observations of, as well as stereotypes about, the identities of the men seeking work. These hierarchies were clearly personified when the Chinese employer passed over the Temps and hired Regulars for his job. The Latino workers, as "immigrants" who were seen as "hardworking" and "knew how to work," were clearly being viewed as Real Day Laborers, a status that was not attributed to the African American and Puerto Rican workers, even though they also jostled for the job. The Hasidic employer's passing over of the Temps, even after his offer was rejected by the Latino and Polish workers, is an even more poignant example of how the Temps were often overlooked as potential workers. However, such judgment calls that ranked men by race and ethnicity alongside an ethics of morality and decency were not confined to the workers—a fact that became apparent when the men refused the Hasidic employer's offer, which I assess later in this chapter (Steinberg 1989). In other words, the workers formed their own judgments of potential employers, similarly ranking them in a hierarchy that followed beliefs based on both experience and presumptions concerning race, ethnicity, and morality.

It is crucial to understand not only *that* race historically has been a critical dimension of labor-market segmentation but also *how* race operates

to racialize workers—citizens and noncitizens. While Latinos and blacks in the United States face different forms of racialization in the job market, (Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Pager 2003; Waldinger and Lichter 2003), the reproduction of racialization should be treated not as individual cases of conferring or denying jobs but as systemic discrimination that is integral to structures that are interdependent in maintaining racial hierarchies (Feagin 2000; Lipsitz 1998; Roediger 1991; Shah 2001; Steinberg 1989; Winant 2001). According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1994) concept of racial formation, racial and ethnic categories are not preexisting but emerge from "racial projects" in which their content and salience are politically constructed and work to secure white privilege. The racial project of the day-labor market, grounded in hiring practices that mark different groups of people who are racially and ethnically distinct as one and the same, applies racial meaning without substantiating racial and ethnic categories (Steinberg 1989). Thus, it is able to racialize the workers in a context in which the only meaningful identity is "Latino" or, more widely used, "Mexican."

Theorizations of racism fail to capture its structural and institutional formations, often restricting the analysis to a social problem that affects bodies and can be evaluated through surveys of attitudes. The outcome is efficient sorting of "good" and "bad." Managers in service-sector industries, for instance, often view black men as "bad" candidates for customer-service jobs, in which interacting with the public is a crucial job function (see Holzer and Ihlanfeldt 1998). This is not surprising, given the overall discrimination black men historically have faced in the labor market (see, e.g., Jennings 1994; Pager 2003, Pettit and Western 2004), and it held true in the sorting of good and bad workers on the corner. One employer in my study shared this view:

> We don't have good experiences with black employees. I'm not a racist, but it's just a fact. Black guys don't stay long; they don't have the same work ethic as some of these men.

Consequently, the "good worker" and "Real Day Laborer" labels underlined the hiring queue at the corner, in which day laborers were set apart in categories of "us" and "them"—that is, "good" and "bad" workers, "legals" and "illegals," "hispanos" and "morenos" (Hispanics and blacks),[2] resulting in a status loss or status gain, that, in turn, led to unequal outcomes in finding work. Efforts to manage identity were especially visible among the Latino immigrants, who sought both to counter the stigma of being perceived as

"undeserving," "cheap," "criminal," or "illegal" and to create a routine from the anomie of unemployment. Despite being stigmatized as "illegals" or "aliens" whose work was relegated to the informal, or "illicit," economy, many of the men had not developed a "culture of resistance" as a result of their social isolation (see Bourgois 1996). Instead, they demonstrated diligence and entrepreneurship. Regardless, their economic and social mobility was limited, and belonged to the ranks of the working poor. These perceptions had varying implications for the different men at my field site and contributed to the socially constructed identity of the day laborer. Disparaged and favorable traits simultaneously produced the stigmatized identity of the Real Day Laborer.

## A "Real" Day Laborer

Erving Goffman (1963, 3) defined stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" and that disables and devalues one "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one." My fieldwork builds on this definition, showing that stigma is also a process whereby others distinguish differences—real or not—that are informed by the experience of everyday living. A growing body of research supports the principles for matching workers with jobs based on identity factors of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and legality (Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Fernandez and Mors 2008; Lieberson 1980; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Waters 2009). These studies also show that the labor queue plays a key role in understanding the changing composition of the labor force. The processes I observed at my field site are consistent with the model of practices and structures outlined above. However, my observations contribute further data that identify how employers' conceptualization of identities among the workers on this corner, whether true or suspected, created a system of discrimination that consequently ordered the labor-market hierarchy among the different groups of men looking for work. Although I was able to obtain some information about this in interviews with some of the more regular employers on the corner, most of my data are from workers who were willing to share their understanding of how employers used race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and legality to create a hierarchy of hiring preferences in which Latino men (or men presumed to be Latino) ranked highest, followed by white men, with African American men (or men presumed to be African American) at the lowest level. What follows describes the elements that defined this classification and the nuanced preferences that guided the hierarchical statuses of these three

groups. But first it is important to define what is meant by the master narrative "Real Day Laborer."

The Real Day Laborer was always a man. He was believed to be undocumented and desperate, but he was also described as "hardworking," "a fast worker," "obedient," and "just trying to feed his family." Last, he was sometimes described as "Hispanic" but was always identified as "Mexican." Thus, being stigmatized as undocumented and desperate translated as advantageous in securing work for the Latino men—above all, Mexican men and those mistaken for Mexican men—at my field site. In other words, they were "desirable" in the social order of day labor on the street corner. Thus, ethnicity and nationality (residency status, immigrant or U.S.-born) were important organizing principles on which the corner's hiring queue was structured (Tienda 1989). Race also influenced the social order of the hiring queue, as it does in all labor markets in New York.[3] I discuss the racial hierarchy at my field site later in the chapter.

Each day, I saw employers stop their cars in front of the Regulars, who were the desirable workers, and avoid the Temps. The men themselves invoked these distinctions. Luis echoed what many of the day laborers expressed and reinforced throughout my field research:

> We know how to work hard. We need to work, and they [the employers] know this. Also, they know that we don't have our papers, so they take advantage of us. Yes, that's true. But I want to work. Not like these boys. What do they know? They just know how to play around. Nobody wants to hire them.

Employers held similar opinions. Joe, a Hasidic man, frequently stopped by to hire a few of the men, either for his business or for personal work at home. He said:

> I like to hire the Mexicans. They work hard and do good work. They really know what they are doing. They fixed a bathroom in my son-in-law's house—beautiful. They just want to help their family. I know some of them are illegal, but who cares? They want to work, so I give them work. We are all immigrants in this country, so why are they different? I don't say we should give them help with everything, but work is OK.

Mr. Kaplan (he never shared his first name with me) also often stopped by the corner to hire Latino men—specifically, the Mexican and Ecuadorian

men—to help renovate houses he owned in Borough Park. Mr. Kaplan had hired two Mexican men from the corner the previous summer, and when he had more work opportunities, he tried to hire the same two men, along with a couple of their friends. He said:

> These men are good workers, and they referred me to other good workers. I trust them. You see him? [*He points to Jerome.*] I hired his niece, too, I think. She works for me in my home. She cleans, cooks. A very nice woman, a good worker. [Actually, he employed Jerome's sister-in-law; she and her husband and son shared an apartment with Jerome.] I don't think it's wrong to say that there is a perception that Mexicans make good workers. Besides, they are the ones looking for the jobs here. So if I hire Mexicans, it's because here most of them are Mexicans.

Thus, Mexican men such as Gerry and Luis and Mexican-looking men such as Ronaldo were assigned top spots in the hiring queue on the street corner. However, their high status at la parada did not carry over into other areas of their lives. They remained at the bottom of the economic order, because finding adequate long-term employment was more difficult for them than it is, presumably, for U.S. citizens.

When employers talked about Latinos or Hispanics on the corner, they always called them "good workers." The workers also used this term, along with other adjectives, such as "hard," "strong," "reliable," and "experienced." That Latino men are perceived this way finds support in other studies (see, e.g., Waters 1999; Waldinger 1996). At face value, these descriptions appear to reflect employers' concerns with productivity. Margaret Zamudio and Michael Lichter (2008) rightly point out, however, that "this is productivity derived from pure exploitation, not one rooted in a skilled workforce as commonly understood." Although some of the Latino immigrant day laborers were skilled, there were also workers who had little or no experience and would typically be excluded from the labor market. This was also true among the non-Latino immigrant day laborers: many U.S.-born workers had work experience and possessed the fluency in English needed to manage labor exchanges, but there were also those who did not have the skills or experience to effectively carry out the jobs offered on the corner. Thus, no objective difference in skill levels existed that could explain the favoring of one group over another.

Instead, as the men shared with me, identity (real or perceived race, nationality, and legality) coupled with attributes such as vulnerability, com-

pliance, and disposition were the factors that made one group (Latino immigrants) attractive. Ronaldo explained:

> People like to hire Hispanics. They say that we work hard, and I agree. I've always worked hard, and I do good work. I was never absent from work in Ecuador. And here, well, we are here to work hard, too. They know that we do good work and don't complain, not like the Americans. They want everything for free. So people know they can depend on us for anything. Well, maybe not all of us, but most of us. You know us. You've met a lot of good men here, right? That's why they hire us. But since we work hard and they can rely on us, they can also take advantage of us. So it's not always good.

In fact, some of the descriptions can be taken literally. Working "hard" not only describes diligence. It can also indicate the vulnerable position of undocumented immigrants and their resulting submissiveness when it comes to meeting employers' demands, whatever and however many there may be in a work setting.

This brings me to the Americans, the Temps, and where they fit in the hiring queue on the corner. Jerome described it best:

> Los trabajadores . . . the workers, the real workers, that's us. We speak Spanish, not English. Go look anywhere and you'll see. We do the work. If I had a job working in a kitchen, I would have no problem. They all speak Spanish.

For the Temps, native English fluency—a discernible symbol of their nationality—was a handicap in acquiring jobs.[4] Employers and the Regulars used terms such as "irresponsible," "lazy," "dishonest," "young," "unskilled," "proud," and "troublemakers" to describe the Temps. Thus, the Temps did not conform to the constructed identity of the Real Day Laborer, which, in turn, translated as "undesirable" and limited their chances of finding day-labor work.

The Regulars were intolerant of the Temps and, showing an understanding of the core fundamentals of the hiring process, distinguished themselves from them (see Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996). One day, a car pulled up to the curb near Ronaldo and other Latino Regulars. A few Temps standing nearby began to raise their voices and push one another. What looked like a loud disagreement to the Latinos was actually a playful debate about a recent professional basketball game. Although the context was ambiguous,

the result was predictable: the potential employer, annoyed by the noise and horseplay, drove away from the corner and stopped in front of a group of Mexican men standing at the next intersection.

After this incident, Ronaldo summarized the Regulars' feelings best:

> Estos muchachos no entienden lo que es vivir pobre. No conocen la pobreza. [These boys don't understand what it is to live poor. They have never known poverty.] I need this job. They are Americans. Why do they come here? Don't tell me that they need to work like us. They can work anywhere. Has visto lo que pasó? [Did you see what happened?] I lost maybe $80, $100. Bueno, me voy a parar allá [Well, I'm going to stand over there]. You are not going to see much here, if you stay. If you want to understand better, come stand with us over there.

Similarly, a couple of Mexican men were sitting on crates one morning when they were approached by three of the Temps, who were making enough noise for a group twice that size. The Mexican men quietly moved to the other side of the same corner. Their move didn't seem to matter to the Temps, who appeared quite comfortable taking over the crates. When I asked Luis what had happened, he said:

> I stay away from them. They are only looking for trouble. They don't need the work. If I stay with them, I won't get any work. There's no problem. They don't bother us. And nobody wants to take them anyway.

When I asked Luis about the black Latino men on the corner, he answered:

> Yes, I know them. Sometimes I see them all together over there [referring also to the Temps]. You see, they are the same. The only difference is the language. Son hispanos y tambien son negros [They are Hispanic and they are also black]. To me, they get along better. If they come over here, that's fine. I know they need to work, too. But these blacks and Puerto Ricans, they make too much noise. They don't need the money. That's why I moved. If someone comes and sees them, they won't stop. Me, I have my family . . . in Mexico. I came here to work.

Octavio, the young man from Colombia, described the feelings of the majority of the Latino Regulars when he said this about William, the twenty-year-old African American Temp:

> That man, he is so lazy. Sabes? [You know?] He's afro-americano. You see all those negros [black men] over there. They are all afro-americanos. They don't want to work. That's why the people don't take them. They want to work that day and get paid that day. You understand?

On a warm Saturday morning, I spoke with Richie, a twenty-year-old Puerto Rican Temp, about finding work on the corner. He remarked:

> You see, we can speak English, but do we get the jobs? Not really. They come and pick up the Mexicans first, and then the Polish. I find work, but they don't pick me first. It's the same in every job, everywhere. Not just here.

William echoed this opinion:

> Yeah, there a lot of black folk up in here now. Summertime, y'know, people want to make that extra cash. But it ain't always easy. Y'know, I was born here, I speak the language. No problem. But people don't want to hire me sometimes. Not even here. They go to the Mexicans first. I guess 'cause they're illegal, so they can pay them whatever. That's OK. I make my money, too.

William visited the corners almost every day, but only during the summer. During the rest of the year he was attending classes at a local city college. He and the other Temps often accepted jobs that were not labor-intensive, would take less than a full day, and paid well. On this particularly hot summer day, William told me:

> I ain't taking nothing today. It's too hot to be outside breaking your back. Let them run for it. [*He points to the Mexican men on the opposite corner.*] I don't need it.

Workers' understandings were, in fact, ideas produced on the corner resulting from their observations and experiences with employers.

## Fluid Order in the Queue

Immigrants were favored over U.S. citizens as "desirable workers," and group membership was a principal ordering element of queues such that potential employers favored people from the group they preferred, regardless of their

qualifications.[5] Danny, an Italian man from Bay Ridge, stopped at the corner to pick up "a few extra hands" to help him move his sister into her first home. I asked him why he had pulled up in front of the Mexican men at the corner and not in front of the group of black men across the street (five of whom were African American and seven of whom were Panamanian, Colombian, and Dominican). Danny explained:

> These men I know will work hard. I hired them—not these guys, but different ones, you know the ones on 18th Avenue. They helped me fix up my backyard. Now I have a little deck. It's really nice. And it was cheap and quick.

I pressed him about why he did not consider hiring the black men, whom he perceived as African American. He said:

> I don't know about them. They look so young, like they haven't worked a day in their life. Why aren't they working in McDonald's or something? Anybody can get a job at Mickey D's. Maybe they sell drugs here. I can't trust them [not] to fool around, especially moving my sister's stuff into her home. Would you hire them?

I explained to him that some of the men in the group were also Latino immigrants, but his response didn't change except to acknowledge that he "couldn't tell just by looking at them" that they were "Hispanic." For Danny, the fact that these men were seeking work on this street corner alongside immigrant men, or "illegal aliens," necessarily meant that they were undesirable as workers in the general population (Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Newman 1999). After all, as he noted, even McDonald's didn't seem to want them. Because perceptions of good and bad workers are constrained by the Real Day Laborer social construct, Danny and employers like them are able to argue that skilled people with legal or native-born social status who possess the desirable characteristics of a good employee would not purposefully choose—or, in fact, be allowed—to participate in day labor (see Bourdieu 1977, 1979).

Thus, the idea that young Americans should have no need to choose day labor worked to marginalize the Temps. It did not matter to Danny and the other employers that these men were trying to maintain a work ethic along with the other immigrant men at this site (Anderson 1978; Duneier 1992; Liebow 1967). This is not to say that the Temps were never hired; only that they were not considered ideal workers. In fact, the Temps were considered

appropriate or "good" only for certain types of jobs (Lieberson 1980; Reskin and Roos 1990; Tienda 1989), most requiring few skills, such as posting and handing out flyers, moving inventory, painting, and assisting in home-improvement projects. The Temps were overlooked as a population who are part of the working poor and who also day-labor.

Going to the corner to look for work wasn't originally Franklin's idea. A friend had convinced Franklin to go with him, and because he was hired for a few jobs, he continued to return with his friend until his friend found a formal job as a stock boy. William said:

> He didn't help me out or nothing. He could have at least put in a good word for me. How hard is that for a brother! Friendships hurt more than any kind of relationship. My father can say something harsh and it bounces off me like nothing. That don't mean shit to me. But friends? That's the family you choose. You know it's gotta hurt.

I wanted to know why he was so bitter about looking for work on the corner:

> *Carolyn:* Do they [Regulars] bother you?
> *Franklin:* Hell yeah! That's a stupid question.
> *Carolyn:* Why? I mean, why is it stupid?
> *Franklin:* Well, OK, not stupid, but it's obvious, isn't it?
> *Carolyn:* I guess I don't know what you mean.
> *Franklin:* Look at it this way. You have a right to be here. I have a right to be here. They don't. But who gets the jobs. They do. This country, man. They have their priorities all screwed up.
> *Carolyn:* I understand. Do you want the jobs? I mean the ones that are offered here?
> *Franklin:* Nah man. They're crap, but a penny's a penny. [*A smirk escapes from his annoyed expression.*] I tried to find work, but if I'm going to work, I want to make some good money. I want to buy a car. I'm not going to do that working in Mickey D's. For that kind of money, I might as well look here. I found some work last summer. This year is slow, man.
> *Carolyn:* It looks like it's slow for everyone.
> *Franklin:* But not for them. They still get jobs. That's what I mean. It's unfair. It ain't right. I was born here. I got an education. I ain't illiterate. I'm not in school, but that's by choice. You think they would want to hire me. They could train me. No problem. But I'm the last person they want.

*Carolyn:* Why?
*Franklin:* You ask a lot of questions you should know the answers to.
*Carolyn:* I'm sorry.
*Franklin:* No, it's OK. I guess for a woman, it's different. A young black man in this society ain't gonna go far. That's the bottom line. I'm not prejudiced against Hispanics. Otherwise we wouldn't be talking. I just think it's unfair for a man to pass me over to hire one of them.

In addition to feeling "passed over," Franklin felt that he was too good for the jobs offered to him at the corner. He didn't want to pass out flyers during the summer months. He liked painting but was unhappy about the lack of creativity of some of the people who hired him to paint rooms in businesses or houses:

> It's boring if you're just painting a single color, especially white. I did a paint job for one woman, and she had some crazy ideas—colors and everything. She paid attention to every detail. The job took time, but it came out real nice in the end.

That particular job, Franklin seemed to say, was worth the time and effort he put into looking for work on the corner.

Essentialized black traits therefore are understood partly in relation to Mexican men's purported essential qualities. The manager of a local warehouse echoed this when he told me about having had to fire a young black male employee after a shouting match on the floor. The young man had become offended when the manager said that a lot of the black men were ex-offenders who were hired cheaply and that he considered them more a burden than a benefit. He told me:

> The black men in here, they don't stay long. We waste time and money finding men to replace them. So why hire them? I'd rather hire these [Mexican] men. It's not worth it with the others. . . . Mexican men are hard workers. So what if they are illegal? Even if they benefit from our tax dollars, Medicare, does it matter? These guys are good, generally. And generally, they're here 'cause they want to work, and they do it. They just do it. So I don't have a problem.

Mexican men overall are considered particularly good employees in the service sector. Migrant men are seen as having a stronger work ethic than

U.S.-born men. As one employer shared with me, Mexican immigrants "come to work; they do the work, go home, no problems. If one of them is sick, he'll send his brother. They're never late; [I] never have to worry about one of them saying that he overslept. The black guys, or anyone else I hire here, always has some issue."

Hiring according to group-specific preferences can yield results like these.[6] Employers in my study were less likely to hire blacks than others and more likely to hire immigrants than U.S. citizens (see also Bean and Bell-Rose 1999; Bobo et al. 2000; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Newman 1999; Waldinger 1996; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Waters 2001). The master narrative of the Real Day Laborer, and the stigma of not being considered one, kept the Temps at the bottom of the hiring queue at this work site and placed immigrants, especially the Latinos, at the top (see Bean, Fossett, and Park 2000; Doeringer and Piore 1971; Holzer 1996; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Lieberson 1980; Reskin and Roos 1990; Tienda 1989; Waldinger 1996; Waters 2001). However, this hiring queue also worked against the men who were both Latino immigrants and black, again providing an example of Elijah Anderson's (1990) observations on the implications of race in nonverbal communication.

## The Active Production of Stigma and Negotiating Identity

So far we have seen that Mexican, Ecuadorian, and Polish immigrants were accorded top spots in the corner's hiring queue, while black and Puerto Rican U.S. citizens ranked at the bottom. Some men fell in between: the Latino immigrant Regulars from Colombia, Panama, and elsewhere were also black. And often they fell to the bottom of the queue, along with African American workers (see Kasinitz 1992; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Waters 1999, 2001). One day I asked William about a small group of black men who were standing on the same corner as the Mexican men. He said:

> They cool. They ain't black, y'know. They're Hispanic. One of them I know is Panamanian or something like that. They speak the language [Spanish] and everything. But they ain't that cool with the Mexicans, either. See that guy? He's cool. He likes my music. Look at him sportin' his gear and shit. He's gonna be all right. I guess it's

> a black thang, y'know. But it ain't always like that. They have a hard time, too. Them Mexicans, man, they take it all [all of the work].

On these corners, the all-encompassing label "Latino immigrant" actually described two different, and separate, groups: Mexican and Ecuadorian men, Latinos who were visibly "not black" made up one group that employers often called "Mexicans" or "Hispanics" and sometimes "Spanish"; the black Latinos, most of whom were Panamanian or Colombian, made up the other group and were called "the Americans," "blacks," or "African Americans." Race was decisive as was skin color in the critical formation of identities on the corner. Phenotype thus became a significant indicator of nationality, socioeconomic status, and even cultural values (Gregory and Sanjek 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Romero, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Ortiz 1997; Twine and Warren 2000), and on the corner black Latinos lost social status by being identified as African Americans, the undesirable workers at this site.[7]

The hiring process was informal and occurred quickly, with potential employers assessing the labor pool as they drove by or while they were stopped at a traffic light. They had no time, and made little effort, to distinguish who among the black men on the corner were Latino immigrants and who were U.S. citizens. The Mexicans and Ecuadorians were easy to pick out visually as Latinos. Compadre and the other black Latino men knew this, and they often stood alongside the Mexican men to separate themselves from the African American men to improve their chances of getting work.[8] During a visit, Compadre said:

> We're here [standing on the same corner with the Mexicans]. There is no problem. They are there. We are here. Somos hispanos pero somos diferentes [We are Hispanic, but we are different]. Do you understand? Sometimes I tell them [the younger black Latino workers] not to go over there too much. [*He points to the Temps across the street.*] We are not like them. . . . They sell drugs. The people who come here, with one look, they know everything. But when they hear us speak, they are surprised. Sometimes, they still don't take us. We are not Mexicans. Oh, mamita, I learned a lot here. Aquí, yo soy african-americano [Here, I am an African American], and that's not good. No importa el idioma [Language doesn't matter]. Just this. [*He points to the skin on the back of his hand.*] That's why sometimes I stand here. They stop here first, and so maybe I can get the job.

Thus, these workers managed their identity by choosing to seek work from the same street corner as the perceived Latinos, illustrating how the negotiation of space located ethnicity in the hiring queue not only among the men but also among potential employers. Physical positioning on the corners allowed the men to manage their identity in a limited way by creating distance from the Temps and visually marking themselves as among the desired workers. I explore the significance and implications of placement on the corner in Chapter 6.

At times, some of the black Latino men in Compadre's group marked their identity with more obvious and symbolic representations: a cap or T-shirt with the Panamanian flag or a jersey from Colombia's national soccer team. Compadre also would typically say "Arreglanse!" [Fix yourselves up!] when he found someone's attire inappropriate or sloppy, and he often joked with the others that they were starting to "look American." As Compadre noted, how one dressed was another cue for potential employers to distinguish which black men were immigrants or Latino from those who were African American. One's style of dress reflected not only one's nationality but also one's social class and even cultural values. When I asked Mr. Kaplan about hiring African Americans from the corner, he said:

> I don't have a problem hiring blacks. You can ask them. [*He points to Jerome and the other Latinos.*] I hire black men, too. Right now I have one man from Trinidad who's going to tell them [*he points to Jerome and Luis*] what to do. But he's not like other black men. I mean, they are different from blacks from other countries. Well, you can say that about all Americans, too. Look I have no problem, so long as they do good work. He has to know what he is doing. He has to want to work. Like these men. [*He points to Jerome and Luis.*]

As described earlier, immigrant men, particularly Latino men, were favored by potential employers. Thus, Octavio and Compadre, who were both immigrants, should have been hired more easily and quickly than William or Richie, who were both U.S. citizens. However, Octavio's and Compadre's advantage as black men was slight compared to that of men such as Luis and Gerry, whom, as Danny mentioned, were both "Hispanic-looking." Skin color, a telling indicator of race for the employers, complicated this dynamic. Language, clothing, and physical placement on the corner therefore became crucial in presenting ethnicity. The extension of this image was a presumed, and often stereotyped, expression of class, nationality, values, and

social skills (Gregory and Sanjek 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Romero, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Ortiz 1997; Twine and Warren 2000). Taken together, these distinctions were significant in facilitating the process of distinguishing the men as desirable or undesirable workers for the potential employers and reinforced ideology that varying levels of skill, experience, and diligence could be located in specific racialized bodies. Compadre's and the other black Latinos' efforts thus illustrated the work that day laborers performed to minimize the chance that potential employers would miss this difference—not only their position as immigrants and Latinos vis-à-vis the American men but also their overall status as Real Day Laborers—and thus deprive them of an opportunity for work. Their movement on the corner was a visual manifestation of their efforts to locate their ethnicity and spatialize their identity as Latino immigrants. In all, the social construct of the Real Day Laborer informed employers about whom to hire, instructed workers about the hierarchical hiring queue, and communicated to all involved about the social organization and culture of this day-labor market.

## Employer Queues

As employers created racial and ethnic hierarchies for the workers, the workers also developed judgments of the potential employers from personal experiences, as well as from stereotypes rooted in race, ethnicity, nationality, migrant status, and stigmas of illegality. The day laborers attempted to influence the hiring process by constructing their own hiring queues when employers arrived. Many of the men said that they tended to compete for certain jobs based on the experiences of and recommendations from others on the corner that were anchored in perceptions about the race or ethnicity of the potential employer. For instance, I learned from the Mexican men why they declined to work for the Hasidic man in the incident described at the beginning of the chapter: he had cheated three men earlier in the year and was labeled "dishonest." The men informed others in their group, and all agreed not to accept work from him because he could not be trusted to pay them in full for their labor. In general, the men were reluctant to work for the Hasidic Jewish men in the neighborhood because they felt they could not bargain with them for an acceptable wage. Gerry, one of the Mexican Regulars, explained:

> Los chinos [The Chinese] pay more. They give you time for lunch. Sometimes they even give you drinks. They don't pay too much, but

> it's better than the others. Pero los judíos [But the Jews], I don't want to work for them. Some of them are OK, but they don't want to pay a lot, and they make you work so hard. Los hispanos [The Hispanic employers], they cheat you. They are the same. But not too many come here. When I see a Chinese, I run. The Americans, too. I want to work for the Chinese. Then I'll be OK.

As in the episode recounted earlier, when a Chinese employer comes to the corner, he will be immediately surrounded by Latino day laborers. Other employers—notably, Hasidic and even other Latino men—will not garner so much interest.

On one morning, Compadre and I were speaking about places where he and the young men in his charge could enroll in English language classes. When Compadre invited the others to join us so that he could encourage their participation, a Latino man approached Octavio, and the two men began arguing loudly. Compadre quickly took notice and soon left me to present the details about the language classes and answer the men's questions so he could investigate the situation. Within seconds, Compadre was holding Octavio and the Latino man apart and, in a stern voice, ordering the Latino man to leave the site. We overheard the Latino man tell Compadre that, despite his declarations to the contrary, Octavio had received his full pay and had no reason to be angry. As the other men moved in to show support—and, possibly, get involved—Compadre yelled at them to stay where they were. He instructed them to take a good look at the Latino man and advised them to reject any work he might offer, because, as Octavio had experienced, he would not pay the full amount offered at the pickup. Seeing that he was outnumbered, the Latino man yelled one last time to defend his reputation before crossing the street toward a small group of Mexican men.

Outcomes of such situations varied based on a number of circumstances, including whether the men could afford to decline a work opportunity. Further, the men did not decline all work opportunities from any particular group. Some said they had benefited from working for Jewish employers. For instance, Señor Delgado, a twenty-two-year-old day laborer from Colombia, said:[9]

> To work for a Jewish man is good. Why? Because he will offer you a job and then your wife or your sister. Then he wants to give a job to your cousin, and he keeps going. They want good workers. It's dif-

> ficult to come here with family, especially for the first time. So you should never turn them [Jewish employers] down right away.

Luis recounted an experience similar to Señor Delgado's that involved a niece who had lived with him but, by the time of the study, had returned to Mexico:

> It's difficult for women in this country. I see that. That's why my niece went home. She had a job and met one friend but still, she missed Mexico too much. But the Jewish man helped her a lot. He gave her a mattress that his family was no longer using. A good one. We all tried to make her comfortable. She loved his children, so it was hard for her to say good-bye to them. We were lucky to meet him.

Thus, like the hiring queue constructed by the employers, the day laborers' hiring queue was based on past experiences, stereotypes, and cultural beliefs that resulted in a general preference for a specific, desired jefe (boss) who corresponded to the ideal of the Real Day Laborer.

Race, gender, nationality, and legality, therefore, all influenced the construction of hiring queues—by employers and day laborers alike—on the corner. Workers at the bottom of the labor queue, mainly African Americans and those perceived to be African American, tended to be affected negatively by employers' disposition to favor hiring immigrant workers—specifically, undocumented Latino workers and those perceived to be undocumented Latino workers. Some of these perceptions were rooted in stereotypes of different racial and ethnic groups coded in terms such as "good," "hard," and "reliable" workers. The chapter's findings have important implications in demonstrating the salience of race and racism in this labor market. Just as employers rank workers, the workers rank those for whom they want to work when circumstances allow them to make the choice. Yet when workers at the bottom of the labor queue face pressure to save their jobs, they are able to act in ways that promote them as strong competitors to those who are preferred in the hiring process. The lack of critical attention to the dynamism in the day-labor market ignores the knowledge and power these workers, in fact, possess in managing their daily livelihoods.

# 3

# Sergio and William

## *Becoming and Being "(Il)legal"*

Legal scholars have focused on the role of the courts (Epp 1998; McCann 1994), how individuals develop legal consciousness (Gleeson 2010; Abrego, 2011; Merry 1981, 1990), and the individual and institutional barriers to claims making (Albiston 2005). Part of what is missing from this analysis is how meanings of legality and illegality develop and are practiced in interactions, as well as how those meanings shape the consciousness of workers such as day laborers.

This chapter scrutinizes what I observed as a duality of legality in the street-corner labor market and contributes two significant analyses to the literature. First, although studies have examined how the law shapes undocumented workers' consciousness (see, e.g., Gleeson 2010), they analyze undocumented and immigrant workers in isolation. I examine interactions between African American U.S. citizens and undocumented immigrant Latino low-wage workers to show how ideas about (il)legality affect both groups simultaneously in their search for day labor. Second, I illustrate how the meanings and effects of (il)legality for the two groups can reinforce ideologies about race that challenge our expectations about how each group will fare on the corner.

As noted in Chapter 2, workers such as William and Franklin, who were African American men born in the United States, should have more job opportunities available to them because of the advantages they possess—nota-

bly, their knowledge of the local labor market; familiarity with workplace rights; connections to working relatives; fluency in English; youthful energy; and, most significant, citizenship, or the membership in U.S. society that is a privileged birthright and that provides employers with legal permission to hire them. However, as also noted in Chapter 2, in the day-labor market I studied it was not U.S. citizenship that was rewarded with opportunities to work. Instead, "illegal" status—or, more comprehensively, *migrant illegality*—was accorded value and power in ways that elevated immigrants as desirable, skilled, and deserving workers and consequently undermined the value of citizen workers.[1] If one based one's opinion of immigrants on media reporting and controversial anti–illegal immigration legislation such as the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (SB 1070) and the Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act (HB 56),[2] one would have to assume that groups of immigrant men looking for work from a street corner would threaten neighborhood safety by bringing in criminal behavior and otherwise impinge on one's quality of life. Nonetheless, the labor practices I uncovered distinguished immigrant day laborers as good workers, which challenged negative views about them and raised their status in a positive way. Conversely, *U.S.-born legality*—that is, citizenship—devalued the American workers by marking them as undesirable, unskilled, and undeserving and raised suspicions about why they were looking for day labor in the first place. Differences in the resulting hiring outcomes driven by employers can create conflict among the groups of workers. A separate body of literature in this area makes plain that employers' preference for immigrants over native-born black workers is a common phenomenon (see Waldinger 1996; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). The street corner illustrates how they operationalized those preferences relying on ideas about race, ethnicity, and immigration status. However, ideas about the legality and illegality of the immigrant and citizen workers, whether real or perceived, were critical in shaping preferences and outcomes, as well as workers' rationales for their experiences—that is, their deserved place on or exclusion from the corner.

The study of legal consciousness—"a theoretical concept and topic of empirical research developed to address issues of legal hegemony, particularly how the law sustains its institutional power despite a persistent gap between the law on the books and the law in action," as Susan Silbey (2005, 323) summarizes it—has taken a front seat in sociolegal research in recent decades. Scholars have contrasted "instrumentalist" and "constitutive" perspective on the law; the former focuses on external causality and the effects

of the law, while the latter concentrates on the internal meanings individuals derive from the law.[3] However, Silbey (2005, 358) argues that research must "redirect studies of legal consciousness to recapture the critical sociological project of explaining the durability and ideological power of law." By focusing on the experiences of "everyday life" (Ewick and Silbey 1998) rather than on the courts and other legal institutions, we can identify a variety of ways legal consciousness is operationalized and discussed, and is relevant, in individuals' lives. This chapter aims to contribute such an analysis by articulating how legal consciousness was developed and became evident in what people said and did at my field site.

In this new postindustrial era, workers change jobs often, and many low-wage jobs offer only part-time schedules that pay far below a living wage. Within this context, significant economic disparities emerge. Immigrant workers, as well as U.S.-born racial and ethnic minority workers, are key populations who participate in the low-wage sector of the labor market. Nationally, African Americans and Latinos are both disproportionately represented in the low-wage workforce. According to economists such as George Borjas (1991, 2001), new immigrants have an impact on wages and employment prospects; the negative impact, he maintains, falls disproportionately on African American and U.S.-born Latino workers because of their overrepresentation in the low-skilled workforce in the United States. Although work-related conflicts arise between these groups, it would be worthwhile to focus on opportunities for solidarity, a narrative that is generally absent from mainstream media and from conventional academic studies.

Ideas about "illegality" have implications for the treatment of workers in the labor market. Those who are undocumented are not only the most likely to work in low-wage jobs; they are also the least likely to be unionized. Critical legal theorists argue that the structural location of undocumented workers serves and reproduces the economic system (see, e.g., De Genova and Peutz 201; De Genova 2002; Willen 2007)—that is, what makes these workers vulnerable to abuse is their unauthorized status in a cheap and flexible labor force with little or ineffective government oversight.

The dual status of "unauthorized" and "immigrant" isolates workers and places them in the precarious position of being unable to benefit fully from resources that might otherwise be accessible to them in the United States (Hiemstra 2010; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). The most important inaccessible resource in the years of my study was access to consistent gainful employment, an outcome of hostile barriers erected in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). This federal legislation makes it un-

lawful to "hire for employment" anyone who is not authorized to work in the United States and punishes employers who hire undocumented workers.[4] Employers who violate the law are subject to fines, asset forfeitures, and, in cases of repeated violations, criminal arrest. By establishing verification requirements and sanctions, IRCA has essentially placed immigration enforcement in the hands of employers. However, if a worker's documents appear genuine on their face, the employer has an affirmative defense against charges of hiring undocumented labor; this loophole consequently has led to abuse by employers and shifted the burden of verification back to workers. As a result, undocumented immigrant workers have been hesitant to complain about wages and working conditions, which, in turn, has provided a strong incentive for them to work hard and well for low pay.

For African American workers at my field site, contending with a reality in which they are always at risk of working in low-wage jobs, the promises of citizenship have yet to be fully realized. The African American and Puerto Rican workers on the corner, such as William and Richie, were aware that their status as citizens, their fluency in English, and their comprehension of the local culture did not yield currency they presumed would be of value to potential employers. However, the reason for this was not always clear to them, especially since it conflicted with their understanding of employment law. As Richie explained to me:

> They [the employers] don't have to break the law, but they do it anyway. They can hire me—I got mad skills. But even if I didn't, I was born here. But they don't want to hire us, and so they'll break the law to hire them.

When I asked Richie to comment further on this in a later interview, he said:

> So let's see if you can explain this. There's a law: you can't tag [spray paint graffiti in] a public place, right? You know it. I know it. But I do it anyway, and I'm in trouble. If I do worse, my life is shit. That's it. Now, I don't know the law, but I know you ain't supposed to be hiring illegals to work. They [the employers] know it. They do it anyway, and nothing happens. If they hire me, they don't break the law. But they hire the illegal and break the law. And that's OK for them. He [the worker] gets paid. He [the employer] hires cheap. Win-win. For me, it's just lose, lose, and lose again.

What is striking is that, although the immigrant workers' undocumented status makes them vulnerable to exploitation and dehumanization, it simultaneously marks them as possessing the traits that distinguish them as Real Day Laborers, or desirable workers. Illegality is beneficial—it pays off in this context, resulting in more offers to work at the corner. Although African Americans' and Puerto Ricans' legal status as citizens offers them protection from many forms of abuse in the formal labor market, on the corner it dealt them an irregular hiring pattern. They were not considered Real Day Laborers and thus experienced vulnerability and stigmatization of a different sort. In other words, for these citizens, legality resulted in exclusion from the world of day-labor work by both potential employers and other workers on the corner. In the world of struggling low-wage day-labor workers, therefore, undocumented and U.S.-born men are interdependent, and a deeper appreciation of the social sorting that is done based on (il)legality, real and perceived, may offer a key to supporting solidarity among them (Jaynes 2000). Advocates, as well as educators and union organizers, are increasingly seeing the crucial need to bring these two groups together on issues that range from workplace safety to unionization and demands for higher pay.

Race and class have always played a central role in how the United States regulates who is allowed in and who is kept out (Ngai 2004), and in many low-wage sectors, immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities fill most of the jobs. There are many disagreements over the impact immigrants have on other categories of low-wage workers, particularly U.S.-born African Americans (Borjas 2001; Chiswick and Miller 2009, Jaynes 2000; Massey 1987, 1995; Peri 2010; Sassen 1985; Wright and Ellis 2001). Wayne Cornelius and his colleagues (2004) and others have documented how immigrant labor became "structurally embedded" in the low-wage labor market. The street corner I studied was an ideal setting in which to both observe populations in the low-wage day-labor sector and learn from the workers about their interpretations of one another.

In considering whether, and how, undocumented immigrant and U.S.-born day laborers are able to access the rights and protections afforded them under U.S. law, it is important to assess the ways in which institutions and global forces shape and produce these processes (Hiemstra 2010; Holmes 2011; Sassen 1988). In addition, it is critical to examine these forces not only as producing the conditions that shape the workers' situations—working in the New York day-labor market—but also in terms of how they use race, gender, and legal status, to name a few factors, to diversify vulnerability and

create shifting hierarchies of power across different groups of workers (Holmes 2011). It is equally relevant to learn about, though understudied, how the workers themselves engage in a parallel process—that is, how they conceptualize, experience, and respond to legality (Calavita 2006). By comparing undocumented immigrant workers and U.S.-born workers in the day-labor market, we can assess how the street corner differentially shapes each group's work experiences. Their qualitatively different experiences of (il)legality hold consequences for integration, assertion of rights, and a sense of belonging (Calavita 2006; Calavita and Suarez-Navaz 2003).

Discussions about legality among the workers didn't always center on immigration reform or undocumented status. While Sergio explained to me the intricacies of how undocumented men were privileged as day laborers yet marginalized in the general labor market, William contributed an equally telling narrative that offered a more complex lens through which to interpret how legality functioned on the corner:

> *William:* You think that people come here wanting to hire someone like me. I can do the work if they give me a chance. But see, as an American, I guess, I do have a choice to do this shit. But they're [the Latino immigrant workers are] not dumb. Really! Sometimes they don't take the job, either. It's tough shit being out here. It's not like flippin' burgers. I mean, that's hard; I know cuz my cousin works in Mickey D's. But he ain't out here freezing like me.
>
> *Carolyn:* Why can't your cousin get you a job?
>
> *William:* I don't know. He tried, and it's not that I don't want to do it. But I can't. I need to make my own schedule. It's the only way I can really make money. When I get older, I'll take that job. They'll always need workers. Even to clean floors. But for now, I'm young and I can work this. I just need to sell [drugs] sometimes. And I can't do that working behind a counter. I don't use; I just sell. Same with Martin, except he can fix cars anytime. He's got mad skills.

William thus presumed that his status as a U.S. citizen would give him some capital on the corner. Yet his experiences suggested that employers saw him primarily as an American youth, a status that equated with lacking "hard work" experience. And even though his gender identified him as a man and thus presumably capable of doing physically hard work, his racial appear-

ance undermined this by marking him as an "inexperienced worker" on the corner. Cultural constructions about race and youth also marked William in ways that linked him with criminality and deviance. Thus, the employers' conflated perceptions of (il)legality discounted the value of William's labor.

On a clear summer day, many of the young Americans, most of them African American, were standing alongside the Latino immigrant workers. After passing over William and others to hire Sergio and Luis, a potential employer approached me and asked whether I was looking for work.[5] I briefly explained my presence and then asked the employer about his hiring decision:

> *Carolyn:* How did you decide to hire them? [*I point to Sergio and Luis.*]
> *Employer:* They want to work, don't they? That's why they're here, right? I didn't decide. They did it for me.

Sergio's and Luis's simple presence on the corner caused the employer to assume that they were undocumented immigrants in search of improved livelihoods—regardless of any other reasons the men might have had for seeking day labor. The employer thus drew on the prevailing narrative about hardworking immigrants to rationalize his decision to hire Sergio and Luis rather than William that day. I pushed a bit further, however, asking why he had chosen Sergio specifically, pointing out that William was around the same age and also available. He said:

> He's ready to work. [*He points to Sergio.*] I don't have time to waste, and I know he won't give me any trouble. I can hire him, too [*he points to William*], but why take the chance? These kids don't learn how to work these days. Do you see any of them going with their dads or grandfathers to learn how to work? I did with my dad, but maybe that's the Italian way. Hispanics are like that, too, right? They're just hanging out here and getting into trouble. [*He points to the Americans.*]

To this employer, therefore, William's presence on the corner reinforced the image of the unskilled, uninterested, irresponsible young American, while Sergio's presence on the corner demonstrated the complete opposite. Although Sergio and William shared the same space that morning, the employer assumed Sergio was earnestly pursuing work, not hanging out, and therefore was more deserving of the job opportunity.

I tried once more to learn about the distinctions the employer was making between the two workers. Pointing to William, I remarked, "He wants to work, too." Tersely, the employer replied, "Well, he can go get a job. It's not my responsibility." A little less abruptly he then asked me, "Don't you ever stop to think about *why* he's here?" When I prodded him one last time for clarification, before he left with Sergio and Luis, he said, "He's gotta be doing something wrong. I'm not saying he's a criminal, but he's not in school, he's not working, and he's here with these guys. They ain't all saints here."

Some of this bias derived from a general perception that U.S.-born workers of all races and ethnicities do not want to work hard, but much of it also resided in the racialized construction of African Americans in particular as "unstable, uncooperative, dishonest, and uneducated" (Wilson 1996, 111). In their four-city study of entry-level workers, Philip Moss and Chris Tilly (2001, 97) found that employers assessed black workers as having a "lagging motivation." By contrast, most of the employers had positive views of immigrants. When they characterized them as "not being a problem," they meant the immigrants were good workers. Echoing remarks made in Chapter 2, one employer noted, "They don't give me trouble. They do their work, and that's it. The ones who try to argue about the work or about the money, they lose the job and they lose the money. They can't afford it. It's the only reason why they're here, so they know they have to be good." New immigrants were viewed as desirable because of their willingness to work long hours at dirty and dangerous jobs for low wages and for their "work ethic" of compliance. As noted earlier, immigrants working in the United States face constraints and opportunities that create incentives to accept low pay, long hours, and dangerous conditions.

The global forces that instigate these movements and produce these conditions are invisible. For the past few decades, many Latin American countries have struggled to comply with conditions placed by the International Monetary Fund on their foreign debt and to cope with the economic upheavals associated with free trade. As governments devalue their currency, decrease spending on education and health care, and undermine their domestic industries, more and more Latin Americans see the exporting of their citizens as migrant laborers as an investment and identify the United States as the place where immigrants and nations can make ends meet. But in the United States, the invisible outcomes are the immigrants bearing the heavy burden of financial obligations to their families at home and of debt that they incur during and after migration to the United States (Abrego 2014; Baca Zinn and Wells 2000; Dreby 2010). Maxine Baca Zinn and Bar-

bara Wells complicate the idea about the "normal family" by arguing that Latino families are a "product of social forces" (Baca Zinn and Wells 2000, 446) and modify their family structures by adjusting to social structures that shape them, including the social and economic contexts that shape their entry into the United States and the global forces that shape economic and social life in their home countries.

African Americans have a very different perspective on the value of legal citizenship, given the lack of mobility that low-skilled black workers experience in the United States. For them, citizenship does not deliver on promises of economic and political advancement as it does for their white counterparts. For the employers on the corner, such presumptions about illegality went beyond migration status to influence perceptions about workers' character and morality. Legality (having U.S. citizenship) and perceptions of illegality (criminal or deviant behavior) simultaneously marginalized William and the other African American and Puerto Rican workers in crippling ways. They received job offers infrequently, and the kinds of jobs they were offered differed from those offered to the Latino immigrant workers.

## Hidden Disjunctures of (Il)legality

Employers certainly play a significant role in shaping labor conditions, but workers are also actors in the economic structures in which they labor. The beliefs they hold about one another influence their actions and can generate conflict. The employers' characterization of workers operated in two directions on the corner, rationalizing both the employment of Sergio and the passing over of William. This also instructed the workers about the meanings they should derive from their employment experiences. Sergio communicated a view of the U.S. workers that echoed the employer's:

> I come here to find work, not to cause trouble. I have skills. I worked all my life. But I can't find work easily because I don't have my papers. But if I want to, I can find work without it, too. That's the difference. We are more ambitious. We'll find work. They don't need the papers; they were born here. So I don't understand why they come here to waste their time. They don't take work from us because you see all the time that the people come here to hire us, not them. So that tells me that they don't need to work or they are making their money in another way. You see, they sell drugs here sometime—not too much, but you see it.

William, who lived at home with his mother and younger siblings, was enrolled at the local community college, but his attendance faltered after his mother lost her job as a nursing home aide. Although she was able to pick up part-time work off the books, William took on added responsibility for contributing financially to the household. William also had a record of interactions with the police, including arrests, during his high school years. This made finding a job even more difficult, so he supplemented his income at times by selling drugs for a friend—an act he saw as inevitable and unavoidable:

> It's not easy out here. You can't make a mistake. You don't get a second chance. Not for black men like me. So I have to do it myself. Sometimes that means I sell, but I have to; I don't have a choice. I can't get the work others can get. We're not that different from them out here. [*He points to the immigrant workers.*]

William shared that he was greatly discouraged by his work experiences both on and off the corner; he felt that he could not seek work legitimately from the corner or find a job in the formal labor market. He explained:

> Even if I found work, work that's legit, it's not like it's going to be a career. Not like what you want to do, right? There's no advancement, at least not in the kind of work I could get out there. It's a dead end.

Despite his discouragement, William stated that he, too, had a right to "pass time" on the corner:

> I'm looking for work. That's why I'm here. But even if I weren't, that's my right. Out there, I'm rejected. I take my chances working [selling drugs] with my boys on Caton Ave[nue]. Life for a young black man ain't safe. Here I'm rejected, too, but it's different. I pass the time here, and no one bothers me. The cops come around, but nothing really happens here, and so it's not like in the projects, where they're always lookin' for something, for someone to harass, take in.

For William, passing time in the company of others, without harassment, represented a break from the harsh realities he was managing in daily life—a break to which he felt entitled. Illegality for him, in terms of his criminal past and current drug dealing, was anchored in survival. However, potential employers on the corner had no knowledge about his past or his criminal activity

even as they attributed criminality to all the African American and Puerto Rican U.S. citizens looking for work on the corner. The intersection of legality with ideologies of race is paramount here: William's blackness marked him as "illegal" and devalued his identity as a worker. As a result, being a U.S. citizen stigmatized his presence on the corner and resulted in discouragement, if not disdain, from the workers around him. William was often denied work opportunities in this informal labor market. In addition, William's illegality (in terms of his criminal record) kept him excluded from opportunities in the formal labor market. The outcome of his job search was therefore poor.

Although illegality for Sergio was also anchored in survival, the term "illegal" primarily described not any criminal acts such as drug dealing but his status as a migrant worker who had entered the United States without authorization. His Mexicanness and brown skin color masked suspicions potential employers might have had about criminal activity (e.g., that he was selling drugs) and instead reinforced the master narrative that classified Sergio as a deserving and skilled Real Day Laborer. The outcome of Sergio's job pursuit was thus positive, even flourishing, compared with William's, particularly in warm weather seasons. In other words, "illegality" brought condemnation to William but was forgiven for Sergio.

Interestingly, neither William nor Sergio felt that his "illegality" should have a bearing on his right to work. William said he made a mistake by selling drugs but also noted that he did so only to help his family, that he had little choice, and that, like anyone else in the United States, he deserved a second chance. Sergio said that he made a mistake by crossing the U.S. border illegally, but he also did it to help his family, had little choice, and did not think that it made him a criminal. Thus, both William and Sergio located their poor economic circumstances in their particular illegality; moreover, each regarded the other as deserving his marginal economic status. Sergio believed that William had squandered his right to work when he left school, started selling drugs, and generally failed to capitalize on other resources Sergio presumed were available to William to improve his socioeconomic situation. Sergio said:

> He's not going to find good work here. I think he's OK. But I don't think he wants to work. That's why he sells drugs. He must have some family that can help him.

At the same time, William believed that Sergio did not deserve to find work or earn a living from the corner, in part because it reduced his own chance

of being hired. Although William did not disparage Sergio specifically, he voiced objections to the immigrants' taking working-class jobs that were once held by African Americans. The risks that Sergio took to look for day labor made little sense to William, who said:

> He [Sergio] could leave if he can't take it here. It ain't right, but they don't have to be here, either. Why doesn't anyone ask why they are here? If they are so good, then wouldn't they be working in restaurants or something? I know a lot of them are. So why are they here? They can find work easier than me, believe it or not. But you see yourself, we're not in competition. Actually, I want them to help me. I think we can help each other. We do need each other. But "the man" makes sure we don't.

Taken together, the plight of both men highlights the trouble each group experiences as marginalized workers in the labor market and, more generally, as members of the working poor, immigrant and citizen alike, in New York City.

Immigration and sociolegal scholars have emphasized the effect of immigration status on identity and patterns of legal mobilization (see, e.g., Abrego 2008, 2011; Menjívar 2006; Salcido and Adelman 2004). I offer that undocumented status shapes the voice, purpose, and future to which undocumented workers may believe they have a right, regardless of the extent of the rights offered to them. Although Leisy Abrego (2008) and others offer innovative analyses of the effects of new rights-granting laws for undocumented immigrants, I contend that we can still learn a lot from the relationship undocumented workers have with the existing rights that they "enjoy." As noted earlier, undocumented workers on the corner embodied the master-narrative status of Real Day Laborer, which characterized them as good and deserving workers in two ways. First, they were good workers to hire because employers presumed that the vulnerability their "illegal" status brought made them easy to take advantage of, and they were presumed to have skills and work experience that would yield better outcomes for the employer. Second, despite their status as "illegal," their presence on the corner signaled to many potential employers their interest in working; their desire to support their families; and their character as responsible husbands, sons, and fathers (i.e., deserving of job opportunities in this market). The same could not be said for the U.S.-born workers.

These patterns offer insight into how undocumented status may shape

the legal consciousness of workers on the corner. Contributing to the scholarship on legal consciousness, scholars have recently examined the ways that undocumented status constitutes an increasingly critical factor that shapes both individuals' interpretation of the law and their claims-making behavior in significant ways. Shannon Gleeson (2010, 3) argues in her seminal works in this field, "Much like the holistic experiences of race, class, and gender undocumented status is similarly a master status that is constructed by the law and that in turn shapes an individual's relationship to the law." This chapter offers findings that are counterintuitive to prevailing understandings about the effects of undocumented status in the labor market.

Scholars and the public may believe that Latino immigrants and African Americans see one another working but know little or nothing about the circumstances of one another's lives and histories. Workplaces stratified by race, as la parada certainly was, are presumed to be competitive and rife with conflict and can become so when lack of knowledge leads to misunderstanding that is magnified by observations of and interactions with employers. But it is important to recognize that the interests of these day laborers are dynamic, and solidarity between African American citizen and Latino immigrant workers requires supporting how they develop shared interests in effecting workplace change. Ongoing efforts to do this need to be cross-racial and cross-ethnic and grounded in sustained engagement with institutions that have historically sought to cultivate such coalitions, such as community groups, churches, and unions.

There is, indeed, interest in organizing immigrant workers, and scholars have identified these concerns (see, e.g., Fine 2006; Gordon 2007; Milkman 2000, 2006; Ness 2005). During my fieldwork, I found meaningful levels of cooperation among African American and Latino immigrant day laborers. Latinos, though initially negative in their views of blacks, recognized that African Americans were also negatively affected in the U.S. labor market. As Luis said:

> White people are treated differently here, I know. He's [William's] suffering, too. We're all working terrible jobs and we can't complain, not even him. Being a black man here is the same [as being black] everywhere. This is not the first time we work with black men. At home it's the same. Black men don't want to work or just not too much, not too hard. It's the same here. But that black man and this black man are the same—they will always be poor. Here, the American has control—you have to be white.

A shared identity as workers was helpful for the men on the corner in developing shared ideas about their connections to one another. Just as crucial, though, were their shared understandings of how work status and race intersected to marginalize them in similar ways (Cordero-Guzman et al. 2001; Dominguez 2010). On one summer morning, with temperatures in the mid-90s, coupled with high humidity, few men came to the corner. It was also Friday, when fewer jobs tended to be offered than, say, earlier in the week. A man arrived on the corner and offered a job to William, which he rejected. I later found out that it was a moving job and that William had suggested to the employer that he offer it to the group of Latino workers. Outsiders might view William's turning down the offer as reinforcing employers' beliefs that black Americans are lazy and do not want to work. However, when I asked William why he declined the job, he explained:

> *William:* I need to visit my daughter up in the Bronx today, and I can't be late. But I don't want to [do that job] anyway, and like I said [to the employer], they [the Latino immigrants] need it more. Look, I got nothing against them. We all need to work. I just don't need it [the job] right now.
> *Carolyn:* So why are you here?
> *William:* I like coming here. No one bothers me here. I have time, and later I'll take the train to the Bronx.

Although such exchanges were not frequent, there were other times that African American workers referred jobs to Latino immigrant workers. Additional activities pointed to connections that could be fruitful in learning about the men's shared positionalities as day laborers, low-wage workers, and racial minorities in the United States. There were, for example, exchanges of brief language lessons. Compadre was the most animated in reaching out to the African Americans on the corner. "You should learn some Spanish," he'd say. "You'll get better work if you can speak English and Spanish. Women, too, papi! We teach each other, OK?" The cues and signals communicated across the street corners of the intersection were another example. For example, the workers whistled while circling a finger in air and jumping from large waste containers or leaping off the ground to alert one and all when the police were driving by. Neither group wanted to interact with law enforcement, and workers called attention to all to seek safety.

Another meaningful, though unexpected, exchange of assistance involved the selling of drugs. One day, Sergio, young and depressed about

being in the United States, made his way over to Oscar, one of the young African American Temps, who was smoking marijuana. After exchanging a few words, Oscar handed his blunt to Sergio, who took a hit. Although this is certainly not a kind of solidarity activists seek to promote, it does point to ways in which the members of these groups tried to connect with one another; acknowledged a shared sense of despondency over their financial and social situations; and attempted, however temporarily, to attend to one another's needs. Additional events are examined in Chapter 6.

One sentiment that William and Sergio shared with me in different ways indicated a shared understanding that scholars and the larger public may be missing: talk about "blackness" in the United States almost always means talking about "whiteness," because "black," succinctly, is taken to mean "not white." Teaching and learning about shared African ancestry and common experiences with racism, colonialism, and oppression in the greater American context is crucial. Contact across racial divides alone will not automatically result in greater trust or understanding, and I do not mean to simplistically equate the experiences of U.S.-born African American and Puerto Rican workers and Latin American immigrant workers who arrive in a new location, on this corner, together. But as immigrants of color are increasingly focused on work as a route to belonging in the United States, their interests should begin to converge even more with those of African Americans.

Achieving solidarity will take more than the efforts of activists, lawmakers, or employers, however. Community members, as vested members of the areas in which they live and work, also must be invested in change. This means active education of, and involvement by, institutions such as schools and colleges, churches, and businesses. This kind of organizing is crucial, and the capacity for change can be significant: not knowing their own rights in the workplace and how labor legislation weakens the positions of all of these groups, and learning about the unique vulnerabilities that each faces can be fruitful in fostering cross-racial and cross-national solidarity.

# 4

# Daily Masculinity

"Santiago, he has to learn. I'm not his mother," Luis said. It was a frustrating afternoon on the corner. Gusty wind blew hard against the men's bodies. A downpour forced many of the men to run away and washed away any potential job opportunities for that day. Luis and I were sharing egg rolls at a nearby Chinese restaurant. Mr. Zhao, the owner, did not mind that we were sitting down, and I knew from some of the day laborers that he sometimes let them take shelter there when the weather was bad. Minutes earlier, I had seen Santiago storm out of the restaurant, frowning. I found Luis eating alone and gathered that Santiago was unlikely to return. "What happened?" I asked Luis. With a huff to some of his frustration, he said, "He [Santiago] eats all the time and spends all his money. You see this? [*He points to a container of fried rice.*] I bought this for him, not for me. All I want is for him to do his laundry before he spends all his money and has nothing. So he left." "To do his laundry?" I asked, a bit puzzled by both Luis's remarks and Santiago's apparent irritation. Luis answered tersely, "I hope so, but I don't think so." Later in our conversation, Luis offered more insight about the incident:

> There's nothing wrong with doing laundry. I have to do it here. Who's going to do it for me? I'm not going to do his laundry. Let him meet some woman, and then she can take care of him. Here you have to be a man. To survive here, you have to be a man and do ev-

erything, no matter what it is. I make sacrifices for my family. He's young, you know? I treat him like my son. He has to learn.

The dilemma, apparently, was that in Mexico, washing clothes was considered "women's work."[1] Many of the Latino men—not only Mexican men but also those from Central and South America—made a point of explaining to me the different kinds of work men and women did in their home countries. Specifically, Luis stated, it was the man's job to make sacrifices to support his family. At the time, his words were a straightforward statement of what it meant for him to "ser hombre" (be a man). Many of the other men on the corner shared his views. But what was the relationship between men and work in this context? What were the implications of being a man in finding work as a day laborer on the street corner? How and why was this different from being a man off the corner?

This chapter examines how the day laborers in my study viewed themselves and others and what they said about themselves and others as men. Gender in the form of masculinity was another structure the men engaged through social practices (while simultaneously and inevitably engaging the social structures of race, ethnicity, nationality, and legality).[2] Although the chapter focuses on the men's interactions with employers, one another, and me, I also discuss how characteristics of this particular sector of the informal economy encouraged the performance of being a man in the workplace (see Connell 1995; Stinchcombe 1990). Through observation of the men's experiences, I learned about how situations in daily life affected the ways in which these men understood what it means to "ser hombre."

Masculinity is often defined in terms of work and employment (see, e.g., Alonso 1992; Kessler-Harris 1992; Gutmann 1996). By migrating to find work, men engage in an activity that is viewed as masculine and central to fulfilling their gendered social function of providing well for their families. However, the experience of migration and the daily life men live as migrants situate them in circumstances in which they frequently experience powerlessness, lack of control, and loss of authority, coupled with emasculating anxiety and fear. The racial and ethnic context of New York City (and elsewhere in the United States), along with their status as undocumented workers, prevents them from obtaining the same jobs as their legal coworkers; thus, they often experience marginalization, discrimination, and exploitation (Parker 1994; Valenzuela 2006). Remarks among my participants about having been "somebody important" in Mexico, Colombia, or Ecuador were all too common. And they used good humor to mask feelings of demoral-

ization and embarrassment when they talked about compromising their self-worth, dignity, or masculinity or expressed regret about becoming a day laborer or migrating to the United States.

How, then, do men practice masculinity in an environment that frames and produces this vulnerable situation? Gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, migrant status, and legality interact to reinforce existing hierarchies in the segmented labor market and thereby reproduce broader relations of production. The narrative about Mexican men as hardworking immigrants supporting their families, for example, reproduces ideas about immigrants' "American dream" and thus influences perceptions of both the quality of their work and their skills. Recent immigrants were preferred to native-born workers on the corner because they were seen as having a greater incentive or drive to succeed. The narratives also reproduce the discourse of traditional gendered divisions of labor and heteronormative households. Despite the wide range of available kinship and household configurations, particularly among migrants, the ideology of men as providers was clearly dominant.

In my observations of daily life on the corner, however, I also learned about how masculinity is tied to forms of work in new ways for the men, and not exclusively in job-related exchanges. Luis's words served as a reminder that he and the other day laborers are fathers, husbands, and sons who have obligations to their families, in New York and in their home countries. This identity position influenced Luis's decision to move to the United States and to live in a precarious situation without documentation—an identity that, in practice, reduced his chances to fulfill those responsibilities and affected his daily life in ways he did not anticipate before his move. Luis also did not anticipate the ways in which his experience would modify his own ideas about himself, his life in the United States, and his life in his home country.

So while Luis's explanation after Santiago's departure from the restaurant frankly expressed part of my observations about the men and their work, in-depth field research about the details and dynamics of the men's social and economic situations revealed much more about their particular responsibilities and what it meant for Luis and the other day laborers to say "Soy hombre" (I am a man), as well as about the relationship of "Soy hombre" to "Soy trabajador" (I am a worker), a statement that occurred equally often in the men's self-identifications. What did it mean to be a man? What did it mean to be a worker? How was this identity position linked to assumptions about one's moral character? And how was the relationship managed in the context of migration and undocumented residency in the Unit-

ed States? How did crafting an identity as a hardworking man safeguard the day laborer's pride and self-esteem in the face of poverty, insecurity, and social marginalization?

Gender was visible in the local meanings men attributed to being a trabajador (worker) and being a man, which, in turn, were influenced both by the New York City urban context and by the men's own cultural and class perceptions of masculinity. Although gender identity is the focus of this chapter, these distinctions and statuses are always in conversation with one another and should not be viewed as separate dynamics that are independent and fixed in nature (see Parsons 1937).

Comprehensive studies have been done about the effects of gender on labor situations among migrants, yet few employ ethnographic methods to identify how day laborers negotiate gendered identities in their daily economic and social lives. Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987, 126), for example, argue that the accomplishment of gender is "an achieved property of situated conduct." The conduct of being a man on the street corner was a key example of how men "do gender," thus illustrating how they managed and presented "being a man."[3] Both the workers and the employers understood, and used, masculinity as a structure in their interactions with others and in their activities on the street corner, which helped to frame how and why Luis and men like him identified themselves as good men and good workers. They accomplished this in three ways: through physical display, through their social conduct, and by performing "women's work."

The principal masculinity-structuring interaction I observed was labor activity—specifically, the hiring process between workers and employers, which both helped to determine which men were considered good workers and guided their interactions with one another, potential employers, passersby, and me (see Kimmel 2000; Messerschmidt 1993). I also observed how the men's attitudes about their masculinity, and their behavior, changed in response to their work experience and as a result of instruction about proper gendered behavior—that is, how to be a good man and good worker—that they gave and received in their daily life (Fenstermaker and West 2002).

Most of the presentations of self I observed took place in public on the street corner. Men who engaged in behavior regarded as obnoxious, such as yelling out to women, drinking, or causing disturbances that might discourage potential employers from stopping, were labeled "malcriado" or "bruto."[4] However, I also learned about gender instruction that was less visible, which I call "veiled masculinity." This became apparent in the men's discussions of activities they labeled "women's work." Participating in housework or child

care, for instance, challenged their understandings of their own masculinity; consequently, they reclassified their engagement with such activities as masculine behavior, reinforcing their self-concept of being good men and maintaining their masculine identities. Luis's statement, "To survive here, you have to be a man and do everything," is an example of the discourse in which many of the men engaged to explain their changing attitudes about the meaning of being a man based on the informal instruction they received on the corner.

The dominant narrative is that migrant men—particularly, undocumented men—desire to return to their home countries to reestablish their gender and other privileges (see Gutmann 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Rouse 1991; Smith 2006). What I observed, however, were men who continued to demonstrate gender privilege even while they were away, largely in the absence of women, through phone calls and the sending of remittances to their families (although their directions about how the money should be spent often were not followed). The men's accounts also revealed that they were actively reconstructing their ideas about gender in the new context, suggesting that gender privilege and patriarchy were not their only priorities. Studies on gender relations and migration indicate that the majority of men who migrate alone and live away from family and partners for long periods learn to do domestic tasks, and when they are reunited with their partners in their home countries, they often assist with those duties (see Donato et al. 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mahler and Pessar 2006).[5]

Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan Malone (2002) report that for many men, especially young men, emigration is a rite of passage into manhood and confirms one's masculinity. Peggy Levitt (2001) found that women in Miraflores, Dominican Republic, sought out men who had emigrated because single men living in Miraflores were perceived as worthless. Luis identified the weight of this social benefit of migration:

> I'm responsible for my family here and in Mexico. A good man works. Some of these men don't work, and their families know. If they go back home and they didn't do anything here, they are embarrassed. Their family is shamed. Why? Because he is not a good man. Even the parents are ashamed, because it means they have a lazy son, almost worthless. But at the same time, I can understand these men because it's not easy here. And they [the families in Mexico] don't understand that because they don't know what it's like here.

In my field research I observed how both employers and day laborers used bodily expressions of masculinity to rank-order men as potential workers. The ranking mirrored the men's characterizations as "good" or "bad." On the corner, being labeled a good man was inextricably linked with being viewed as a good worker; however, I also discovered that, although the "good man" status reinforced perceptions about a day laborer's work ethic and character, it was not based entirely on those factors.

## Looking Like Good Workers

*Beep-beep. A rusting indigo minivan pulls up, horn honking. Javier grabs his hammer and runs with Luis and Ronaldo to meet it at the curb. . . . Jerome arrives late, but despite his stout and stocky build he manages to squeeze in. Now he is among the few whose anxious faces stare at the man, who hollers, "I need two men, just two men." Yelling at the men on both sides of the van, he continues, "Move away. I just need two. Move." As he gets out of the van, he pushes past Kaspar and Michal, two slender young Polish men, and points at Javier and Jerome. He says sternly, "Come with me," which encourages them to follow him. After many of the men walk away, the man from the van appears more relaxed and explains to Javier and Jerome that he needs them to do some "heavy lifting" at his hardware store. After stating his offer of payment, he extends his arm and pats Javier's broad right shoulder. "Yes? Good?" he asks. As he waits for Javier to nod in agreement, his hand falls along Javier's right side, and he squeezes Javier's upper arm. Later Luis, who is watching with me, remarks that he would have moved away, saying, "Mirame. Soy hombre. Soy fuerte. No me tienes que tocar." (Look at me. I'm a man. I'm strong. You don't have to touch me.)*

The study participants understood that being identified as immigrants and as Latinos were markers of high status in the day-labor sector of the informal economy and that being situated in both identity positions was highly desirable (see Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Newman 1999; Tienda 1989; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). However, they also explained that achieving the status of Real Day Laborer went beyond this. A desirable worker was also a "hardworking" and "strong" man; thus, many of the men were concerned about their physical appearance on the street corner. Although the importance of physical strength naturally varied depending on the type of work a potential employer needed done, Gerry told me that it

was necessary to "look strong" to secure jobs. Employers often chose stocky men or men who appeared to have upper body strength over those who appeared less physically strong—for instance, the employer who pushed past Kaspar and Michal to offer the job first to Jerome and then to Javier, whose physical ability was less visibly obvious (explaining why the man squeezed Javier's upper arm).

The vignette highlights not just the visual factors at play in hiring but also instruction the men were giving and receiving about how to present themselves so employers would perceive them as good workers.[6] Many of the Latino immigrants, as well as potential employers, called attention to the physical appearance of the American day laborers as an indication that they were not serious about finding work. On one blistering summer day, Franklin, who had been complaining about having to stand outside in the heat, took refuge under the canopy of a nearby apartment building. William called out to him to come and check out a new game on his Game Boy. After Franklin crossed the street, I asked Luis why he looked so dismayed. He answered:

> Look at him. He doesn't want to work. You can see it. Look at his hands and then look at my hands. You see me; I have my tools. I'm ready. Look at his clothes. They don't know how to do real work. I know this. They don't have to work hard in this country. They'll get tired of waiting and then they'll leave. You'll see.

Equipment such as drills, hammers, and tool belts constituted coveted items for self-presentation as hardworking men and good workers. Tools, Gerry stated, highlighted a man's expertise and skills and his readiness to work on a given day:

> If someone comes looking for workers, he wants to see that you are ready for work. Sometimes they ask us if we know how to do something. But most of the time, they don't. They explain it to us later, when we are already at the place. So that's why I carry my tools and I wear my belt so that they can see that I am serious; I am ready. Sometimes, they don't even have tools to give workers, so it's better to have your own. You'll be hired faster than the others because they see that you are prepared and know what you're doing.

All of the day laborers were aware of the fast pace of the hiring process and knew that the ability to provide certain visual cues improved their chances

of being hired. Thus, they emphasized that looking physically able and being armed with the appropriate tools was necessary and significant for presenting oneself as a Real Day Laborer.

## Acting Like Good Workers

Comportment also provided an important signal that a man was looking for work. A good worker stood at the corner, as opposed to sitting on the sidewalk. In other words, not resting was an important cue for potential employers. Luis pointed out to me that even a man's distance from the corner or the curb was relevant in showing his status as a good worker and, consequently, his seriousness about seeking employment. For instance, a man sitting on the curb was considered more interested in working than a man sitting on a building stoop. Moreover, Luis explained, this particular cue illustrated that a man possessed a respectable work ethic, which was an important distinction among the different groups of men. Thus, in their efforts to secure work, the men presented and performed certain behavior that was deemed appropriate for a worker as well as a man within their own ranks while, at the same time, responding to expectations held by potential employers.

Alongside the good men and good workers on the corner were many men who were perceived as not having a healthy work ethic. As Elijah Anderson (1978, 143) discovered in *A Place on the Corner*, rank within the extended primary group was determined by both the individual member's representation of the group's values and the member's acts of conveying those values in interactions with others. In the social order established by my study participants, public displays of alcohol and drug consumption were markers of a poor work ethic because they discouraged potential employers from stopping at corners where such behavior was occurring (Pinedo Turnovsky 2006). Certain groups of men therefore banned visible acts of drinking within their ranks. How and when one took rest periods could also be called into question. All of the men sat in front of buildings, on stoops, or on the curb during what they referred to as rest periods, times when they ate snacks, read the paper, played games, or called an end to the workday. Those who frequently sat on the ground or on car hoods and trunks or who sat on the curb throughout most of their time on the corner were perceived as not being serious about finding work—that is, as examples of men who were not good workers and, consequently, not good men. Compadre explained:

> Do you see them? They are not going to get work. They look tired, bored, lazy. Who wants to hire someone who is already tired and hasn't even worked today yet? I feel sorry for their families. [*He points to a group of young men.*] I tell them that they better look awake—drink some coffee. They are young and they are good workers. Finding work is hard to do, but you have to want to work.

As noted earlier, Compadre led a group of young, black Latino immigrants and took responsibility for shaping them up in the hope that it would help him, and them, to be hired from the corner. Compadre often helped the young black Latinos find appropriate work attire; he also took things a step further by advising them about how the clothes should be worn, often chiding young men such as Octavio for wearing pants that fell below their hips; he felt that this style of dress indicated laziness, and perhaps even arrogance, which were not the character traits of a good man or a serious worker. Compadre felt strongly that if the men in his group dressed sloppily or carelessly, potential employers would hesitate to hire them:

> A man has to look ready for work. No matter how I feel, even if I've been drinking all night, I wake up and clean myself. I shave. I wear clean clothes. They have some stains, but that's from working. They're still clean. Look at them. [*He points to a group of young African American day laborers on the same corner.*] They're boys. They make a little money. People hire them. [*He points to his group of men.*] These men need to be serious. They can play later.

## Good Men and Brutos

*When I arrived on the corner the next day, the men were huddled together around Javier. Their faces expressed interest, though their smiles teased him with sarcasm. Javier had finished explaining to them that he did not receive full pay for the previous day's job, and because he had not worked earlier in the week, he could not send money home to his family. He had called his wife to tell her to use the money he sent last month to buy a bicycle for his son and a freezer for his mother, and he promised her she would be able to buy a freezer for herself and a new mattress for their bed with money he would send next month. When I asked him whether they had argued about this, he said, "No. Well, yes, but she understands. I'm the only one really making money, and that's why I'm here, isn't it? I can't give her everything." The men agreed*

*that Javier gave his wife correct instructions, although many of them also doubted the instructions would be followed and teased Javier, saying, "Once she has the money, you'll never know what she did with it," to which Javier responded, "I know. I don't live there anymore."*

Public presentations of masculinity that were acceptable or desirable on the corner included displays related to social activities, particularly in the treatment of women, and the assumption of roles as surrogate fathers, husbands, or community leaders. My interactions with the study participants included courtesies the men extended to me during my visits. Luis and Ronaldo always offered me a place on the stoop when I arrived at the street corner. Some of the men bought me orange juice or cocoa for breakfast. Women passing by, however, were not always treated courteously. Some of the men whistled at them or remarked on their appearance as they walked by. Others remained quiet but tried to make eye contact with the women, and men greeted almost all of the women who passed with warm "holas" (hellos) and "buen días" (good days). Soon after a woman passed by, a conversation was likely to begin about the men's relationships with women. For instance, after whistling at a pair of women walking to the laundromat, Santiago began talking with the others about them and then said, as if to remind me:

> Don't be upset. We're men. Understand? That's what we do. We're out here all day. It's not different if we were in a bar or at a party. You're not supposed to be here, but you're here. And, well, you're going to hear a lot of things you don't want to hear. If women pass by, we have to say something to them. We're men. Look, I have no one here. A lot of these men are alone here. They have no one. Don't you miss your husband? Women like to hear that they're pretty. We're not doing anything bad. We're just saying hello. They don't have to talk to us.

Although Santiago explained his behavior as simply a character trait of "being a man," his remarks to and about women also reflected his experiences with them. Specifically, Santiago often said he could not trust women to be loyal to him in relationships. On this day, he said:

> I have a girlfriend in Mexico, but I know that she's already betrayed me. I want to find a new love. . . . They are all the same. Son traicioneras

> [They are traitors]. They play with men as if they were toys. I know that not all women are like that, but most of them are. Not you. You are not like that. [*He raises an eyebrow and gives a sarcastic tilt of his head.*] Are you? No, no. It's just a joke, that's all.

I followed up by asking why he assumed his girlfriend would be unfaithful. His reply was simple: "Well, I'm not there, and she knows I'll be here for a while." Untrustworthiness may appear to be a character flaw in his girlfriend, but Santiago's broad application of it as a trait common to all women identified it as stemming from his migration experience. For Santiago, it was distance and, more precisely, his long-term presence in New York that was producing the assumed act of betrayal.

Conversations about women in general were common; talk about the specific women in the men's lives, such as wives and mothers, was less so. Many of the men considered such topics inappropriate, especially if they involved negative images of specific women or commentary on male-female relationships. Often these conversations concerned sexuality or sexual relations with women, and as the only woman present on the corner with the men, I often felt uncomfortable. Reiterating Santiago's comment, I was going to dislike some of the discussion, and I could not fault the men or complain about it, since it was my choice to spend time with them.[7]

However, not all of the men shared Santiago's opinions. Some looked down on men who told me stories about prostitutes they visited or about women with whom they had affairs. Luis expressed this opinion:

> These men, they do not respect women, especially the prostitutes. They treat them differently from their wives, daughters, girlfriends, mothers. There is no respect. I am a decent and honest man. These are not topics that should be talked about outside, in public, especially with you. Son brutos, ellos [They are stupid]. Why do you want to know about that from them anyway?

Luis often warned me not to stand with certain men on the corner whom he saw as interested only in "bothering people." This is not to say that he and others who felt as he did, such as Ronaldo, made no attempts to speak with women at the corner; their attempts were just subtler than those of Santiago and Ricardo, for instance, who often tried to walk beside women and engage them in conversation. Luis and Ronaldo did not physically move away from men who whistled at or harassed women, but they were wary of standing

right next to them, partly out of concern over losing out on jobs. Ronaldo expressed frustration one day after a woman at whom Santiago had whistled threatened to call her boyfriend to come to beat him up and continued creating a scene:

> He [Santiago] bothers women too much. Now she's yelling at him. If someone comes by and sees a fight, you know what they're going to do: they'll leave. Then nobody gets the job. What if the police were here and they saw her yelling at him? He's a problem. That's why I don't talk to him too much. I am an upright and proper man. I like him, but when he starts to act like that, it's better if I move away. He's young; he isn't a man yet. He wants to play, that's all. I came here for work.

The men also commented on how disrespectful such behavior was, especially when remarks were made to women who had children with them or were particularly young (teenagers). Ronaldo added:

> Look, you have to be careful here. Algunos son malcriados [Some of the men are ill-mannered]. If you start to talk about these things, then the men are going to think about other things. They are going to think that you like them. Understand? It's not good. Your husband should be angry with you. Like I tell my wife, I even tell my daughter, I tell you the same. Don't be offended, but understand.

At the time, my husband was working outside New York City. Even though I told the men that we saw each other frequently, some of them expressed concern about the separation. They were equally concerned that I had no children, and they often told me personal stories about their families and fatherhood in the hope that I would reconsider my decision not to start a family right away. Santiago and Ricardo, who often boasted to me about the girls they misled in relationships and who were certain that their female partners (girlfriend and wife, respectively) were doing the same with men in Mexico, reacted differently to the separation and found my marriage suspect.[8] Although all of the men displayed some camaraderie on the corner, Ronaldo and Luis disliked Santiago and Ricardo in the same way that other men who possessed character traits marking them as respectful, good, and hardworking—in other words, as good fathers, loyal husbands, and wise leaders[9]—tended to dislike men who were perceived as disrespectful and

lazy and were thus labeled "brutos" and "malcriados." In discouraging me from speaking with particular men on the street corner, Luis and Ronaldo were treating me as they would a daughter or wife, and it became common for the men to offer me advice, particularly about my family life, much as they did for one another.

Compadre's relationship with the young black Latino men in his group was like that of a mentor to students. He served in many ways as a surrogate father to them by offering advice not only about their clothing but also about dating, health, and situations with family members here and in their home countries. He also unfailingly provided motivation and support. For example, after he and I discussed the possibility of my providing English-language drills to his group, he encouraged the men to participate. He told me:

> I know English, bueno—not a lot, but enough that I can understand you, and you can understand me. But if these boys are here, they should try to learn the language. Even just a little bit. Why not? It's not going to hurt them, but it will help them.

In Anderson's *StreetWise* (1990), "old heads" were important figures in the community who acted as role models for the "young heads," or young black men. Similar to the "old heads" whose efforts were to instruct and instill values of hard work, family life, respect, and a sense of purpose (Anderson 1990, 70), Compadre represented a socializing agent in the absence of family relationships as he instructed young men about values that were part of the good man and good worker identities.

## Uncovering Masculinity in Doing "Women's Work"

Just as a veil can hide and disguise without completely covering, I discovered what I call "veiled masculinity," in which the men were able to discover—or, rather, recover—their masculinity while carrying out purported women's work. In other words, they veiled what could be seen as demeaning engagements with housework or child care by reassigning such activities the status of appropriate masculine labor. This allowed them to maintain a positive identity and reaffirmed masculinity. It was also empowering, as became evident in the mixed humor and satisfaction they expressed when they executed such tasks successfully.

Arguably more important was the increase in self-esteem the men experienced when they realized that, as one put it, "it takes a strong man to do

a woman's work." Being a man meant taking responsibility for washing and mending their clothes and cleaning their living space. It meant not only taking the lead in getting jobs for themselves and others but also cooking for the men who lived with them. Although they typically would not have taken on such work in their home countries, they showed distinct pride when they were able to carry out these tasks in the United States. But this was not the same masculine pride discussed by Roger Rouse (1991) and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, 2003). The kind of pride shown by the study participants both characterized and strengthened their masculinity by allowing them to uphold their status as real men and good men.

According to the dominant narrative about gender and migration, traversing transnational space does little to trouble gendered divisions of household labor or to destabilize the gendered inequalities of a patriarchal state (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind 1999). Studies have argued that men and women remain complicit in reproducing patriarchy beyond national borders and, in fact, resume existing power relations when they return home (see, e.g., Gutmann 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Rouse 1991). I cannot argue that the men in my study escaped from the patriarchal systems of social relations characteristic of their native countries. However, while the men arrived in the United States with certain conceptions and experiences of race, ethnicity, gender, and national status, their situation as day laborers in New York City reconfigured these components of their identities. Previous studies have left little room for the contestation or reconstruction of masculinity in contexts involving men working and living with men. For example, Yen Le Espiritu (2002) showed that although male Filipino migrants who became navy stewards doing feminized work brought a host of domestic skills back to their families, the "stripping of male privilege" they experienced may have resulted in attempts to reclaim their masculinity by denigrating women and children. As Sarah Mahler (1999, 712) notes, "Transnational processes may produce new spaces, but this does not mean that actors within these spaces are set completely loose from their social moorings."

Many of the men realized that upholding the privileged position they held in their home countries was unproductive in the new U.S. context. The reality of migrant life often obliged them to fulfill social roles and engage in labor activities associated with women and the social construction of femininity. At times, the men welcomed opportunities to show me how successfully they took care of tasks and responsibilities traditionally relegated to the women in their lives and how this was integral to their masculine identities.[10]

As the narrative that opened the chapter shows, Luis viewed doing laundry, cleaning his apartment, and cooking not only as necessary but also as his responsibility. The end of the workday soon arrived, and I was invited to share lunch with the men. A few had bought Italian bread from a local bakery and distributed pieces to a few of the men. Luis called their attention to his backpack. "Now you will taste great food," he said as he pulled out a fat thermos and forked pieces of stewed meat onto each man's bread. "We eat it [the meat] with this bread because it's heavy and won't break so easily," he explained. "Then, like the Italians, we can clean it up [*he moves his bread in a circle, as if cleaning a plate*]. It always tastes better on the second, third day." I took my first bite, raising my eyebrows and widening my smile as I enjoyed the meal. Luis quickly asserted that he cooked better than his wife and that he could take more time to cook now because he wasn't always working. "The truth is that my wife does not let me cook at home," he said, "and in any case, I am always working there. That's what a man does. You don't have time to yourself like you do here. Life is different there, for men and for women, too."

Some of the men who lived near the corner took advantage of the laundromat to wash their clothes while they looked for work. It was during these times that the men often told me proudly that they performed this task, and others, better than their wives or girlfriends in their home countries. Jerome was particularly proud of his cooking and invited me to his apartment to share a meal with his brother, sister-in-law, and nephew, who lived with him. He prepared a mole sauce over grilled chicken that he served with homemade flour tortillas:

*Jerome:* My food is authentic. Did you ever eat Mexican food before? Not American tacos. Real Mexican food? You will like it, I know. I cook real food.

*Carolyn:* Do you cook at home a lot?

*Jerome:* No, Mariana [the sister-in-law] cooks. But I cook better than she does, and I'm a man. That's embarrassing, no? On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, she sleeps at her boss's house to take care of their baby. Most of the time we go out, but sometimes I cook. No one taught me how to cook. I'm good, no?

*Carolyn:* What about in Mexico? Did you cook there?

*Jerome:* No, no, no [*he says with a giddy laugh*]. My mother cooked for everybody. But now that I'm here, I have to cook sometimes.

> I like it. There is no shame in doing any kind of work in order to live, to survive. It doesn't matter. [*I grab another tortilla.*] If you don't like it, you don't have to eat it.

Compadre explained to me that a lot of the men in his group found pride in their ability to do women's work because it meant that they had the skills to be both a man and a woman (see Butler 1990). He described this as part of a man's strength, not as a flaw or weakness, and explained:

> He's a man because he does a woman's work. Do you understand? He's a man because he's taking care of himself. He is responsible, a decent man. Even if it isn't for himself, he will clean, cook, anything. That doesn't mean he isn't a man. He is a man. He is doing what he has to do so he can provide for his family at home. He can be proud of that.

Notions of appropriate gender roles shifted rapidly in the context of this particular migration and work experience, and many of the day laborers I studied employed creative strategies not only to assert their identities as men but also to provide instruction to one another about a new way to define masculinity (Fenstermaker and West 2002). The literature on migration and transnational studies discusses changes in gender relations; however, the attitudes and behavior of men are most often addressed in the context of women's shifting gendered experiences in the migration process and how men react to them in the home and host country (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). There is little discussion of men's changing attitudes about gender roles and how they participate in gender instruction in the absence of women and in the host society's gender relations system. This is crucial in accessing a fuller and more complex evaluation of migrant men's gender development in the migration experience. Although the men in my study recognized the familiar man-woman binary, the meanings of "masculinity" and "femininity" for them were constantly evolving and shifting. The street corner provided a unique vantage point to observe this gender instruction, demonstrating the decisive ways in which men worked masculinity on the corner.

Just as the men in the study were aware of the significance of their racial, ethnic, and national identities, they were cognizant of the implications of their gender presentation, which was associated with their identities as good men and good workers. The idea that they experienced a conflict of mascu-

linity does not fully capture their daily reality. Just as they selectively accepted and rejected parts of the U.S. racial system and the racial system of their home countries, the men modified the context of gender relations that included versions of privilege and inequality.[11] Further, unlike the Latinos in Nicholas De Genova's *Working the Boundaries* (2005, 109), who verified their masculinity by proving they could protect women or by asserting a dominant status over other men, the Latinos on the corner confirmed their masculinity largely in the absence of women and in the context of constructing identities as good workers. Their masculinity and sexuality came to be defined through their labor activity, with an ideal of "respectable" manhood and masculinity ordering the space of the street corner, as it does other urban spaces across New York City.

Gendered displays in this workplace helped to rank-order the men as desirable or undesirable workers. A conduct of masculinity distinguished good and decent men from dishonest men and brutos. Men also reaffirmed their masculine identities in novel ways, by taking on duties typically carried out by the women in their lives, thus unveiling their masculine character. The efforts of Luis, Compadre, and the other men to manage and maintain a positive gender identity illustrate how the day laborers actively worked to provide instruction about "ser hombre"—being a man—to attain the status of a good worker and a good man in this street-corner community. These accounts reveal the capacious opportunities for modeling paradigms of gender relations and norms that are not restricted to the public and private. Moreover, the men display agency in the decisions they make to introduce femininity and masculinity into these spaces, affecting normative gendered ideas.

# II

# Making Community

# 5

# Entre Nosotros

"Entre nosotros, ¿Lo ves?" (Among ourselves, you see?), Edwin remarked as he and I observed a conversation between two day laborers. One of the workers, Juan, soon reported that he would be leaving the corner early to watch a soccer game at a bar in Queens. The cover charge was $15 per person, and he had agreed to cover the other worker's entrance fee, along with a meal and beer. Juan said, "I like him. He's new here. I talked with him a little last week, too. He's really nice, very humble. And he said he'll pay for my meal another time. I trust him." Edwin turned to me, remarking, "¿Lo ves?" Aquí tratamos de ayudar, como somos familia" (You see? Here we try to help, as if we are family). Juan echoed the sentiment, saying, "Claro que si. A veces tienes que hacerlo. Nos entendemos y podemos resolver las cosas entre nosotros" (Of course. Sometimes you have to. Here we understand each other and we can work out matters among ourselves). "Entre nosotros" was a common response to how men attended to matters on the corner. The rules men created about pay scale and length of workday, to name two, extended beyond the corners of the intersection.

The clandestine ways in which undocumented immigrants attempt to live and work, out of sight of law enforcement, make their lives vulnerable, unstable, and precarious, both economically and socially.[1] That immigrant newcomers rely on family, friends, and compatriots in the place of arrival has long been acknowledged; the social obligations that inhere in these ties, it is believed, allow immigrants to draw on such social networks for assis-

tance, substantially reducing the costs—financial and psychological—of migration. Social networks include key institutions in the state and local economy but primarily consist of personal ties—that is, family, friends, and neighbors. As immigrants settle, these ties mature, providing avenues for stability and successful incorporation into the new society; thus, social networks are presumed to protect immigrants from the changes they experience in the societies they enter by counteracting the detrimental effects of poverty and instability (Tilly 2005). In this view, therefore, social networks account for the success not only of individual immigrants but also of particular immigrant groups.

The quantity and quality of personal social contacts produces the strength or weakness of undocumented immigrants' social networks. Even if the capacity of these ties is strong, they may still be constrained by U.S. enforcement efforts (Granovetter 1973; Singer and Massey 1998; Tilly 2005). In our conversations about the circumstances that led them to la parada, the study participants often told stories about family and friends who had helped with their migration, financially and otherwise, in the pre- and post-arrival and settlement stages. These accounts described the personal ties that made up their social networks. Some had family members living in the United States, even in New York City; however, while the majority of the men were in touch with family, they often did not call on these social ties in times of trouble. Their experiences, in fact, revealed advantages and disadvantages embedded in these networks and ways in which social networks both assisted and frustrated them in their present situations. I found that many of the day laborers at my field site did not rely on kin, particularly when their families included members with legal or mixed immigration status. This chapter looks at how legal and migrant status shape the composition and functioning of immigrant social networks, troubling immigration scholars' normative understanding of what constitutes these networks for immigrants (Kim 1999).

Just as poor and working-class U.S. citizens rely on social networks to survive economic hardships (see, e.g., Duneier 1999; Kornblum 1974; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974; Venkatesh 2006), the men in my study drew on their contacts to gain access to resources that would mitigate their hardships, especially as they became acquainted with local service providers. But the men I interviewed also said that they avoided involving family members in situations that could damage their relationships—for example, by bringing contact with the police. All of the men said that relying on family members to resolve minor problems, such as asking for loans to buy food or pay

monthly bills, risked weakening their connections to kin networks. Further, many of the men were concerned that family members would use financial and other kinds of debt to create obligations and thus exacerbate their already strong sense of lost independence and powerlessness. Finally, the men frequently said that suffering and hardships were characteristic of the life of an immigrant. Although their social and economic vulnerability clearly frustrated them, they defended their position by stating that self-reliance in the form of not asking relatives for help was a necessary part of achieving success in the United States.

The objective of this chapter is not to evaluate networks' success in meeting the needs of my study participants; instead, it attempts to illustrate the decision-making processes that went into shaping and producing the day laborers' networks. Requests for help were considered very carefully; for the workers who entered the United States without authorization, the risk of being caught and the insecurity this produced decisively restricted their mobility in the labor market. One can understand why they wanted to avoid contact with law enforcement—or any agency or individual that could discover their undocumented status. Ultimately, the chapter attempts to show how the men took charge of opportunities that would yield successful outcomes.

Sociologists have long examined social ties in poor communities (see, e.g., Drake and Cayton 1945; Kornblum 1974; Stack 1974). Works that look particularly at these communities' incorporation of immigrants illustrate, critically, the makeup, functioning, and implications of relying on social networks and how that affects successful integration and mobility (see, e.g., Cordero-Guzman et al. 2001; Dominguez 2010; Foner 2001; Hernandez-Leon 2008; Menjívar 2000; Lomnitz 1977). My research is in conversation with works that scrutinize how cohesion in relationships shapes the strength (and weakness) of social ties and how migrant and legal status influence workers' decisions to access specific network members. I aim to build on these works by looking at the links between documented and undocumented members of complex immigrant networks to more fully understand the conditions under which undocumented immigrants choose to ask for help, particularly from family members.

## Evitar Problemas (Avoiding Problems)

As I noted in Chapter 1, Ronaldo had a brother in New York City who helped him to move to the United States from Ecuador. Ronaldo lived with his brother for a time, until he had a falling out with his brother's wife, who felt

Ronaldo was not paying his share of the household expenses. She reached a breaking point when Ronaldo invited a friend, who also needed help, to live with them in the small one-bedroom apartment. Ronaldo's brother asked him (and the friend) to move out. However, in speaking about the situation, Ronaldo defended both his friend and his brother:

> He [the friend] helped me out. Sometimes he tried to find jobs for both of us. He's a good man. So I wanted to help him, too. When he told me about the problems he was having in his apartment, I told him to move in with us. But I asked my brother first. He gave me permission. But I guess his wife never agreed. She is bothered too easily. She doesn't like to see us in her house, in the kitchen, watching television, using the telephone. Not just him. Me, too. We are so nice to her, and we try to help as much as we can. But she has a problem. I don't care. She is not from our town. I don't know her or her family. My brother met her here, in this country. The truth is, I don't care.

Ronaldo kept in touch with his brother but was hesitant to ask for any more help:

> We will always be brothers. But his family comes first. I understand that, but at the same time, he can't forget about me. I'm his brother. He shouldn't have let her [the wife] throw me out. I understand that she wanted my friend to leave, but I'm family. I'm his family. Sometimes I feel like I came to this country and I have no family here. But I don't want to be a burden to anyone, especially family. And he [the brother] has to make sacrifices for his own family now. I understand that. I respect that. We'll be OK.

Ronaldo's friend eventually moved to Queens to live with a girlfriend, and Ronaldo moved in with Luis and Santiago.

Luis also described meetings with family as problematic, but he made the important distinction that these problems extended across borders. Luis's brother, who lived in Manhattan, was the manager of a restaurant. They visited with each other frequently. Luis said:

> I go to see him because he's family. But I come back with more problems. So I don't see him too much. It's better that way. We get along better that way, too.

While Luis made the effort to visit his brother, the effort was not reciprocated. Luis always excused his brother by saying that he was working. But in times of overwhelming hardship (e.g., illness or injury, depression, or financial destitution, to name just a few), which seemed to pass from man to man on the corner like a virus, he was obviously frustrated by his brother's lack of effort to stay in touch.

Winters were always difficult, partly because of the harsh weather conditions at the corner but also because of the scarcity of day-labor jobs. Many of the men found their confidence, patience, and physical stamina—not to mention their will—tested in merciless ways. One week in early February, Luis had managed to save enough money to pay his own expenses; although he was frustrated that he couldn't send money home, he assured me that he would make up the difference. "I manage. It's true," he said. "You find something, anything, and then you're OK. This happens every year." But this time was different: Luis's aunt was ill—possibly with cancer that had caused damage to her liver—and the family wanted her to have surgery. On the morning following a conversation with his family, Luis was visibly upset—a rare occurrence, as Luis's displays of emotions were usually subtle. He told me why he was angry:

> He [the brother] isn't going to help, but I knew that already. I told him to come to Brooklyn tonight so we could try to figure what to do. But he told me that he's busy and that I need to go see him. Can you believe that? I have a job today. I can't go. He knows that I can't find work so easily, but still he wants me to go see him.

Later that year, Luis updated me on the situation:

> He [the brother] helped a little bit, but he could have helped us more. But I understand. He has his own family to take care of. He has his business. It's hard, I know. I was very angry with him, but then you have to let go of the anger. That's why I have never asked him for a job. We'll have problems, and then you get sick. The anger, frustration, especially from family, eats you up inside.

So although Luis maintained contact with his brother, he never called on him for a job, even in desperate times. "To work with family is to have problems in your life," he said. "You want to avoid problems, not create them."

## Help Is Risky

Santiago, who shared an apartment with Luis, Jorge, and Ronaldo, never considered moving in with family, even in the early years after he arrived in New York. This sort of assistance was low on his list of options. He said:

> I think I could move in with them. But if I don't have to, I won't. I already started asking for help here, and he [*he points to another day laborer*] told me that he might have a job soon in New Jersey. That will help me for a little while. And Luis said that we can find someone else to move in with us, too. I can try to find a job, maybe with Ronaldo. I don't want to, but if I have to, I'll go back to Mexico.

Juan was a twenty-one-year-old day laborer from Puebla, Mexico. He was a newcomer to the corner when we met in 2001 but had been living in Brooklyn for a little less than a year. Juan lived with his brother and sister-in-law, who were legal residents and whose children were U.S. citizens by birth. Yet Juan couldn't bring himself to ask them for help. Juan's brother worked at two different restaurants, and his wife, a seamstress, picked up part-time jobs with a nearby tailor shop and took in tailoring work at home. Every dollar was stretched. Juan's brother agreed to help him, but only if he helped pay the rent and expenses. However, to mask his feelings of self-doubt about not having a well-paying, reliable job or place of his own, and missing his girlfriend in Mexico, Juan began spending the money he earned on alcohol and betting on soccer games in Queens. "The little money I make, it's nothing," he said. "How can I send that home? I waste money sending that home." Gambling and drinking were Juan's way to avoid the shame that would have resulted from revealing to his family that the investment they made in his migration to the United States was not paying off. Although his brother was, indeed, annoyed about Juan's drinking and gambling habit, what brought Juan the most shame were the reminders that his undocumented status placed his family at great risk. He told me:

> He [the brother] complained that working on the corner would only bring trouble for me and the family because everyone there is undocumented. I told him, what about your job? You think all of the people working in the kitchen have their papers? He told me that unless I can pay half of the rent—half!—I would have to live somewhere else. It's too dangerous. That's what he told me. What danger?

> The police aren't going to do anything to them. If I get in trouble, they send me back home. Not them. I'm tired of hearing them say it. They think if they tell me every day, I'll just leave. So I am.

Ignacio complained that he lost control over his life after he asked his brother for help to pay his rent. Ignacio, a twenty-three-old day laborer, left family in Mexico City to live with his older brother in New York in hopes of buying, if not building, a house for his wife and family. Ignacio was a newlywed when he left Mexico in 1999. Ignacio's brother had a small informal business in the neighborhood, mostly doing small house repairs, such as fixing clogged kitchen drains, patching roofs, or installing appliances, which he ran by word of mouth. His brother invited Ignacio to work with him, saying that he could supplement the money he made working from the corner:

> *Ignacio:* He helped me, but I ended up doing a lot of work for free. That isn't right. I give up time looking for work on the corner or somewhere else to work for him, and then I don't make any money. That's my own brother, and he's robbing me!
> *Carolyn:* Where does the money go?
> *Ignacio:* Again, the money goes into the bank account or to pay him back for the help he gave me. So I never get it.

On another day, I asked Ignacio whether the situation with his brother had changed. He said:

> In Mexico, our aunt is taking care of my children while my wife works. He [the brother] told me that he pays her to take care of my children, for the food and things they need. So the money that I would earn goes home to Mexico. But I don't know that it does. And I don't know how much he sends home. He said that if we don't pay her [the aunt], she'll have to send my children to live with someone else. First of all, I don't believe him. Second, all my family sees is the money he sends to them. They don't know that it's my money, too. And the last point is that I have no money here. For what did I do all of this if I'm just going to be poor here, too? I knew I wasn't going to be rich, but at least, if I'm poor, it's because *I* earn little or I'm sending *my money* to *my family*, not because my own family robs me here. This country changes people, I think.

Thus, seeking help from family members clearly produced both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, it could make it easier for the men to find housing, pay rent and utilities, find work, and meet other basic needs. On the negative side, it could create real obstacles to mobility and integration, especially for those whose sights were set on eventually settling in the United States.

## Debts and Duties

Having a sense of control was deeply important to the men, and this desire manifested in different ways. When Octavio first arrived in the United States from Colombia, he stayed with family in Houston. He said he disliked the city and felt isolated living there. His relatives shared the family car and scheduled their routes to coincide with one another's jobs. Octavio was not working at the time, so he rarely left the house. He compared Houston with his situation in New York City:

> Here I can go anywhere I want. I love to walk. I can walk here. I couldn't walk there. I was bored there. And I don't like asking my family to take me here and there. They had to drive me everywhere. I work for myself and do for myself. I'm just not like that—depending on someone else all the time for everything. Family makes you feel guilty sometimes. They tell you just like that and directly to your face sometimes. You feel bad. So I didn't like living there at all. Here I can do whatever I want, and I don't have to ask for help from anyone.

When asked whether his family helped him financially, he responded:

> I am my own man. I do for myself. I'm twenty-five years old. I buy my own food, my own clothes, my own things, you know? I'm a man. They are my family, but I have to take care of myself.

Gerry similarly wanted to manage matters on his own. In fact, he characterized this as part of the immigrant's way of life in the United States. Gerry said that his landlord once offered him a job at the grocery story he owned in Brooklyn's Chinatown, but to avoid problems Gerry declined the offer:

> It's not good. If I have trouble at work, I'll have trouble at home. I am not stubborn. I am grateful. He's been very nice to me. He has a good

> wife, and the children are nice to me, too. But what if I lose my job? I don't want to be without a job and home at the same time. It's better if I find my own job somewhere else.

Gerry kept in touch with his sister in Alabama and knew that she was getting her "papers" in order because her husband had legal permanent residency. However, Gerry was reluctant to ask his sister for help during the time I spent with him on the corner:

> She is trying to make her life, and I have to live my life. I didn't live with them because I wanted to come to New York City. I didn't want to go to Alabama. Also, it's difficult to live with family. It's better to live alone, where you don't have to answer to anyone. You do things your own way. It was hard for me to come here. I suffered a lot. I paid $1,500 to cross with the coyote. It took five days to cross, and I had to walk a long time in the desert. That was so hard. Sometimes I went without drink or food. Once I walked for three days straight. Now that I am here, the life here, it's not so hard. I don't suffer like I did in order to get here. It is hard, but I have a place to live, and I have money to buy things and to send home. I found my place all by myself. When I arrived, I lived with a friend, but he was sharing his apartment with a couple of other men. They drank and smoked too much, and they always brought home women. Sometimes I couldn't sleep. So I walked around and asked questions. Sabes [You know], you watch and pay attention, and then you know who you can ask and who can help you. And so I'm doing OK by myself. I like it here, and I want to stay. As we are all immigrants, we must do things for ourselves.

Gerry's last remark was so typical and predictable, even in times of adversity, that I became concerned that he was simply accepting hardship as his fate. But that was far from the truth. He was realistic and resolute but also determined about finding resources to keep working and moving forward.

Willie's brother, who lived in Brooklyn, had helped to finance Willie and his family's trip to the United States. When they arrived, they lived with his brother for exactly one month. However, Willie explained, the situation was untenable, something he had expected even before they arrived, as his sister-in-law and his wife did not get along. Moreover, the two families felt

crowded in the small apartment, so Willie felt compelled to find his own place. He began to ask around, especially people for whom he had worked, and eventually a former employer told him about the rental apartment that he and his family were living in when we met. Willie had not parted on bad terms with his brother, and they kept in contact. He said:

> To visit with family is a different thing than to live with them. When you visit, you can do it happily, and you want to see them. It isn't very good if there are other things in between.

I asked Willie whether his brother, who was residing legally in the United States, could help him secure his own permanent residency. He didn't respond immediately, and then he replied that he wasn't sure. To be honest, I didn't know at the time, either, although I quickly learned how complex the process is, especially when noncitizens want to serve as sponsors.[2] In any case, Willie and his wife were still uncertain about whether they wanted to remain in the United States. His wife was eager to return to Mexico to rejoin the more robust networks of family and community she sorely missed in Brooklyn. Willie had persuaded her that they should remain in the United States at least for a few years to recoup the investment they had made in migrating, but he understood that this depended on how financially stable they could be in New York. If their pay was sufficient and consistent, Willie shared with me, they would stay longer in the United States. For this reason, Willie felt it was premature to ask his brother about sponsorship or to consult with lawyers. And even if he decided to stay, he said, he didn't know whether his brother would be able to help him.

In some ways, Willie's actions did not match his words: he and his family actually appeared to have accomplished plenty in the United States. He was planning to renovate his apartment, for instance, as well as take more English language courses and enroll his son in kindergarten. "When you have family here, it's different," he said. "I don't have a choice. I have to find a good home, a good job." Yet he reminded me that his situation was temporary, and despite his accomplishments and plans, he never felt secure in Brooklyn and often said he and his family might pack up any day to move elsewhere or return to Mexico. He always ended our conversations with the same phrase: "I hope I see you next time."

These stories are analogous to the interviews that Cecilia Menjívar (2000) recounts in her ethnographic study of Salvadoran immigrant networks.[3] Friends and relatives may be sympathetic and inclined to provide

vital support in the early stages of one's arrival in the United States, but when they are struggling with poverty themselves, they sometimes cannot. They also expect or hope that the newcomer will be able to assist them with their own difficulties, financial and otherwise. What is significant in Menjívar's study, which parallels the life stories of the men in this book, is not the negative interpretation that migrant networks are unsupportive and "fragmented" but that conditions in the host society can sometimes limit their functioning. Like Menjívar's participants, the men in my study recognized that their networks were unstable and inconsistent; thus, they did not immediately seek assistance from relatives. This is not to say, however, that social networks were absent from the men's lives. Their narratives complicate the literature by illustrating how the use of social networks rests on the social positions of the people involved and the context of the society they encounter (Granovetter 1973; Lomnitz 1977; Portes 1995; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). The day laborers in my study fashioned their own responses to accessing resources through their networks as they were informed by the context of their lives.

The men often sought assistance from the networks they organized at la parada. For instance, Willie's wife was employed by a man who had first hired Willie from the corner. He said:

> He was very nice. I worked for him for a few days, and he liked my work. There were a lot of us there, but he really liked me. I guess he wanted to help me, too. He asked me if I knew any women who needed a job. When I told him about my wife, he was so happy. So now she cleans his house twice a week. She likes him, too.

I asked Willie whether other men's wives and female relatives also found employment through the men's day-labor jobs. He said that it was not uncommon for the employers to ask about women who needed work—especially among the Hasidic Jewish men, who often hired women to do household work such as cooking, cleaning, and child care.

Luis's niece worked in a factory before she returned to Mexico. Prior to that job, she worked for a Hasidic man who had first hired Luis from the corner. Luis said:

> I did not like working for him. He was nice, but he did not want to give me the money I deserved. We agreed on the amount, and then I went to his house and helped a couple of other men to fix a third-

floor apartment. It was brand new. It was me, a couple from here, and some Jamaicans, I think. We were not renovating. This was new, understand? I worked so hard on those days, harder than those Jamaicans. I was the first one there in the morning, and I was ready to work. I stayed late. Since the work was for a while, I wanted to do a good job for him. Maybe he would hire me again in the future. Anyway, at the end he gave me the exact amount that we agreed on when he came here. Can you believe it? He didn't rob me, but he could have given me a tip or something.

So on the last day, he asked me if I was married and if my wife was living here. I told him my wife was not here but that I had a niece living with me. He wanted someone to help his wife with the children and the cooking and the cleaning. I thought it would be good for her. Otherwise, she stays in the apartment all day and cries about home and the family. It's not healthy, and my sister is upset with me. . . . So I introduced them, and she worked with him for a while.

Echoing Edwin at the start of the chapter, the men sought to work out matters among themselves: "Nos entendemos y podemos resolver las cosas entre nosotros." The makeup of these ties is more thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. But for Edwin, on the corner, the men's shared understandings and experiences as undocumented immigrants, as low-paid workers, and as marginalized workers in the New York City labor market unified them, almost like a family unit. Their shared histories and experiences facilitated their capacity to understand and support one another.

## (Dis)connecting Social Ties

Before the start of my fieldwork, my expectation was that these men would rely on social networks for various forms of assistance. Since an overwhelming majority of the men on the corner had received help from family in their migration across borders, I presumed that family members would rank highest in the hierarchy of these social ties. However, my findings challenge this premise.

Social ties to family that immigrants called on when they first arrived weakened once they settled in New York, despite their receiving some form of continued support. As Menjívar (2000, 234) writes about the makeup of

Salvadoran networks, there should be more complexity in the "conceptual distinctions" of these social ties. As dynamic processes, social networks are determining factors, as well as outcomes, throughout migration. And as Menjívar argued, despite the question of family assistance figuring in either or both contexts, we should not presume that family is a precondition for developing social networks or for producing the eventual social capital that networks may yield to support immigrant integration, if not assimilation (Coleman 1988).[4] As a result, assessing the weakness or strength of social networks is quite complex, as illustrated in the men's shifting decision making about when and how to utilize them. Legal status—specifically, undocumented status—critically shaped the ties between the men and family members, jeopardizing the health of these relationships and the capacity to access necessary resources (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). This is not to suggest that strong reciprocal ties would develop if the men were legally authorized to reside and work in the United States. However, an unauthorized status underscores the vulnerability of those who live with this risk and, thus, the fragility of commitments fostered across familial ties in these networks.

The preceding narratives complicate the literature on social networks by illustrating how their use depends on the social positions of the people involved and their situational context. Of critical importance is the structuring of legality that shapes migration and the labor market in the United States and in New York. Laws that sanction employers who hire undocumented workers and that put workers who come in contact with law enforcement at risk of arrest, detention, or deportation can prevent people from helping one another. And even though these circumstances are restrictive, punitive, and detrimental to the ability to access opportunities and nurture relationships, most of all familial relationships, the men in my study fashioned their own solutions to such problems and to meeting ongoing needs, through networks they constructed in the context of their life situations (Tilly 2005). But can we take this further?

The need to limit personal and familial relationships that resulted in obstacles, guilt, and humiliation were consistent themes in my interviews and operated in a functionalistic way on the corner (see Mahler 1995; Massey et al. 2002; Menjívar 2000). Should social capital generated in networks always work in a positive way for immigrants, as Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut (1990) have argued? By emphasizing the need to maintain independence and dignity in conditions under which the threat of dependence and powerlessness is always looming, the men were again engag-

ing in the construction and maintenance of identities as good men and good workers. Their accounts reveal how they sought to minimize situations, in both work and family relationships, in which they would not have control over their own lives.

A crucial clarification is this: social networks are important in the healthy incorporation of immigrants in any receiving society. My objective is not to portray immigrant social networks as uniformly weak or unstable. The preceding events, instead, expose the complexity of these networks, and rather than focus on their eventual success or lack of success, the men's experiences explain *how and why* they do or do not succeed. While immigration policies affect the reception and incorporation of undocumented immigrant workers, much of what these men share are the negotiations and decisions that foster social ties that they create on the corner and in other social spaces. The men on the corner were seldom left with no one to turn to. When they needed help, they sought out friends, family members, neighbors, community residents, organizations, agencies, and even me. Their narratives should, however, highlight the vulnerable viability of immigrant social networks and illustrate the contingent options for assistance. Equally important, this chapter underscores the amazing capacity of these men to manage and overcome difficult circumstances.

As the previous chapters have shown, although the precarity of illegality shapes daily life for the men in detrimental ways, this should not preclude opportunities for learning about the richness of their lives. On the surface, these accounts may yield one portrait of immigrant life, but only by capturing a detailed composite of these networks can we construct a more comprehensive representation. The informality of day labor facilitates the creation of social relationships that are not visible to passersby (Duneier 1999). These experiences challenge notions about how social networks can function in an immigrant's social life and reveal that they may be forsaken when material needs are not adequately met. My participants' experiences also offer a counterbalance to overly romanticized notions of immigrant solidarity, which, at times, proved counterproductive in the men's lives.

The next chapter discusses the richness of these ties in more detail. However, one final note is important here. What we learn from the men about the ties they cultivated with one another or with community residents points to a kind of public responsibility that may be informative in connection with organizers' and policy makers' objectives. When the scope of social networks among immigrants is narrowly focused on familial or ethnic

bonds, we may constrain the prospects for cultivating a public responsibility among all who participate in the daily lives of immigrants. Neither romanticizing nor minimizing the hardships these men endure as undocumented immigrants and workers in New York City, I aim to articulate both their struggles and their agency.

# 6

# Street-Corner Community

*It is 6:30 on a Monday morning, and Ronaldo is again the first to arrive. He buys a cup of coffee and a copy of* Hoy *and sits down to wait for the others. As the minutes pass, more men show up and follow Ronaldo's lead or stand single file nearby. Handshakes and nods are exchanged, though most of the men remain silent. Early mornings are quiet at la parada until someone breaks the calm. Señor Delgado is the likely man to do so with a comical report of the previous Saturday's pelota match against a team of Jamaican men in East New York. Today Hector casually listens but is distracted by Jerome's conversation. Jerome has received troubling news about his mother's health from family members in Mexico City, along with the usual request for money to meet their household needs. Despite the upsetting news, Jerome cannot stop a smile from creeping out—even he cannot ignore Señor Delgado's loud and witty banter. Meanwhile, Gerry is having an early start to the workday as he slides into the front seat of a station wagon, joining four in the vehicle who have been hired to repair the roof of a building. By 7:30, most of the men have arrived. They stand on the corner and wait for the "beep beep" of the horn from the first car that drives by that day.*

Although much is now known about the demographic characteristics of day laborers and the processes that shape their work experiences (Bartley and Roberts 2006; Crotty 2008; Esbenshade 2000; Fine

2006; Valenzuela et al. 2006; Varsanyi 2010), little research has been done on the social practices and spaces where they seek employment. This chapter explores the less obvious functions and purposes of the street corner—that is, purposes that were secondary to finding work—and examines social practices there that went beyond exchanges of labor.

Policy makers and scholars have shown interest in learning about how newly arrived migrants are incorporated socially and economically into the United States. Recent immigrants may have limited social connections here; they also may lack formal employment and ways to access government assistance. Often, immigrant men's families live outside the United States. While they may benefit from remittances sent home, they also have to deal with the absence of a husband, father, or son and the hardships that brings. The men share this burden: migrating involves giving up the status they may have enjoyed within these social groups as husbands, fathers, or community leaders. Separation from family, friends, and communities left many of the day laborers in my study disheartened in a city where they often felt alone and unwelcome. Although their primary struggle was economic, they also endeavored to create healthy social lives. The experiences they recounted and social practices in which they engaged revealed how they managed loneliness and created a sense of belonging at la parada, where they constructed their own sense of community (see Anderson 1978; Duneier 2000; Gans 1982; Liebow 1967; Whyte 1955; Wirth [1938] 1967).

In her analyses of Costa Rican plazas, Setha Low (2000) demonstrates how use of the plaza helped define social groups and, more important, construct a meaningful reality for the space's users. A similar phenomenon occurred at la parada: the space they occupied on the street corner shaped the men's activities, but they, in turn, also chose to engage in activities that cultivated community building and were unrelated to job seeking in this "found space" (see Carr et al. 1992; Roy 2004).[1] By creating alternative purposes for the corner, they challenged its legitimate uses and constructed a meaningful community in the "new" society. La parada was the men's office. It also became the tavern or club where they chose to drink and chat with friends. In other words, the corner provided them with a space to discover camaraderie and renew their sense of community membership. These less visible purposes served by la parada were both valuable and necessary to them in satisfying social needs that often outweighed their economic needs.

Because all of the day laborers—Regulars and Temps, immigrants and citizens, whites and blacks—shared the workplace, many stood together on the same corner while preserving loose boundaries that went beyond affili-

ations of nationality, race, and ethnicity. To understand the role la parada played in the men's social relations, it is therefore important to examine the context of these boundaries. For example, friendships among the day laborers typically defined group divisions that were subtler than those based strictly on markers such as race or ethnicity. For example, Ronaldo, who was born in Ecuador, often walked past other Ecuadorian men at the corner to stand beside his friends Santiago, Luis, and Gerry, all of whom were Mexican. And Karl, one of the Polish Regulars, usually gathered with a group of friends that included Jacob and Joe, two of the younger Polish Regulars, who liked to play cards at la parada.

La parada was essentially a collective, though there were no strict rules about who was allowed to join. Newcomers were usually invited to stand alongside the Regulars on the corner, and relatives were accepted, by and large, without much scrutiny. Individuals who arrived alone often remained alone for only a short time because casual conversations with the Regulars often resulted in invitations to stand with them on the corner. Ronaldo shared his first-day experience with me:

> I didn't know anyone here. I have a job working in a warehouse, but since I live so close, I come here on the days when I'm not working. So I don't come here often. But when I first came, I stood here by myself for a while. Then I saw Luis and he looked at me and nodded his head. So I walked over to him and we started talking. Then he introduced me to Santiago and the others. Then it was easy. Luis knows a lot of the men here. The next time, I came with my soccer ball, and we played for a little bit on the corner. We started to get to know each other. They knew that I was working already. At first I thought they wanted me to get them jobs, but they never really asked me. Just once, that was it. So now we're good friends.

A deeper level of acceptance included access to resources such as playing on a soccer team, finding a roommate, or finding extra work or a local guide. As noted earlier, Luis regarded himself as an experienced guide among his friends, and others on the corner often asked him for information and advice. He took a particular interest in advising Santiago, one of the younger men on the corner, illustrating how he also established a mentor role:

> I know a lot. I know all the people who pass by here. I've been working here for a few years already, and I know a lot. You see, Santiago,

> he's young. I'm like his father in this country. Sometimes I like it. I try to teach him. The others, too. I tell them what I know, what I see. We have to help each other. Too many of the men want to do everything alone. That's good, but sometimes you need to ask for help and help others, too. So I try to do what I can. My family comes first, but I try to help some of these men, too. If I need help one day, maybe he can help me. I know more than you think.

The Regulars never extended invitations to men they disliked or with whom they had poor experiences—for example, men who demonstrated the poor character traits of untrustworthiness, dishonesty, or unruliness. As Ronaldo explained:

> You see that man over there? He stayed with us a few nights because he didn't have anywhere to sleep. We felt bad. We know what that's like. He ate our food. It was OK. But he didn't want to work. And I was thinking, what is he doing? That made me so angry. So we told him he had to leave. He's living off of us, making fools of us. I don't trust him.

The men who were most scorned were those who participated in unlawful activities or were flippant about looking for work on the corner. Edwin, a compatriot from Ecuador, echoed Ronaldo's comment: "It's not just here on the corner. It's not good if you're not paying your rent and you're not looking for work. We have the same problem, but we're trying. If a man is not trying, then we leave him alone. That's all." The men also discouraged drinking alcohol and using drugs on the corner because they were aware the impression this conveyed worked against their self-presentation as desirable workers. The men viewed such behavior as a visible cue that discouraged potential employers from approaching. Although distinctions between the men were often ambiguous, there was a distinct spatial divide between the Regulars and those who were out of favor in the street-corner community. As Michèle Lamont (2000) discovered among blue-collar workers in the United States and England, morality and an underlying principle of decency guided the men's interactions and self-presentation not only among themselves and for me but, most critically, for potential employers.

The Regulars were also intolerant of boisterous and obnoxious behavior, such as when young American Temps yelled, "Take me, take me—I work cheap," at potential employers' vehicles. This behavior generally discouraged

the employers from stopping not only in front of them but also in front of anyone standing near them. Thus, the Regulars often chose space on the corner a good distance from the Temps, particularly in the early hours of the workday when there were more opportunities to be hired. Physical placement around the corners of la parada therefore not only reflected efforts to reach potential employers; it also, and more precisely, illustrated the social boundaries of community membership.

Although drifters and visitors were not uncommon, most of the men at the hiring site arrived daily to seek work. Over time, the men recognized themselves as a community of peers who had undergone similar life events and were now experiencing similar plights. Much as Elijah Anderson described in *A Place on the Corner*, I found that la parada "serve[d] as a source of personal identity" for the day laborers who frequented it and that "the extended primary group offer[ed] supportive social ties for its own" (Anderson 1978, 180). My observations of everyday interactions at la parada revealed that the corner offered the men a space to enjoy the company of others, share their concerns, offer advice, provide information, and lend support to one another. Moreover, like the yoseba that Todd Gill found in Japan, which represented a community for day laborers, la parada was a place men could go to reestablish a position within a community—an opportunity that was absent in other areas of their lives in New York City (see Gill 2001, 134).[2]

## An American Community after 9/11

Immigration laws and the labor market cannot be ignored as they shape opportunities for undocumented day laborers. They dictate not only whether immigrants have access to resources with which to assist one another but also what kind of resources are available. When these factors are favorable—that is, when immigration laws are relaxed, or even friendly, and a strong economy is producing an abundance of jobs—immigrants can muster the resources they need. But adverse conditions, such as immigration laws that restrict the movement of people into the country and make those already here but without legal residency status highly mobile and vulnerable, have detrimental effects on informal social networks. The practice of reciprocity and norms of exchange that lie at the core of informal networks are difficult to maintain when global, legal, and material constraints interrupt them and extend indefinitely the normative time within which plans for reform can resume.

*Staring through the clear glass panes of the laundromat's storefront, the men and I could see the news on the mounted television. As a paying customer, I could walk inside and listen to the reports, after which I returned to the men and shared updates and additional information. On this day, the men and I learned about the crash of American Airlines Flight 587 in Belle Harbor, Queens. Unlike on September 11, 2001, we were together this time, and in hectic fashion I stepped in and out of the laundromat with reports. To calm my chaotic hop, the employee let me leave the door open so I could converse with the group who stood nearby.*

The aftermath of the tragic events of 9/11 illustrated the social problems the men faced in their efforts to find order and community in their everyday lives. Only a few of the men had crossed the border with their families. Visits to Mexico were irregular; visits were even more infrequent for the men who had come from Ecuador or Panama. Given the tense security conditions, high level of surveillance, and other risks involved in crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, the men told me, they feared being caught by La Migra and permanently losing a crucial source of financial support for the people who depended on them. Luis best described his time on the corner when he said to me, "Sin mis amigos . . . without my friends on the corner, I have nobody here. One needs his friends, given the way things are in this country."

If these men remained in an area where economic opportunities were diminishing, the loss of financial support would be detrimental—and even more so for their families and friends abroad. Moreover, many of the men felt stranded in and unconnected to this country. Gerry, for example, did not foresee a future for himself or his family in the United States:

> It's nice in this country. I wanted to live here, but the way I see things, it's better for me to go home. First, I have to make my money. Then I can go back home, help my family, and then have my own family. . . . I work here, that's it. And they don't want us here, except to work. Only to work. Then it's OK. But not even now. They were talking with the president, you know, [former President Vicente] Fox [of Mexico]. And what happened? Nothing. Nothing is going to change. And now it's worse. I'll stay here for a few more years and then I'll see. But things are bad in this city now. I hope nothing else happens. I'm already used to the life here.

Many of my study participants did not identify as part of the American community, the association that was so emphasized in the wake of 9/11, with some explaining that they would return to their home countries if the situation worsened. Then, on the morning of November 12, 2001, American Airlines Flight 587 to the Dominican Republic crashed in Queens, killing all 265 people aboard and compounding fears of terrorist attacks. I was standing with four of the men outside the laundromat when a gypsy car service pulled up to the curb to tell us what had happened. One of the younger men quickly ran to the pay phone and pretended to say to an operator, "Un billete á Mexico, por favor [One ticket to Mexico, please]. It's time to go!" I had been following the breaking news on the laundromat's television and tried to reassure him (and myself) that the crash wasn't an act of terrorism. During a previous visit, Santiago had shared his fear of more terrorist attacks and of breathing air around someone who might open mail laced with anthrax. On that day he had said, "I don't want to die in this country alone. I want to go home. If things get worse, I'm going home."

A lot of anxiety and ill-informed opinions about illegal immigration, along with bad feelings toward the men, swirled around the corner during this period, adding to their sense of exclusion from the larger community. On one occasion, Joanne, a laundromat employee, told me that the day laborers (some of whom were customers) stole clothes, urinated on the floor, and made a mess of the men's room. ("Stink up the bathroom" were her precise words.) However, I also often saw her smile at and greet the men as she walked to and from the bagel shop, and she never treated them disrespectfully when they washed and dried their clothes, so I thought she might not have been singling out the day laborers and probably said similar things about any non-customer who came in just to use the bathroom. But a few months after this incident, I asked Joanne what she thought about the increased security along the U.S.-Mexico border. She said:

> That's how these guys got in here. We have to do something. And if it means that we stop more illegals from coming here, no matter who they are, then that's what we have to do. But it's not gonna work. They know all the tricks. How do you think these guys got here?

Joanne was not harmed on 9/11; nor did she know anyone whose life was greatly affected on that day. Nonetheless, she—like so many others—had plenty of opinions to share. After Flight 587 in crashed, I had a telling conversation with Joanne that reflected a common point of view in the area. She said:

> I know these guys didn't do anything. They're just trying to make a living. But what if? You never know. They're illegal, just like those horrible men. Why not them? You just can't be sure about anybody these days. That's all I'm saying. That's why I don't want them in here unless they're going to wash their clothes. I don't think they're going to bomb this place, but these days, I just don't know. First the World Trade Center and now that plane in Queens. What's next?

While attending a local community board meeting, I met Felix, an Ecuadorian man who had been living in New York City for twelve years and worked at a bodega. After the meeting, he told me that a large number of Mexican men had looked for work on the corner where he used to live in Bay Ridge. He didn't feel any sympathy for their situation, he said. He had "worked hard all [his] life," and he was "proud of what [he had] accomplished in this country." Felix continued:

> I understand what you're doing, and it's good. And I know that a lot of Mexicans died in the World Trade Center. Nobody knows about them. But you see, we know how these terrorists got in. They crossed the border. These guys [Mexicans] are coming back and forth. What if one of those guys, those Arabs, pays one of them [a Mexican] to bring something in with them. They need the money and they might not even know what they are doing. This is what I'm talking about.

But not everyone shared his opinion. During another meeting, a member of the Human Service Cabinet said:

> This country is backward. I know these guys are illegal. But why do they come here? They come here for a reason, right? Because we hire them. They need the money, and we need them, too. And now we're going to make it harder for them. They didn't kill all those people. It doesn't make sense.

In the months following 9/11, Gerry and Luis told me, police had increased their presence in the area. Neither connected this directly to the attacks, but they agreed that they had noticed it not too long after they occurred. Gerry explained:

> The police—they speak English and Spanish and they are white. We Mexicans, hispanos, we understand English, too. Maybe not the ones who have just come, but a lot of us have been living here for a while. We understand a lot more than people think. . . . The police, they bother us now. They keep us moving, but I don't move. They only do it because they have to. Maybe they're looking for that guy here, too. Y'know, ese árabe [that Arab], Osama. They're everywhere, and no one can find him. What's going to happen next? This country is nervous now. That's why they do this—the police, immigration, the president—everybody is nervous. They have to do something. So long as they don't bother me, let them look.

In late July 2002, I spent a morning standing with William, whom I hadn't seen on the corner for a few weeks. We spoke about the changes at the intersection—increased police activity, new faces,[3] the number of men waiting, and the obvious expansion of the work site. He had an interesting outlook about the changes:

> You see what happened here, right? The police run all of them off. They pass by more, a lot more now. But they [*he points to the Mexicans*] still here. Damn right. Them white cops, pain in the ass. They didn't do nothing. I gotta be careful, too. Any reason to arrest a black man, but now they want to run off the Mexicans, too.

I went back to see him later, and he again remarked:

> You see, they're still here. Just on the opposite side and down there, too. [*He points toward nearby corners along the avenue.*] They still here. *This is their space.*[4] They [the police] tell them that they can only stand on those corners. [*He points at opposite corners of the avenue across from the deli.*] The people around here probably complained. It's funny, actually. The police come up in here, tell these guys to move away. So they did. Now they all spread out on this corner, that corner, down there. They [the police] thought that if they move them from here, they wouldn't come back? And they're even more people here now. It's a bigger problem. Oh, well.

On September 12, 2002, the day after the one-year anniversary of 9/11 was commemorated, I spoke with Jerome and Santiago about their plans.

Jerome was sympathetic, but the concerns about security and safety he had felt a year earlier had subsided in light of more immediate concerns about financial stability and help for himself and his family in Mexico:

> What happened that day was terrible. So many people. You have to remember, and then you have to move on. I'm going to go later, maybe. Don't you want to? Too sad, no? All those people crying. You have to feel that way today. But then tomorrow is another day. I have to keep living my life. I have to make my money. Who's going to support my family? Last year, I thought about leaving. A lot of people did. Some of them did. [*He points to the other men.*] But now, I don't think about it. I don't think anything is going to happen. I have to worry about work. I have to make a living. I only think about my family. That's it. That's all that matters.

Santiago echoed Jerome's feelings:

> I don't want to think about it. I have to worry about what's in my pocket now. I am very bad, yes? It's sad, but you can't be sad every day. . . . I'm not scared. The only thing I'm scared about is Immigration. That's it. My cousin is going to come. He's crazy to come to the United States. [Crossing the border is] dangerous, but they already know how to cross. They had to change the route, but they know it already. It just takes more time and more money.

Many of the men told me about plans to help friends or relatives come to New York City. The decision depended on changes in the city's economy. None of the men expressed concern about their own safety, and consequently they did not discourage friends or relatives from making the move. It was apparent that, after a year, underlying, economic concerns were again primary. Many stated that their objective remained to earn enough money to build a better life for themselves and their families in their home countries. In the meantime, they sought to build a sense of community in their temporary home on the corner, at la parada.

## A Place of Our Own

A poignant example of the implications of spaces such as la parada for the social incorporation of undocumented day laborers was illustrated in the

days that followed the opening of a formal worker center in the Gravesend neighborhood of South Brooklyn. The center was created to allay an intensifying conflict among Latino day laborers, local residents, and businesses caused by the explosive growth of a large, informal work site spanning several intersections on a main avenue in Bensonhurst. The Latin American Workers Project and other community advocacy groups, including the New Utrecht Reformed Church, worked with State Senator Vincent Gentile to set up the center.[5] Following talks with all parties, including local residents and day laborers, at community board meetings, the center opened in March 2002.

While many of the men from the informal site used the formal workers' center, some were reluctant to look for work there. Many of them preferred to keep seeking work opportunities on street corners and traveled to other informal sites in the city. My field site became one of those alternative work sites, causing an increase in the number of day laborers there and expanding the area in which they sought work. This is not to say that the men did not see the benefits and resources offered by formal workers' centers, which include an organized hiring process and improved work experiences. In fact, the men acknowledged Brooklyn's need for more than just one workers' center, where they could find shelter from abuse, harassment, fatigue, and bad weather. More important, the men could report work-related problems to center staff, who would resolve disputes, including those involving on-the-job injuries and wage theft, the most common abuses the men experienced in the day-labor market (see Gordon 2007; Valenzuela et al. 2006).[6] Problematic employers would thus be discouraged from abusing day labors hired at the center. However, many of my study participants rationalized their decision to continue seeking work on the corner by citing their social attachment to la parada.

The men had reservations about the formal workers' center that concerned loss or perceived loss of control over their work conditions, particularly regarding the center's rules regulating hiring. They also worried about set wages, vulnerability to law enforcement and immigration authorities, and the center's distance from their homes. The fact that the center matched workers with employers made the men feel that they would have less control over accepting or declining particular job tasks or working for specific employers. The men were also discouraged by the center's first-come, first-served system of assigning workers to jobs. This put pressure on them to go to the center earlier than they arrived at la parada; while some workers arrived at the corner as early as 6:30 A.M., many showed up

closer to 8:30 or 9:00 A.M. and still felt confident that they would secure work. So although all of the men appreciated the center's intention to bring order and decency to their situation, many found the system less than ideal, especially those who lived far from Gravesend. Finally, they felt that the center would limit their work opportunities because it was easier and more convenient for employers to hire from informal sites, especially given the center's remote South Brooklyn location. Luis best described the general opinion:

> Who's going to go to there? Yes, some people will go, I know. But there are so many places like this one [la parada]. Why will you drive all the way over there when you know that there are men looking for work right across the street? Understand? They know that we're here. If I'm not here tomorrow, someone else will be.

Social factors also kept the men from the formal workers' center; their ties to a particular place sometimes outweighed the potential to find better work opportunities (Gill 2001, 134). Although the men would have opportunities to develop social ties at the center, they did not want to break away from their established relationships at la parada. Señor Delgado echoed Luis's feelings about men's desire to help one another and described his need for companionship:

> I come from a big family. I really miss that sometimes, especially when I go home. That's why I like to come here. Even if I don't find work, it's hard, but at least for a part of my day, I find some peace here. I don't like to be here, outside in the cold and waiting for someone to give me a shitty job. But you see how I am here? I tell jokes. I tell them stories. We gossip a lot, too. It's the same in my family. My brothers, my sisters, they know I can make them forget their troubles. And it's not just for them. It's for me, too. I come here because it's just enough to keep me going. I think it's the same for all of us.

La parada was the place where the men renewed the status as husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons that they held in their home communities. Thus, they did not immediately recognize the workers' center as an attractive alternative to la parada. The corner became a familiar place where the men wanted to spend time while looking for work.

Men continued to go to la parada even when they lived far away or had

options to look for work on street corners closer to home. For example, Rubén, the Cuban day laborer I introduced in Chapter 1, originally lived within walking distance of the site but moved to Queens. He could have looked for work on one of the many street-corner sites in his new neighborhood but regularly made the forty-five-minute subway trip to la parada. Others also commuted to la parada by bus or subway—but, notably, they did not choose to commute to the Gravesend center. While Rubén acknowledged that he could meet people there—both day laborers and community members who could offer assistance in the form of legal and medical services—finding work at the center would "feel more like a job" than his experience at la parada, he said:

> The faces of the men on these corners are familiar. Some of them are my very good friends. We understand each other. I've known some of these men for a while now. We're like a family. A lot of these men don't know anybody here. I know a lot of people because I've lived here a long time and I still come here. Look, you can't come here every day and not become a part of each other's lives. [*He begins pointing to others.*] I can tell you about his life and his life, where he comes from. That's normal.

During another visit, I asked Rubén whether he would use a center closer to la parada. He answered:

> Yes, if the center was closer to me in Queens, then yes, I would consider going there, too. If I liked it, I would use it. Maybe if the center was closer to this neighborhood, then we would probably all go there together and use it. But for now, I'll come here. I'm the only one who brings empanadas, so they don't want me to leave. . . . You come here a lot, too. You could go somewhere else, but I think you like to come here because you like to gossip with us, too, no? So, you see, we're not so different. We're all friends here.

Thus, membership and community were key reasons Luis, Señor Delgado, Rubén, and the other men looked for work at la parada. They saw other benefits, as well, placing significant value on the right not only to accept but also to decline job offers, especially from employers who were reputed to be dishonest (i.e., who withheld or denied payment). They also liked that they could decline work if they felt ill or just did not want to carry out a particu-

lar task. For instance, most of the men found demolition insufferable and tended not to take those jobs. This is not to say that they often declined work opportunities. But they did value having control in the hiring process, which they would not have at the workers' center, where staff matched the men with jobs and employers (Galemba 2008; Gomberg-Muñoz 2010; Kohn 1976; Light and Bonacich 1988; Light and Rosenstein 1995; Portes, 1995; Valenzuela 2001).

Opportunities for recreation were another resource men found at la parada. Ronaldo, who worked twelve-hour shifts at a warehouse six days a week went to the corner on his only day off for two reasons: to supplement his earnings and to meet his friends and enjoy leisure activities—specifically, soccer. Warm, sunny days often brought Ronaldo to the corner with a soccer ball in hand and the hope of persuading some of his friends to play fútbol with him. One day, after he declined an offer to paint classrooms at a public elementary school, I asked Ronaldo why he came to la parada. He said:

> I'm not lazy, sabes [you know]? Life is hard here. I work practically every day. But in order to survive, I have my soccer ball. That's why I come here. Sometimes I need to find work. Today, I want to enjoy myself so I can forget my problems here, my problems at home. I need to practice, too. I don't want to waste the training I had at home. I'm bothering them today. Let's go play. You can't just work here, not all the time. I'll die. I won't make it here.

When possible, Ronaldo and others took advantage of free days to recruit men for recreational and social activities.[7] For instance, on most Sundays many of the men met at the corner for an early breakfast before attending mass at the local church. Others gathered on the corner before traveling to bars or restaurants in the neighborhood or to attend sporting events in other boroughs, such as Queens. Sports, church meetings, and local events helped organize social ties among the men and develop networks that materialized into a community (see Massey et al. 1987; see also Smith 1996).

La parada was a public place the men could frequent without worrying too much about being harassed by the local residents or local law enforcement. Although occasional complaints were made about the men's behavior, mostly by people who lived in nearby housing and particularly in the summer, when the number of men gathering on the corner grew, the police pa-

trolling the area generally did not hassle the workers. Typically, their interactions involved asking the men questions and suggesting that they move on or "spread out." As Jerome told me:

> They are doing their jobs, I suppose, and just tell us to go. But that's it, really. . . . They have never asked me [for papers]. I don't think they really ask the others, either. Sometimes, they [the workers] walk away because they don't have any papers. They worry. Me, too, sometimes. But they just walk around the block, and by the time they come back, the police are gone. It isn't a problem.

Thus, the men explained they did not have to feel anxious about going to la parada. This level of presumed comfort, and concern that they would be more vulnerable to legal authorities there, also discouraged them from using the formal workers' center. A common sentiment among the men was that they belonged at la parada. Gerry, whom I met during the first year he lived in New York and who had been a day laborer for a little more than two months, agreed that there was a demand for day laborers at la parada:

> So many people come here for anything. Sometimes you work hard—they want a new kitchen or bathroom—but sometimes it's just to move boxes. You know that Americans are very lazy. And there are a lot of them here. [*He laughs first and then smiles at me.*] They need us, no? We do what they don't want to do. . . . Sometimes I only work half a day, that's it. I earn my money and then I go home or to the park. . . . Look at how many came today.

Gerry's words illustrate how the men used la parada as a legitimate workplace. They did not romanticize it as an ideal workplace situation and recognized that the workers' center was a step in the right direction, but la parada embodied, figuratively and materially, a social life in a city from which they often felt excluded. Each man felt he was somebody on the corner, as Gerry shared:

> People drive by and see us standing here. They know we need to work. But that's all they see. They don't see that we need much more. I need my family, my friends. I need to work, but I need some time to feel human again. . . . I am among friends here. Sometimes, I can be his brother [*he points to Luis*] or I can be his father [*he points to*

> *Santiago*]. We help each other, and we are living this life together, almost like a family. This is how we do things in our country. I don't think life is the same here.

## Life Lessons at la Parada

On any given day on the corner, someone inevitably would ask me about English words and phrases—particularly about words that would assist them in their work (see Borjas and Tienda 1985).[8] At la parada, these "lessons" were mainly impromptu casual conversations that men were free to join or leave at any time to inquire about a job or just go home.[9] Learning English was a frustrating experience for many of the men. Fortunately, Spanish speakers are not difficult to find in Brooklyn, where 19.8 percent of the population is Latino; this was especially true of the area surrounding the field site, where 44.5 percent of the population was Latino.[10] However, lack of English fluency did present a barrier to the men's successful management of their everyday lives.

Enrolling in classes was difficult because many feared revealing their undocumented status. Also, employers frequently kept the men past the initially estimated end of the workday, so they could not guarantee that they could attend classes regularly. Moreover, many said they would be too tired to attend school and learn after long days of strenuous work. Ronaldo explained:

> There are two elementary schools that offer English classes. . . . But, I work until 8:00 every night, and I think that's when the class starts. I would be late every night. It's not worth the time or spending money. . . . Also, the school is not so close. When I finish working, I'm so tired, and I don't want to walk or take the bus just to take classes. . . . I want to learn, and I watch some television, the news. Do you have some books? I can try to study them if I'm not so tired.

Willie prided himself on being one of the valued members in the group because his English skills allowed him to help the men negotiate wages and describe the work requested by potential employers. He knew quite a bit of English because he had taken a language course, for which he had paid about $1,750. However, he abandoned further lessons because his family could not afford the expense. Many of the men needed to send money to their families in their native countries, as well as cover their living expenses

in New York City, and thus could not afford to pay for any classes. And for some, any money left over after expenses understandably was spent on recreation such as going to movies, clubs, and restaurants.

The men understood commonly used words and phrases for typical jobs, such as "roofing," "demolition," and "plumbing," and they were able to accept or reject jobs mostly based on the pay offered in the initial stage of the hiring process. Yet they brought up other concerns and complained that they were sometimes misunderstood and were mistreated in typical daily interactions with neighbors, store owners, and potential new acquaintances. For example, Octavio tried to help a woman who was trying to cross the street before the light changed but was quickly and rudely rejected because he was unable to communicate that he was offering to carry some of her many shopping bags and meant her no harm. Consequently, many of our conversations involved quick and simple translations of phrases the men found helpful in managing day-to-day situations, such as greetings, making purchases, and asking for service.

Although la parada offered space for learning, these occasions also illustrate how the corner provided the men with an arena for social exchange. Men coping with the emotional torment of separation from family, friends, and country were grateful for the opportunity to socialize with peers who were experiencing similar dilemmas and frustrations. When I asked Luis about his family in Puebla, from whom he had been separated for a little over four years, he lowered his head and said quietly:

> I miss them very much. I want to see my son. I left when he was only one year old. It is so hard to do that. I speak to them every eight days. Sometimes, it's every two weeks. [*His voice cracks slightly, and he fights back the tears in his eyes.*] I call from the apartment using a card. . . . But my wife has to go into town to an agency to receive the calls. So we set up a time to speak to each other each week. Even if I wanted to go home, I couldn't. I need to make more money first. And then I'll go home, for good.

Luis's anguish resonated with Octavio, whose family lived in Buenaventura:

> I have family here, but I have my own family in Colombia. My son is four, and my daughter is three. [*He shows me a picture of them.*] They live with their mother. She is married now, so my kids live with him. I don't speak much to her, but I talk to my kids all the time. I

> take care of them. They're my kids, no? I send them money, clothes, whatever they need. I am a good and upstanding man. I want to bring them here, but she won't let them come here. I saw them one year ago. It is very sad to be apart from your children. You don't have children? [*I shake my head no in response.*] When you do, I wish for you that they will always be with you.

At other times, the men highlighted the difficulties day laborers face. Significant moments in our conversations dealt with the hardships of the work itself. During one group meeting, Manuel asked me how to say, "I burned my leg." After telling him the English words, I asked him, in Spanish, whether he had burned his leg. Manuel lifted his right pant leg to reveal an unsightly area of scarred skin, evidence of a burn he suffered some time ago. He then described how he had burned himself at a factory where he worked before he started looking for day labor:

> I worked in a welding factory. Some gases ignited and burned right through my pants. It looked horrible. I cried so much that day. . . . The foreman told me that the owner didn't want to give me any compensation, not even medical care. . . . And because I don't have papers, the boss told me that I was not entitled, that I did not deserve any help, either.

This is a typical account of how employers take advantage of undocumented day laborers' vulnerable situation. Manuel confided that he feared he would lose his leg because of the severity of the burn. The men shared many similarly emotionally stirring stories about hardships, but they also told me about their aspirations, their families, and their fond memories of their lives in their native countries. La parada was a place that fostered camaraderie and encouraged the men and me to learn more about ourselves and from one other. La parada provided a social arena in which the men could express concerns, needs, and aspirations and escape from the daily routine of day labor on the street corner.

My time on the corner uncovered exchanges that point to practices of community and suggest the reasons for seeking such membership. Examining such community-building practices among marginalized people in U.S. society can help us find possible ways to meet their economic and social needs and can have an impact on policy formation. Elaborating on his work experiences in an interview, Edwin said that his principal complaint was the

discrepancy between the number of hours he worked and the compensation he received for it. In fact, and not surprising, wage theft was the most common grievance the workers shared with me about working in the informal labor market. In *On the Corner* (2006), Abel Valenzuela and his colleagues found that abuse was pervasive in the treatment of day laborers. Forty-nine percent of all workers reported that they had been denied payment by an employer for work they had completed. The study also found that workers were subjected to verbal and physical abuse and hazardous working conditions (Parker 1994; Valenzuela et al. 2006). In addition to what I observed on the corner, the men often shared with me that these forms of exploitation and discrimination were part of their daily struggle, both on and off the corner. Accounts of unsafe work conditions such as Manuel's harrowing story of being injured at the welding factory, though not unusual, were the most alarming and upsetting experiences.

In a formal interview, Compadre brought up Manuel's experience and shared one of his own that similarly demonstrated lack of respect and compassion, as well as a violation of his rights:

> When I was younger, I accepted a job to work for a man in his home. There were three of us: two Mexicans and me. When we arrived, he took us to the basement where there was a small room in the back. I became nervous. He showed us a picture of what he wanted us to do—it was like an exercise room. The job was simple for now. He wanted us to paint the walls, lay down some kind of cheap wood for the floor. He said it was a surprise for his wife. He gave us the materials, but no gloves, masks, protective glasses, smocks, nothing. So we started. But it was hot. It was summer. And there was no window; we're underground. We continued. We started coughing a lot and my eyes were burning and tearing so much. We left the room to take a break, but when we walked up the stairs, we realized that he locked us in the basement. We yelled and banged on the door, but no one came. What could we do? We didn't want to lose the money, so we continued. Then one of the Mexicans was too dizzy and he laid down on the floor. That made it worse and he vomited. And then the other man vomited. I was strong, but I could feel the fumes burning my eyes, even my throat, in my chest. We're gambling with our lives working in this country. The man came down four hours later, maybe longer. He wanted to know if we could work later because his wife was going to be home late. I was angry. I demanded to know

> why he locked us downstairs. He said that he explained it was a surprise. That was it. He apologized and he even paid us for some of the work we did. Maybe he was sorry, but I was too angry. So we left. My eyes teared the rest of that week. And we all complained about having trouble breathing. How can you do that to someone? We're not animals.

Much like in the above accounts, men reported incidents of bruises, cuts, muscle fatigue, burns, broken limbs, and the like. My field research teaches us about these situations, but also sheds light on experiences that may reduce the risks that day laborers negotiate daily working in this labor market.

## Good Neighbors

The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recognizes that, once undocumented workers are employed, they have most of the rights to wages and protection from discrimination and abuse as their legally employed coworkers. However, these rights are rarely enforced. Manuel's and Compadre's accounts clearly demonstrate that employers ignore these rights; are uninformed about these rights; or assume that these men do not know that they have rights, along with access to legal assistance. What does it mean for Manuel's boss to claim that he "did not deserve any help"? Was Compadre's boss obligated to provide for the well-being of the men he hired to work for him?

How do we regulate behavior when laws don't do it for us? We can fall back on an informal system of civic and moral norms that are important in maintaining community memberships, as well as professional relationships. Under this system, people cannot justify actions that violate civic responsibility to other human beings, whether they are members of the community and whether or not they are citizens.

Alvin Gouldner writes in "The Norm of Reciprocity" (1960) that whether people are disposed to engage with one another depends on the norms of a particular society or community. This leads to a discussion of community as a value and an exploration of the expectations we share about how people should behave. Can trust or civility be a central factor of cooperation among the anonymous individuals in a street-corner community? Can morality serve the interests of a business exchange? Although exploitation and abuse between strangers certainly occur, as Manuel's and Compadre's stories

prove, it was not universal. Not all strangers on the corner I studied were disingenuous, and many informal arrangements I witnessed clearly showed civility, trust, and respect in the relationships between workers and employers, conveying a shared understanding about the practice of community (Tilly 2005). For example, Nick, the manager of a small hardware store, devised a constructive way to manage employer-worker relationships in the day-labor market. He needed to hire three men for three days' work, but he was wary about hiring men who might skip out after the first day because looking for replacements would cost him both time and money. So he explained to the men, through me, that he would pay them for half of one day's work on the first day to ensure they would return for the second day; on the second day, he would pay them the remainder of the first day's pay plus half of that day's pay to ensure they would return for the third day, and so on.

Nick explained to the men that they would all gain something: he would get some of the work done; they would receive some of the money. The men agreed but were anxious about the risk that they would not be paid on the second day or even find Nick at the store. Nick followed the agreement and on the last day he paid a full day's wage. By forging his own arrangement with the workers, Nick not only ensured that both sides met their needs; he also developed the mutual trust necessary to forge a longer-term relationship. When he returned to the site to hire men, he often sought out these specific men and offered them the work first. They usually accepted his jobs and even referred him to other workers. The men explained to me that they understood why Nick chose to pay them this way, and they said that he was one person they could trust to pay them what they deserved, and earned, for the work they completed.

Mr. Zhao, who owned the Chinese restaurant, also expressed a desire to treat the men with respect and offered them some dignity in their work experience because he recalled similar experiences in his own life and appreciated the kind treatment he had received from others. He often allowed a small group of day laborers to sit in his restaurant, whether or not they planned to buy food. The men appreciated having a space where they could sit comfortably, eat lunch, or find shelter from harsh weather. Mr. Zhao said:

> I give them egg rolls or drinks. They work hard, so I try to help them when they work for me. I can't pay them much, but I pay them. That's better than a lot of people. But then I give them food, too. I understand what it's like to start new in this country. A man helped me once on the subway when I first came to New York. I would have lost

> a job because I didn't know how to get to the place. But he took me there himself. So it's the same. Someone helped me, and now I have a chance to help them.

By being a good neighbor to the men, Mr. Zhao helped create a shared sense of membership in the community. This was very important because many of the men I met said they wanted others to view them as contributing members of the surrounding community. Many of them joined local sports leagues, attended mass, and were involved in activities at the local churches. Even the few who had children living with them assisted in activities at the schools or freely offered some maintenance work, especially in the Catholic schools. So although the men valued being identified as hardworking men, they also wanted to be seen as neighbors, as fathers, and as sons, like any other member of the community.

## The Practice of Community

In my field research, I uncovered modest examples of how people, not just employers, could establish trust and behave civilly toward those who make up a vulnerable, marginalized population—in this case, undocumented Latino immigrants. How can we erode the borders that define who is "in" and who is "out, and who is deserving not only of work but also of a dignified and safe work experience? How can we encourage exchanges in which employers feel a greater sense of responsibility to workers like Manuel and Compadre? A cohesive society is inclusive and founded on a sense of communality and mutual responsibility among its members (Lofland 1973). Gouldner (1960, 171) suggests that a norm of reciprocity "makes two interrelated, minimal demands: (1) people should help those who have helped them, and (2) people should not injure those who have helped them." As we reflect on these cases and others, we may think that it is self-interest that brings people together. However, my research revealed interactions in which something else emerged on the corner: a sense of belonging and shared stake in outcomes builds trust and reciprocity that can yield significant benefits in the practice of community. This diversifies the makeup of social networks, echoing the findings in Chapter 5.

La parada was a physical place, but it was also a space that contained and communicated meaning in its purpose, function, and perception. Visibly, the actions were economic: the men used the public space on the corner to find day-labor work in the informal sector of the local New York economy.

Less apparent were practices that were social in nature. The social atmosphere of la parada—the friendly conversations, the games of "Quarters on the Wall," the sharing of egg rolls and containers of fried rice at the Chinese restaurant—helped the men escape the anguish of being separated from their lives with their families in their home towns.

# 7

# Methodology and Assessment of Doing This Fieldwork

People searching for work on street corners is not an uncommon scene across the boroughs of New York City. All of the day laborers at my field site were men, and almost all of them were immigrants. Each day men arrived at the corner hoping to exchange their bodies and skills for a wage to maintain and sustain a way of life. In this chapter, I outline the ethnographic methodology of my research and examine the insider-outsider dilemma by exploring positions of race and ethnicity and, more significant, the nationality, culture, and gender of the ethnographer and the participants. Moreover, the chapter challenges common understandings of the diverse elements and processes that inform and contribute to the ethnographer's work.

Work is one of the most important aspects of our lives. It determines and shapes social placement in society. The work in which the men engaged was basically the same, whether they were Mexican, Panamanian, Polish, or African American. A typical workday involved laying down cement for driveways in Bensonhurst, cleaning fruit and vegetables for grocers in Sunset Park, or remodeling brownstones in Park Slope and Windsor Terrace. The men at my field site also found self-worth and a place in this new society in their ability to maintain a discipline of work and live responsibly to carve better lives for themselves and for their families in their home countries. Much as Michèle Lamont (2000) found in her study of working-class men, morality and work ethic were at the center of the social and working lives of the men in my study.

The fact that all of the day laborers at my field site were men presented both advantages and disadvantages in my collection of data and interpretation of the meaning of this social situation. I spoke only with men who agreed to let me stand with them on the corner. I made every attempt to identify myself and explain my presence; understandably, however, that information was more easily conveyed to those who stood near me. I assumed that the men would pass along the information when they conversed with others, and many of them did. However, communicating the information to newcomers and to men standing across the street was not so easily achieved. In many instances, I got to know small groups of men and began my inquiries with them. I then expanded the number of participants through personal references (snowball sampling). This was typical of my early interactions with the men, which more or less followed my assumptions and generated strong contacts for potential interviewees (Cornelius 1982). My later encounters, however, introduced me to identities and roles that the men had already constructed for me.

Many of the men who worked on the corner told me about family members living in New York City. Often these family members had offered the men assistance, financial and otherwise, in their migration to the United States. I was fortunate to meet and speak with some family members about some of the men and about their own lives in New York City. I contacted family members only after receiving permission from men with whom I had developed a close association, usually those I met at the onset of the project. All of these meetings took place in the family homes. Neighbors such as nearby business owners and local residents also contributed important details. I approached potential employers and business employees on the corner or at times at the workplace and met with them during their lunch breaks or briefly during the workday. The first of these participants were employees at the nearby laundromat where I had made my initial observations of the work site and of these men. I was a familiar face there because I often laundered my clothes during the initial sessions. Also, my visits to the corner occurred in the early morning, when few patrons were using the facility, so I was able to speak with the employees during their working hours. Finally, I met with organizers and leaders of formal institutions such as the local community board about their interactions with, and efforts to reach, these members of the community. Moreover, through the community board I became a volunteer serving on a committee for the Human Service Cabinet, an extension of the board that addressed specific concerns, such as health, education, and housing, identified by representative members of the community.[1]

Many of the men asked me directly or one another whether I was affiliated with the local police, the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, or a media outlet. The precarious state of being undocumented brought unwanted attention not only to the workers on the corner but also to anyone photographing or taping at the site. As a result, I taped only the interview sessions and kept notebooks of observations, as well as audio notes, written and recorded during and following daily site visits. This approach helped facilitate our exchanges while minimizing the participants' anxiety about my data gathering. I promised all of the men that I would not disclose their real names or identify places of business and other locales to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity. These assurances were made at different stages of the process and as frequently as possible on the corner itself, which was necessary, given the shifting numbers of those gathered on the corner. It was important that all participants understood they would not be exposed to any higher risk of vulnerability or apprehension by participating in this project (Cornelius 1982). I also promised that I would not interfere with their chances of finding work—for example, by asking potential employers questions while the men were speaking with them about employment.

In exchange for speaking with me, I agreed to share information with the men that could alleviate some of their concerns. For instance, translating the local news supported my entrée with a small group of men. A significant example of this came about after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, which occurred in the early months of my fieldwork. Although I was not at the corner that day, I became the men's primary source of information not only about the attack but also about the crash of American Airlines Flight 587, the Anthrax threat, changes in immigration law, border security, and the war in Iraq. Like everyone else, we painfully fixed our eyes and ears on every media outlet in the mornings I spent on the corner after 9/11.

Sharing information about assistance and services was another way I could engage the men. For example, some expressed interest in learning to speak English, so I found local schools that offered language classes. Often our conversations turned into brief language instruction sessions, which were always enjoyable and rewarding for me. On any given day while hanging out at the corner, questions might come up about English words and phrases that led to the sharing of personal details. I became better acquainted with the men during these conversations, and they learned more about one another. Thus, the corner offered the men and me an additional arena for social exchange.

While my research studied the details of the men's work experiences and the structure of the day-labor market at this particular site, I explored how the men understood their participation in this low-wage and low-status industry in relation to groups with different racial, ethnic, national origins and legal status. I also scrutinized my own work experience with the men at the site, which led me to explore my interactions with the men and examine how identities—assigned and presumably evident—influenced our understanding of social behavior in this setting.

First, the narrative convention that shapes both the doing of fieldwork and the eventual written report of the activity—the men's explanations and my interpretations—requires some consideration. Order and meaning did not make themselves available to me very readily. Instead, they gradually emerged from unclear and not yet fully developed events and experiences. At times, researchers can find that they have imposed both order and meaning after their fieldwork had ended to make sense of the chaos they encountered in the field. However, it is important not to impose meaning and instead try to evoke for the reader the social world the researcher observed when describing the activities and practices examined and present the words shared by those who inhabit that world. I uncovered the complexity of the day laborers' social world through the act of writing. Each chapter begins with an account that leads into the world of established images, people, events, memories, and reflections. I not only describe the particular situation in the day laborers' world but also problematize it as a transparent reality. I also address concerns that shaped my experience as a sort of history of how the participants and I sought to make sense of each other within shifting fields of power to help readers grasp the full richness of this experience. The manufactured work, the book, is therefore one organized perspective of micro-level forces—day laborers' everyday lives—and of how they contend with the larger, macro institutional forces that daily shape their lives (Burawoy 1991).

In his reflections on fieldwork in Morocco, Paul Rabinow (1977, 151) writes, "The fact that all cultural facts are interpretations, and multivocal ones at that, is true both for the anthropologist and for his informant, the Other with whom he works." In retrospect, I know that I was not the only one observing and interpreting social behavior during my fieldwork. The research on which this book is based was a mutual undertaking with the men on the corner, which led me to reflect on two questions: How did our interactions influence my work at the site? And what implications did our interactions have for the men's everyday experiences?

## Moving beyond the Racial "Insider-Outsider" Debate

Maxine Baca Zinn (1979) wrote about the lack of attention paid to the methodological issues surrounding "insiders" and "outsiders" in knowledge produced about communities of color, particularly Chicano communities. Very little sociological research had been conducted by researchers of color when her article was published, so acknowledgment of power differentials and potential exploitation, as evidenced by researchers' professional and financial gain at the expense of research subjects, was missing from her discussion. While not immune to critique, Baca Zinn argued, there were some advantages to so-called racial insiders' conducting research in their own communities—particularly, gaining access to and establishing rapport with research participants, which can also be affected by other identities, such as gender.

Robert Merton (1972) expressed skepticism about the importance of racial matching in sociological research. While sympathizing with the challenges "white male insiderism" posed to black sociologists, he argued that the potential for "extreme insiderism" would limit everyone's knowledge to his or her "own" community, based on multiple identities such as race, religion, age, gender, and so on. Conversely, Merton critiqued the extreme position that "outsiders" are able to maintain objectivity and can capture "true" knowledge of a community without personal bias. Instead, he concluded that both insider and outsider research are important to, and legitimate in, creating knowledge.

Sudhir Venkatesh (2002: 92) writes about the "social production" of the ethnographer; it is important that we understand that the fieldworker and participant are both observers and informants, which is significant in learning about the "local properties" of particular social structures' patterns and meanings. The theoretical premise for this query has its origin in the works of Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman. According to Blumer (1969: 24), "The entire act of scientific study is oriented and shaped by the underlying picture of the empirical world that is used. . . . The unavoidable task of genuine methodological treatment is to identify and assess these premises." And Goffman (1961: 132) writes, "It is common in sociology to study the individual in terms of the conception he and others have of him and to argue that these conceptions are made available to him through the role that he plays." I corroborate these arguments by considering my study participants' conceptions and social construction of the "other" (i.e., me as the ethnographer),

and then I reflect on how these conditions informed and contributed to my interpretations in the field.

In addition to power dynamics between researchers and research participants, Aida Hurtado (1994) addresses researcher bias as a result of factors such as language proficiency, phenotype based primarily on physical features and skin color, and gender in perceptions held by interviewees. This broadens the debate on racial matching beyond simply how interviewees interpret researchers based on similarity or dissimilarity to include how researchers evaluate interviewees. The notion of racial matching based on perceived racial similarity and physical appearance only scratches the surface. While conducting fieldwork in an environment in which, presumably, I was an "insider," salient differences in nationality, socioeconomic class, educational background (particularly as a doctoral student at a U.S. university), linguistic fluency, age, marital status, and gender between the men and me all played a role in our researcher-research participant relationship. My physical features and skin color proved not as important as how I talked and dressed, my educational background, and my socioeconomic status, which made me "white" in my study participants' eyes. There was no assumption that we shared experiences of oppression as people of color. As France Winddance Twine and Jonathan Warren (2000, 16) conclude, "The utility of racial matching is contingent on the subordinate person having acquired a particular subjectivity. . . . [W]hen racial subalterns do not possess a developed critique of racism or idealize the racially privileged group, race matching may not be an efficacious methodological strategy."

Ann Phoenix (1994) builds on the assumption that racial and gender matching can facilitate rapport between interviewers and interviewees but argues that other factors, such as the subject of the study, socioeconomic class backgrounds, and even the setting in which interviews take place, are also important. In the edited volume *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective* (1994), Ann Phoenix, Mary Maynard, June Purvis, Beverley Skeggs, and Annecka Marshall collectively argue that methodological considerations regarding the inherent power inequalities embedded in research roles are imperative in conducting feminist research when the focus is on women's lives—particularly, the lives of women of color.

Consequently, "racial matching" was as much a hindrance as an advantage in my field research because of its interconnectedness with other identities, such as social class, nationality, and gender. I am aware that the stories I have framed have been filtered through these multiple frameworks and

cannot represent the "Truth" of the day-labor experience in New York; they are merely a component of a larger picture. In reading my field notes, I found that ideologies connected to race, gender, sexuality, migrant identity, and legality were constant forces to contend with in the field. The men on the corner repeatedly remarked on my status as a young, married Latina from the United States, often through good-natured ribbing or admonishments not to wait too long to settle down. However, this coding of my identity occasionally left me vulnerable to harassment based on assumptions linked to my Western upbringing.

The pressure of conforming to gendered expectations as a Latina and an American woman were additional considerations in my daily labor. Dorinne Kondo (1990), a Japanese American researcher, reflects on the "distancing process" that occurred while she was conducting fieldwork in Japan; she was startled when the image of a typical Japanese housewife reflected in a shiny surface turned out to be her. This caused a "collapse of identity," Kondo (1990: 17) writes, that led her to reevaluate the blurred line between her true self and the self that was created in response to conforming to expectations and the positive reinforcement she received when she displayed "Japanese" behavior, alongside the puzzlement or distress she caused when she behaved in a way regarded as "American" or foreign. Thus, the researcher in the field is also subject to the power of the research participants. As Kondo (1990, 17) notes, "[My informants] were, in the act of being, actively interpreting and trying to make meaning of the ethnographer. In so doing, the people I knew asserted their power to act upon the anthropologist."

Issues of "racial matching" are made more complex by conducting work in a shared space of a global Western city such as New York, with groups of participants carrying both First World and Third World identities linked with First World and Third World structures of social order and meanings. As a contribution to feminist methodology, in which research is not just about women interviewing other women about women's lives, this book provides a greater understanding of how oppression works in the lives of the men (and the woman) who inhabited the space both physically and figuratively, unmasking tensions and contradictions within global masculinities and femininities (Wolf 1996).

## A Snapshot of Working on the Corner

I began my fieldwork in the summer of 2001 at a casual day-labor site in Brooklyn that covered the four corners of one intersection. Although my

work did not involve moving inventory for a factory or building a fence around a house, I did engage in labor: as an ethnographer, my work was to observe behavior and social relations in this setting. I wrote my initial observations from the laundromat, which was situated so that I could remove myself comfortably from the corners during or immediately after my visits to write field notes. A nearby playground was another convenient place to record field notes and interviews. Occasionally I also used the lower level of a nearby church to write about and reflect on my fieldwork. The bulk of the in-depth interviews were held in a neighborhood park a short walk from the field site or in the men's homes.[2]

The intersection became a space where a large number of men, most of them recent immigrants, gathered each morning to look for work in the late 1980s. The men occupied the corners not just in the houses or the local businesses, but on the sidewalks, stoops, and curbs. When my visits began, the workspace covered the four corners of the intersection. A year later, it extended across the avenue, covering the four corners of three street intersections.[3] I often imagined how different our interactions would have been if I were a man and wondered whether it would have mattered, as a woman or man, if I were not Latina. The conscientious response to such a query is to say yes and disclose, the best one can, how positionality can be advantageous and disadvantageous in data collection. Would the men have allowed just anyone to stand or sit with them? Would they have shared with me all that they did? What might they have refrained from telling me? As I observed them, the men scrutinized me to see what I could offer them in our social interactions.

Initially, my goals were to understand the day-labor work experience and to challenge perceptions and stereotypes about the people who engage in this form of self-employment—specifically, people who do not have legal U.S. residency status. While exploring this social situation, I eventually came to interpret these and other goals for my research. However, the men were not simply incorporated into my fieldwork and the overall endeavor of the larger project. Our relationship was very much a reciprocal one so that I also became involved in their world. In addition to my own statements about my role in this setting, my presence was explained via meanings and roles the men assigned to me. My presence on the corners provided resources to the men (e.g., gendered social interaction, English instruction, counsel, news and information, and the like). The privilege of the researcher to sustain social order—a responsibility I had initially sought to explore and maintain—was no longer a responsibility to bear alone. Indeed, this privi-

lege was a shared endeavor that influenced *our*—the men's and my own—interpretations of social meaning in the field.

## Changing Roles: Making Sense of the Woman on the Corner

The ethnographer's work has increasingly become a subject for in-depth examination.[4] As significant as the people and social actions that are the focus of study in the fieldwork process are, participants' interpretations of the fieldworker are also important. Just as Sudhir Venkatesh (2002) examined in his fieldwork in the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, my field research analyzed the "social production" of the ethnographer and explored the relations and interactions between the fieldworker and those being observed.

Since my visits began in the summer, the weather was pleasant, and I often *joined* the men on the corner. That is, we shared the space. While the men stood looking for work, I sat on a building stoop or on the steps of the entrance to the laundromat waiting to fold my clothes. That way I was near the men but never standing or sitting with them. If fact, it was almost expected that I would take these usual places on the corner, and they were often left vacant and offered to me when I arrived. It was from this place—my place—that I made my first observations. Washing clothes at the laundromat, just a few storefronts past the corner, was the apparent reason for my presence, and the men were familiar with my routine. Some of the workers and I had already achieved a basic level of familiarity with one another. Many of them greeted me by saying "hola" (hello) and wished me "buen día" (good day) as I walked to and from the corner. At the start of each visit, they greeted me in the same way, saying, "Hola, amiga" (Hello, friend). When my visits were less frequent, I often received the greeting "Hola, perdida" (Hello, lost one).

I visited the men on the corner on one sunny morning in early October. The scene was familiar and routine except for the time of day: I arrived at 10:00 A.M., a late hour to make a first appearance. It was also Friday, the second-to-last day of the workweek. Most of the men had told me that Fridays were considered days of "trabajo pero tambien diversion" (work and play) compared with busy workdays, such as Sunday and Monday. I turned onto the corner and saw a big group of men sitting and standing in front of the laundromat. A game that I called "Quarters on the Wall" was in session.

One man stood behind la línea (the line)—really just a break in the sidewalk—and flipped a coin toward another coin or, perhaps, past a second line in the sidewalk. As he did this, everyone else roared with laughter. Meanwhile I had started my usual routine by loading my clothes into the washing machine. When I left the laundromat, I asked the men whether I could sit down with them to watch the game. They met my anxious request with a few seconds of silent thought and curious faces but then made room for me on the stoop and agreed to let me watch them play.

After taking his turn, one of the young players approached me. I wasn't able to get a good look at him, because my vision was blurred by the sunshine that bounced off his bright white T-shirt, which was two sizes too large and almost covered the knees of his gray sweat pants, and because his face was partly hidden by a black baseball cap. It was Octavio, a young black man from Colombia. Our conversation did not begin quite as I expected:

*Octavio:* Where are you from?
*Carolyn:* Well, I was born here, but my parents are from South America.
*Octavio:* And how old are you?
*Carolyn:* Twenty-seven.
*Octavio:* No! That's a lie. Twenty-seven? I thought you were twenty, no more than that. No! Twenty-seven? You look young; you're short. Are you married?
*Carolyn:* Yes.
*Octavio:* Really? Because I see you here alone, and you look so young. Is he here? I don't want any problems, sabes [you know]? So what are you doing here, besides washing clothes?
*Carolyn:* Oh, perdón [sorry]. Well, I would like to write a paper about all of you and what happens here.
*Octavio:* Really? It's interesting. You're not a reporter? Or do you work for La Migra? No, you look like a nice person. . . .
*Carolyn:* No, no. I'm a student. [*I show him my student identification card.*] Do you think the others will talk to me?
*Octavio:* Honestly, I don't know, but I'll speak to you.
*Carolyn:* That would be nice. Thank you. . . . So how long . . .

As we talked, another game started. Octavio decided to play. I was curious about the rules and asked the closest man to me. His baby face was accentuated by a large cap on his head, which gave me only glimpses of his

face. He took my interest in learning about the game as an invitation to sit beside me. That is how I met Santiago. He seemed only too happy to explain the rules, and after the game, my first conversation with Santiago followed a similar question-and-answer format to my first conversation with Octavio.

This description of my entry into the field illustrates that my introductions to the men almost followed a formula, regardless of differences in age, race, ethnicity or nationality. After we exchanged names and handshakes, the men asked where I grew up and where my parents came from. Then they asked about my age, to which many reacted with disbelief, and the next likely question was whether I was married. When they learned that I was, each man usually wanted to know whether my husband was celoso (the jealous type), and from time to time the men asked me whether they should "worry about speaking with me."

On the day I met Jerome, our conversation began in a similar way. Feeling a bit exasperated, I asked him why he, like the others, reacted with such disbelief about my age and then about my marriage. Jerome explained that my actions and behavior were uncommon for a woman in their culture, especially for a married woman:

> You don't look married. You look too young. You always come here by yourself. We never see your husband come to help you with the laundry. We never see you with children. So many of us believe that you are not really married. Es una mentira, no? [It's a lie, isn't it?] You are lying to us, but we understand.

He went on to tell me that, apart from women from the neighborhood (three who worked at the laundromat and one who worked at the corner deli), women who passed the men on the corner never talked to them:

> In Mexico, a woman doesn't go outside to talk to a bunch of men. And by herself? No, no! Your parents will tell you the same. The women that come here don't talk to us. Some of us know why you are here, but not everyone. They have the wrong idea. Where we come from, a woman by herself doesn't stand with a lot of men to talk. You don't see that unless you're that kind of woman. Bueno, perdón, I am not saying that you are. But that's why we say that you are lying to us. A man would never let his wife stand with strange men outside in public. But it's different here in this country.

The rules of conduct I have followed in my personal life were ones I had to consciously recognize, modify, and, at times, disregard to engage in more meaningful interaction with these men. I never really mastered this. My ignorance and persistent questions about issues and behavior that many of these men took for granted were often met with surprise, especially since, to the men, we appeared to share more similarities—a common language and a common cultural background—than differences. But soon the differences—of nationality, gender, and class—helped develop complex relationships and interactions that yielded rich data about the immigrant experience (Horowitz 1985; Liebow 1967).

I was so comfortable following my own cultural cues that this project made me blatantly aware of the cues that characterize appropriate social roles for men and women in the United States. This was especially intriguing when comparing people of different cultures. Because only men looked for work at my field site, it was obvious from my first visit that, as a woman, I did not belong in that context (Valenzuela and Meléndez 2003).[5] Rather, the men explained my presence on the corner by assigning me the role of a single woman or prostitute, even though they had heard my explanation and knew details about my personal life. My efforts to dissuade them from these initial conceptions of me fell short, even though they also took seriously my role as a university student and married woman. Most did believe these identities, although not at the onset of the fieldwork. As Goffman (1961, 133) wrote, "As long as the dominion of the situated role is not challenged, other role identities, ones different from but not necessarily opposed to the officially available self, can be sustained, too." Thus, single woman, married woman, university student, and prostitute, among others, were identities that were sustained during the fieldwork process.

I was anxious during my initial visits to the corner. However, once we were introduced and familiarity replaced some of the initial awkwardness, I felt at ease hanging out with the men. I was not wary of speaking with them, individually or in groups, and behaved much as I would with any group of male colleagues or friends. However, this level of comfort was neither expected nor accepted at first in this setting, and it therefore constrained my data collection. The rules that I followed in my personal life were ones that I had to consciously and intentionally modify, the best I could, during each visit.

Since I felt it was not entirely inappropriate to speak with strange men or with men gathered in a group, my engagement with the men was neither easy to change nor easy for the men themselves to understand or follow. For

example, the men did not entertain my questions in groups. Instead, whenever I directed a question to one of them, at times the others would step aside, sometimes moving several feet away, to allow us privacy. As Octavio told me, "Bueno, we all have our problems. And maybe he doesn't want him or him [*he points to others*] or me to know about them." But the men were also abiding by the norm described earlier: as Jerome, Luis, and others reminded me, "It [speaking in groups] doesn't look right." However, as our friendships and trust in me and in my research matured among certain groups of men, a level of comfort developed so that I was able to speak with the men individually and in small groups.

Differences in gender, ethnicity, and culture, to name a few, influence the manner in which people experience constraints and opportunities in their everyday lives. Donna Haraway (1988, 586) writes, "There is no way to 'be' simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation and class." This concept of multiple identities is supported and underlined in feminist poststructuralist theories, and single truth notions are dismissed (Wolf 1996). Thus, I argue that one firm and exact understanding of the "outsider" did not exist in this project. My identity was negotiated with every man in each meeting every day.

## Female Companionship and a "Nice Woman"

There are times when the researcher is also vulnerable, even though researchers are generally in a position of greater power than the research participants. My vulnerability often became evident when the men withheld information and refused to answer questions. This mostly involved conversations concerning sexuality and sexual relations with women or men. The men wanted to present themselves to me as good men and therefore obscured aspects of their lives that I might have perceived as "bad." The desire to have me view them as good men was ever-present. At one point, Santiago shared with me that, although he had a girlfriend in Mexico for whom he cared, it was no longer possible for them to be together, and he explained that no woman could be trusted. However, he showed that he did not fully accept this declaration by asking me about my feelings about trust and relationships. Specifically, he asked me about my marriage and whether my spouse and I trusted each other, especially when we lived in different cities. Santiago felt that separation would inevitably cause his girlfriend to seek other companionship and ultimately cause them to break up. After giving

me a doubtful look when I confidently responded "yes" to his question, Santiago asked me why I trusted people—my husband, the men on the corners, other women, anyone.

At that point, a young Mexican man called out to Santiago, who walked over to him. An exchange was made that I did not see because Santiago's back was turned to me. When he returned, Santiago quickly resumed our conversation, but I interrupted to ask what had happened. He said, "It's nothing." When I persisted, he replied, "Nothing important. Something you don't tell a nice woman." At the time, I welcomed being identified as a "nice woman" because it appeared to situate me in a role of respectability among the men on the corner. However, I soon learned that this status would result in social interactions that were both rewarding and frustrating.

I wondered what Santiago had given the man, especially because he was so reserved about sharing the details with me. Later I learned from one of Santiago's roommates that the exchange involved a woman's phone number. I asked for more information and received a lot of bashful sighs and laughs. The roommate was concerned about discrediting Santiago in front of me. "If I tell you, you won't like him anymore," he said. Finally, I asked him whether the woman was a prostitute. His roommate answered, "Well, not really." Like Santiago, the roommate was quick to inform me that my gender and my role as a respectable woman among the group of men at the site prevented him from sharing details with me, although he could not really clarify why he felt that way. He thought I would be offended and would not speak with him and Santiago on future visits. No matter how much I assured them that our friendship would not be affected, I was unable to convince the men that I valued their honesty, regardless of details. Even though I eventually received nods of understanding, I could not wholeheartedly trust them to feel comfortable with me in discussing sexuality and intimate relationships. Much as Ruth Horowitz (1985) discovered in her research among male youth gangs in Chicago, being a woman controlled and influenced my observations, activities, and interpretations in the field.

Although this event was frustrating and even disappointing, it also indicated how important it was for the men to make me believe their self-presentation as good men. In analyzing the representations and practices of the various men, I decided that their accounts were both factual and, at the same time, constructed to include or leave out details they felt were either appropriate or inappropriate for me to know. There was an underlying principle of respect and decency that guided the norms of our social interactions, which the men felt were significant in defining for me who they were

and who they were not. The role of nice woman that was constructed for me and the role of good man they had constructed for themselves placed me in a respected position but also kept me at a distance.

However, the marginal position of nice woman was not entirely disadvantageous. After all, the limits of the role informed me about the boundaries of social interactions with men and women in different societies and about different categories of men and women (Horowitz 1985). It also enabled me to participate in activities on the corner and in the men's personal lives. Many of the study participants told me that they felt less threatened having a woman hang out with them once they established that I wasn't working for the police or La Migra. Such companionship was even appealing to them, especially because their interactions with women in the wider society were limited and few. I was often invited to their homes to meet their families, and my role even allowed an assumed, though basic, level of trust among family members, especially with the women. Some of the men lived with their wives, sisters, or nieces in New York, although this was not prevalent in the living arrangements or in the migration experience of the majority of the men at the field site. I discovered in my meetings with the women that their social lives were constrained. The women described feelings of loneliness and timidity about meeting people in the neighborhood. Thus, the women welcomed my visits, and the men were grateful for my company. The nice woman role allowed a closeness to develop with the men, particularly because my presence and identity as a woman were perceived as nonthreatening in the field. In fact, some of the men thought of me as an extended relative and accordingly were invested in maintaining a respected and proper status for me on the corner.

This is not to say, however, that my role and consequent interactions as a nice woman were fixed throughout the fieldwork. As our identities are temporal, so are our social interactions; they continually change, are redefined, and produce varying cultural types of knowledge. Some of the men, mostly those who were my first contacts in the field and who remained my friends for a short while thereafter, eventually disclosed details to me about their personal relationships with women.

Another group, whom I knew less and who typically observed me from a distance, opened up rather quickly and felt quite comfortable speaking with me about sex and relationships. It turned out that many of them had mistaken me for a prostitute because of my presence on the corner and my practices of visiting and approaching the men alone. "Te invito para una aventura [Would you like to have an affair]?" was the first line in my first

conversation with Ricardo, who was twenty-three and had moved from Panama to New York City in the tense post-9/11 climate.[6] At first, I was unsure about what I would say or do in response, but soon my thoughts fell behind my pace, and we were soon shaking hands and making introductions. Then Ricardo said:

> You have to be careful here. Not everyone knows what you are doing. I didn't know you were a student. Sabes [you know], not all of these men are good. They'll try to get inside your head, especially if they don't see your husband with you. Don't tell them. . . . Aren't you curious to be with another man? You want to know more about us? Don't fall in love with us. We're trouble. . . . En serio [Seriously], you are lucky to have a good marriage. But, if you're interested, sí, te interesa? Te pago un buen dinero si m'acompañas [I'll pay you well if you go with me].

As noted in Chapter 4, workers were disappointed, and sometimes irritated, when I initiated introductions with men on the corner. The exchange with Ricardo was not the ideal way to prompt discussion about this, but it was not an infrequent occurrence. The men were even more distressed that, over time and as I got to know a group of men better, I would start conversations about their relationships and sexual intimacy with women and men. The workers I came to know well would try to act as intermediaries by introducing me and sharing details about my work to explain my presence on the corner. However, their primary concern was finding work for the day and meeting other needs and interests, so this was not always possible. As a result, I was left without protection against disrespectful actions toward and disagreeable remarks about me as a single woman seeking sexual companionship.

The men were amazed, even a bit shocked, that I did not reach an understanding of this situation on my own. After explaining it to me, they burst into laughter at my naïveté and then commented that it must be the blanquita (white girl) in me who was speaking. They explained that even though I was hispana, I didn't understand because I was also americana, and aquí la vida es diferente (life is different here). But, they said, "tus padres nos entienden. Solo una pregunta y vas a ver" (Your parents understand. Just ask them and you'll see.) Following my own curiosity and desire for better understanding, as well as the men's advice, I enlisted my father to help me comprehend events, moods, and behavior. Even he was surprised

that I had not anticipated the men's response, let alone that I did not anticipate, on my own, the implications of our differences. I should note that, although my father strongly supported my education and did not discourage me from undertaking this research, he did express uneasiness about particular aspects of the fieldwork. He agreed with the men at the start of my fieldwork that it was not entirely appropriate for a woman to visit with a group of men in a public setting.

Like Rabinow (1977), I discovered that my study participants were interpreting not only their own culture but also mine. A common ethnicity and language was substantive in our engagement and in the development of our friendships, but it was not all that mattered in closing the insider-outsider divide between us. In this case, it was clear that culture played a powerful role in defining the situation. This is corroborated in studies such as Carol Stack's research on kinship networks in black communities in the city of Jackson Harbor. Stack (1974) found that the researcher is always defined as an outsider among those being observed, regardless of her or his ties to the community or shared cultural background. The onus is on the researcher to learn how to navigate the participants' everyday world. The ethnographer learns to cross the various borders of social spaces in the fieldwork process and becomes more adept in her or his awareness and identification of the specific roles that are prevalent during particular circumstances of an ongoing situation. I attempted to identify as an insider, although the extent to which I was able to accomplish this often depended on the situation. Some attempts were more successful than others. At all times throughout my fieldwork, I was always an insider and an outsider. This provides an interesting twist to the stranger/intimacy model discussed in qualitative methodology. As Mitchell Duneier (1999, 338) writes, "Participant observers need not be fully trusted in order to have their presence at least accepted."

## The Role of Profesora

Much like the relationships between fieldworker and participants, the men created and re-created social structures in our relationship and in the field through the pursuit of their own interests and in the assertion of their own agency. "Profesora" was another identity the men constructed for me and used for their own benefit on the corner. As I have noted, our conversations often turned into language-instruction sessions, which mostly involved translating words and phrases from Spanish to English. Some of the men

were very interested in learning to speak English. I had no formal training in teaching languages and was slightly discouraged because I didn't really know how to help them. But I told them I would do my best to teach them what they wanted to know. In return, I asked the men to instruct me in Spanish, especially in colloquial expressions that were unfamiliar to me.

Initially I thought the men would ask most about words that help them get better jobs or better pay. But, as one man told me, "Bueno, yo sé los números y entonces estoy bien más o menos" (Well, I know my numbers, so for the most part I'm OK). The language concerns that frequently came up in our conversations involved managing everyday tasks. All of the men wanted to know how to order certain plates of food, how to purchase specific items, and the names of vegetables and fruits. Next came introductory phrases ("My name is . . ."; "What is your name?"; "Where do you come from?"; and so on) and familial terms ("mother," "father," "sister," and so on).

One of the men I met in my first year of fieldwork was Gerry, who was twenty-one and had been working on the corner for just over two months. Early in our conversation, Gerry shared with me that he was interested in learning English. He said:

> In Mexico, I studied English in high school, but since you don't need to speak it there, you don't remember it. Here I have books, so I try to read, but it's hard. I can learn how to spell and recognize words. I don't know how to pronounce the words. That's why I don't like to just learn from books. I need to take a class so I can hear how the words are supposed to sound. I know a lot right now. I hear people speak at work, and I even ask them to tell me how to say things so I can show them that I want to do better. They speak so fast, but I pick it up. I would like so much to learn.

Gerry did not believe, however, that his lack of English proficiency had prevented him from finding work:

> It isn't a real problem. One can still find work. But it is true that sometimes you find work and you may not understand something the person needs to have done, so you lose time there. Sometimes you can lose the job, too. But so far, I've been lucky. I pick and choose what I want and what I know I can do. I can do everything, so I'll always find something.

Although I enjoyed the language sessions, I sometimes felt vulnerability arising from the men's construction of an identity for me that differed from the identities I had ascribed to myself. In addition to university student and a novice ethnographer, I was sometimes treated as a substitute for the female companionship they lacked in their lives. As noted earlier, I was also sometimes presumed to be a prostitute, especially among men who did not know me well or saw me only from a distance. Other identities included sister, niece, or cousin. Last, I was their teacher. Perceiving me in these roles meant raised expectations among my study participants. Although I continuously emphasized my role as a student with limited resources who was ill equipped to provide them with professional language lessons, the means to acquire legal papers, or, least of all, sexual favors, I was nonetheless solicited for such resources and advice. The men regarded me as an hispana who had privileges they could not access precisely because I was an americana; therefore, I was a bridge to a world in which these men felt included and from which they also felt excluded.

It is crucial to understand the diverse cooperating elements of a methodology in ethnographic research. Pursuing this line of scrutiny contributes a conscientious interpretation of social meaning in this situation. To understand the complex interactions among women and men, fieldwork entails recognizing that the participants are not passive, powerless, gender-neutral objects but, rather, actors who can institute change, create knowledge, and contribute to shaping the social worlds around them. The fieldwork process must also recognize the multiple realities and shifting identities of the various actors, including the researcher herself.

All of the distinct positions of my identity interacted with and contradicted one other in the course of my field research, changing over time in different circumstances. They affected how I represented myself, my work, and the meanings I accorded the social situation. Gender, ethnicity, class, and other factors also influenced how people perceived me. The opposing identities of "outsider" and "insider" caused certain conceptual and practical issues. To some extent, I considered myself an outsider. My colleagues and I, and even some of the day laborers, placed me in a position of power compared with the research participants because I was a U.S. citizen and had been socialized in the American context, even though I also have immigrant parents and relatives. Still, as someone whose parents are of South American nationality; who is familiar with a particular Latino culture; and

who grew up speaking both English and Spanish, I was also considered, to some extent, an insider. However, these shared viewpoints and characteristics were not sufficient to fully and truly accord me this status. Identity is a constant process of negotiation composed of the dictating situations of gender, race, ethnicity, and culture and the experiences of these circumstances that are also situated in location, language, and history. My research enables an understanding of the social practices on the corner by uncovering these tensions and their social meanings and structures in the field.

# Conclusion

Ethnographic research in studies of the urban poor helps explain the everyday lived experiences of immigrants and marginalized people in our communities. The accounts of the men in this study show how they understood their identities as workers; as Latino and black men; and as migrants and undocumented workers. These identities were not only assigned to them by institutions and others around them; they were also social locations the men themselves managed to survive their daily economic and social lives on the street corner. They constructed identities and self-presentations in the context of a racialized labor market whose hierarchical queues, based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and legal status, constrained their options. In their daily labor on the street corner, the men not only had to seek paying jobs; they also had to negotiate their identities within two sets of competing images: the good worker and good man versus the shiftless minority or bad immigrant man, and the troublemaking corner dweller versus the powerless Real Day Laborer. All of the men worked hard and wanted others to understand their plight and see them as smart, powerful, and morally decent. My findings about the everyday practices on a New York City street corner thus help reveal the social structure underlying the day-labor market and the complex ways it operates in our society.

Studies that focus on the demographic characteristics of the day-labor workforce and the basic organization and working conditions of this infor-

mal market overlook how day laborers themselves make sense of their situation. Drawing on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork at la parada, the Brooklyn street-corner hiring site I studied, this book reveals how a specific set of day laborers constructed moral boundaries and identity positions that corresponded with their own and their potential employers' cultural understanding of what it means to be a good worker and a good man. But this was not a one-way street: the day laborers also created criteria that allowed them to rank-order employers. The study's findings thus reveal the tremendous "malleability and variability of gendered categories" (Salzinger 2003, 25), as well as of categories shaped by race, ethnicity, nationality, migrant status, and legality, and suggest a need for further attention to the mutually constitutive process whereby these boundaries and distinctions are constituted.

First, my research revealed that the pan-ethnic categories "Latino" and "Hispanic" are insufficient to address the concerns of the many and diverse populations of Spanish-speaking people here, and the fluidity of blackness should not be overlooked when examining the lived experiences of black people living in the United States. This was an obvious concern among the black Panamanian and Colombian day laborers who sought to situate themselves not only among other Latinos but also among U.S.-born African American and Puerto Rican workers on the corner. Through behavior and speech they revealed a conscious decision to present themselves as a distinct group, which became most apparent when they changed their physical location vis-à-vis the other Latino immigrant Regulars and the African American Temps on the corner to reinforce their status as Real Day Laborers. The negotiations of these men—whether Mexican, Panamanian, Polish, or African American—created conflict in the presentation and understanding of identity as they struggled to find their place in New York City's white-black-brown racial landscape.

Second, the day-labor sector of the informal job market, which employs both immigrants and marginalized U.S.-born Americans, needs to be addressed both as a significant part of the urban landscape and as emblematic of the changing nature of work in today's society (Kettles 2008). Researchers must consider the complexity of the term "working poor," especially in regard to U.S. citizens—and how these people, particularly African American youth, participate in the informal economy.

Day labor is typically regarded as part of the informal economy, which is defined as lying beyond the watchful eyes of traditional regulatory structures. Although my field site was not a formal work setting like a workers'

center, I found similar organizational processes and structures at play in the employment practices on the corner (see Sassen 1998; Sassen and Smith 1991). The informal economy therefore cannot be solely or sufficiently defined by the activities and labor populations relegated to it (Portes, Castells, and Benton 1989). For example, Saskia Sassen notes that the undocumented status of a labor population cannot determine whether an activity is "informal" or "formal"; rather, informalization is a process that can be analyzed in its relationship to the formal economy (Sassen 1998).[1] All workers clearly would be well served by changes that reduce the costs of engaging in this type of self-employment. Instead of focusing on the social ills of day-laboring communities—immigrants and marginalized people—researchers should study the circumstances of their connections to work in the informal economy and how these activities can be improved to stimulate economic growth (Roy 2004).

In addition to seeking work, the men in my study relied on la parada for social support, recreation, learning, and finding status and membership in a community of their peers in a way that proved difficult to replace. The corner provided opportunities to obviate the stigma of being seen as marginal people—that is, as "illegal aliens," working poor, homeless—and its social atmosphere supported their desires to escape the anguish of living separated from their families, communities, and lives at home. While institutional and cultural factors certainly had an effect on the men's lives, the men also demonstrated an ability to shape their own reality and construct social meanings through their daily activities on the corner. This suggests that public advocates and policy makers need to continue to develop resources such as hiring centers that give these men chances to establish themselves as good neighbors in local communities.

What are the challenges, then, that recent immigrants, community residents, advocacy groups, and policy makers now face? Many studies have concluded that immigrants are considerably less likely than others to seek out and receive public assistance (see, e.g., Cornelius 1981; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Jensen 1988; Massey et al. 1987). The variety of forms of assistance, including social support systems, has not been sufficiently addressed. Since most of my study participants were on the margins of civil society, legally and socially, the fact that they met their social needs outside such traditional forums as community organizations, schools, local political and economic bodies, and religious organizations is significant in understanding how recent immigrants are incorporated socially into American society. The study's findings also have implications for public policy

concerning employment practices, immigration law, and the provision of social services to undocumented people. As the number of undocumented residents grows, we need to open new discussions about poverty and social inequality, as well as the obstacles to social and economic mobility, among these groups. Furthermore, public policy should address whether some types of migrant laborers, or "guest workers," are regarded as more deserving than others based on demand for their skills and their expected benefits to the economy.

The day laborers I studied labored to be seen as good men and good workers. Their reports revealed that this job-seeking strategy both limited their choices in obtaining work and bolstered their sense of self-worth—that is, it added to their feeling that they were making choices, as constrained as their options might be. These contextually specific situations illustrate how the quest for these positions could cause workers to be complicit in their own exploitation and work against the emergence of a sense of commonality and solidarity needed for collective organization.

My findings also present a challenge to the successful operation of nonprofit day-labor centers established by community organizations and city governments in metropolitan areas throughout the nation. Janice Fine (2006) identified sixty-three day-labor workers' centers operating in seventeen U.S. states and found that such centers can effectively advocate for immigrants and workers and help dispel the stigma that casts these people as socially undeserving (Roy 2004). However, I discovered that such centers are not universally appealing. Many of the men in my study expressed mistrust and pessimism about their hiring procedures, as well as about other services the centers offered and thus did not use them. A regulated, service-providing day-labor center therefore can serve, perversely, as a foil against which street-corner day laborers define themselves. I would thus echo Abel Valenzuela's (2001, 336) claim that we do not know enough about the real and, particularly, perceived benefits of regulated informal hiring sites to the workers themselves. Developing effective organizing strategies among day laborers requires that we further examine the cultural meanings they attach to their work as part of their creative pursuit of identities as good workers and good men.

New York City is a vibrant setting for transnational activity in which specific modes of incorporation, a key one in this study—the context of reception in the labor market—are embedded in social processes that

extend across and connect local, regional, national, and international practices. It is therefore imperative to understand the dynamics of the changing patterns of new immigration as they affect the larger social structures and institutions of politics, economics, and culture. This includes examples of how migrants, particularly those from nonwhite racial/ethnic groups, are incorporated into the economic, social, political, and cultural life of diverse communities informed by economic, social, political, historical, cultural, and regional dynamics.

New York is not alone: more and more communities across the United States—urban, suburban, and rural—are experiencing growth in their Latino populations. At the same time, misleading concerns are increasingly being expressed that immigrants, especially those without documentation, are taking jobs away from U.S. citizens, exploiting social services such as education and health care, changing American culture in negative ways, and committing criminal acts. The day laborers in my study, however, received decidedly mixed messages both from the people who sought their labor and from local police, who made few efforts to deter them from seeking work. The desirability of their labor means that these men's presence on the corner is encouraged, but they pay a price in terms of economic injustice, work-related abuse, alienation, status loss, and the guilt and melancholy that result from being absent from their families' lives.

As public policy makers consider the obstacles to economic and social mobility among these groups, it is important to assess the implications of the issues raised in this book. The local processes I found at the Brooklyn street corner are linked to larger political and economic debates over job distribution, social-service benefits, and, more recently, heightened defense of U.S. national borders. Issues concerning the civil rights of undocumented residents, assimilation and development of immigrant communities, citizenship and identity, and transnational ties to native countries, however, also contribute to a larger, more comprehensive narrative of the day-labor situation.

New immigrant groups are presenting challenges to traditional understandings of race and ethnic relations, identity, and adaptation in New York City. As their efforts to control the social and labor processes on the corner illustrate, the day laborers made situational responses to, and adaptations in, the formation of their own immigrant and ethnic identities (Kohn 1976; Kohn and Schooler 1969; Laguerre 1984). My research addressed how they shaped and managed their identities not only in relation to employment but also in the formation of peer groups and in understanding local culture. My

study participants' identities were modified as they learned a new language, new culture, and new ways to sustain a living (Gutierrez 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Mahler 1995; Menjívar 2000). The multiple realities in which they and I found ourselves revealed complex ways in which identity operates in U.S. society. A social order was created based on visual and spatial markers of residential status (immigrant versus native), race and ethnic status (Mexican versus American), and gender status (strong and respectful man versus inexperienced youth or delinquent) that helped distinguish between good and bad worker and between diligent immigrant and mediocre native. The status of these identities varied in every interaction and even according to where one placed oneself on the corner.

The day-labor market thus is embedded in structural conditions, but, as I hope this book shows, it is also grounded in the interactions of the people who participate in it and the constructs (conceptual and symbolic) they use to shape it. Factors such as race, gender, and migration status, to name a few, influenced their perceptions, and opposing identities caused conceptual and practical problems, illustrating that people are not passive, powerless, neutral objects but actors who can bring about change, create knowledge, and contribute to shaping their social world. Compadre's statement quoted in the Introduction, "The people who come here, with one look, they know everything," was the most compelling description I heard of how my study participants perceived their situation. The active labor they performed to negotiate their work and social experiences as they struggled to articulate their place in New York City was invisible not only to casual observers but also to the men who arrived on the corner to offer them work. Fighting for justice for workers and for the poor—whether they are immigrants or citizens—can help to improve the economic and social well-being of all people. But actively organizing U.S.-born and immigrant laborers working in low-wage, low-skill, informal-sector jobs requires bringing the groups together in a meaningful way. This, in turn, means examining the places where they come together to facilitate communication about how they are similarly denied access to their rights as workers and as community members in New York.

Today the United States is facing a moving deadline that may bring about a historic shift in its immigration policies. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was scheduled to be terminated on March 5, 2018, by order of the Trump administration, unless Congress took action to save it. However, thanks to injunctions brought by the U.S. District

Courts in New York and California, which are scheduled for review by the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, renewal applications continued to be accepted well beyond that deadline. By the time this book is published, we should know whether DACA (or an iteration of it) has been saved or incorporated into a larger, more comprehensive immigration-reform package that would extend to individuals like those we met here.

Regardless, efforts are already being made to strengthen law-enforcement agencies' power to arrest, detain, and deport undocumented immigrants. Not a day goes by without reports of people being arrested for immigration violations or families subjected to terrifying forced separations. Equally troubling are the discussions surrounding immigration reform and DACA that reinforce narratives of good and bad, or deserving and undeserving, immigrants (Hanson 2012; Kuehn 2013). Through no fault of their own, adult and youth immigrants are being forced to prove they are neither "undesirable" nor "criminal" and provide evidence of their value to obtain temporary permission to live and work in the United States. The Real Day Laborer narrative that distinguishes some immigrants as good men and good workers, as the day laborers in my study demonstrated, carries little to no value beyond the informal street corner market.

As Edwin, a day laborer who moved to New York from Ecuador, said:

> We do everything—whatever they want, whatever we can. Sometimes the work is dangerous . . . but we are working. I don't want to be poor. They think we are bad, but I want them to know that I am not bad. I am just like him [*he points to a passerby*] and you, too.

For Edwin, as for other participants in my study, it was important to be seen as not "bad" but just like everyone else.

*It's noon, and the men are starting to leave la parada. As I look around, I see Jerome exiting the van that picked him up, along with Luis and another man, that morning. Luis had gotten Jerome the job by convincing the employer that he needed to hire a third man to paint and set tiles. Jerome, grinning, gratefully taps Luis on the back and tells me, confidently: "This will be a good week. I need the money." He is hopeful that he can send money home to his family and help cover his mother's health-care expenses. Meanwhile, Hector asks me whether I can help his friend fill out forms for her son's elementary school. A young man hollers over the noise of a passing local city bus and waves us over.*

*We cross the street and join a group of three Mexican men who have takeout food from the local Chinese restaurant. As I eat an egg roll, the men begin to play a game of "Quarters on the Wall." Hector joins them and tells me that we can visit his friend tomorrow.*

The accounts shared throughout this book illustrate a need to expand our discussions of how immigrants manage in a new society, maintain ties back home, and address their economic *and* social needs in a place that desires their employment and little else. The call to create more workers' centers is crucial; however, local advocates, politicians, and community residents must continue to improve these resources to address the day laborers' reservations about using them. My study participants desired a place that could both dignify and regularize their work experience and provide opportunities to participate in healthy social activities such as cultural events, sports, and holiday celebrations. La parada was serving these functions during my fieldwork, suggesting that public advocates and policy makers need to continue developing formal spaces where these men can congregate openly and demonstrate that they are not "illegal aliens" and are far more than members of the "working poor."

These and other conversations raise questions about how categories such as "rights," "membership," "community," and "citizen" establish boundaries that both include and exclude certain groups of people. A nation that is understood solely as a community of citizens is ultimately limited in its ability to make progress in immigration reform. Those identified as citizens—the insiders whom the nation values, serves, and protects—may hold this status on paper without being substantively recognized through practice and experience. That is the situation the young, American-born black and Puerto Rican day laborers I called "Temps" faced: despite their status as U.S. citizens, they were, in practice, treated as outsiders. They were not only excluded from the ranks of true citizens but also regarded as in conflict with the nation and devalued as a result. Being identified as a noncitizen effectively makes one a nonperson.

The experiences recounted and analyzed throughout this book compel us to move beyond considering how to identify valued members of the nation to expose the artificiality of such categories as "citizen" and "immigrant." The men I spent time with on the corner experienced discrimination and exploitation as they lived on the social and economic margins of U.S. society. Migration and resettlement brought them suffering that was not

seen by passersby and even ignored when it became visible in on-the-job injuries. We have the privilege, and the power, to reshape the contours of our communities within our national borders to embrace citizens and all classifications of noncitizens. The stories I heard reveal that the political struggles underpinning immigration reform go far beyond accounting for the number and character traits of people who may enter the United States and those who may not. In concrete terms, immigration laws regulate how many and which people cross a border. But more substantively, these laws produce unequal and exploitative employment relations among people, as well as dynamics of marginalization and discrimination that extend into the social practices of daily life. To combat this, we need to keep working in local arenas, through social protests and movements, to build coalitions that fight for social justice and human rights so we can create a more effective daily practice of the ideals of citizenship as modeled by this street-corner community.

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. I use pseudonyms for all participants and locales to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. For a thorough discussion of the study's methodology, see Chapter 7.

2. The italicized sections throughout the book are excerpts from narratives produced from my written or audio-recorded field notes.

3. The day-labor market that was the focus of this research specifically refers to street-corner markets in New York City. Although the formal settings of day-labor work are not wholly addressed in this book, I should note that day labor has become increasingly organized by formal organizations though formal temporary help agencies, formal hiring halls, or workers' centers. Last, I am not referring to agencies characterized as day-labor markets that pay laborers by the week; temporary employment agencies that employ people who are in more stable economic positions; or nonprofit companies such as Labor Ready.

4. Abel Valenzuela Jr., Nik Theodore, Edwin Meléndez, and Ana Luz Gonzalez were the principal investigators on a national day-labor study that surveyed 2,660 day laborers in 139 cities in twenty states across the United States. This was the first national survey of day laborers that offered a comprehensive portrait of this labor population and of this particular labor market: see Valenzuela et al. 2006. In 1999, Valenzuela conducted a random sample survey called the "Day Labor Survey" in Southern California. In 2003, Valenzuela and Meléndez replicated this study in New York.

5. When the men talked about looking for work from the street corner, they often described it as going to "la parada" or "la esquina." In this book, I translate both words as "the corner."

6. A master narrative is a sociocultural form of interpretation that is meant to restrict or control local, micro-level understandings. Originally coined as "meta-narrative," the

term was used by Jean-François Lyotard (1984) to examine the Enlightenment as a master narrative of modernity in identifying a stable, functioning knowledge system useful in legitimizing and preserving the status quo with regard to difference. Foucault (1972) similarly argued for the strength and coherence of master narratives in his examination of the discourse surrounding mental illness, sexuality, and punishment.

7. I capitalize the initial letters in the phrase "Real Day Laborer" when I am referring to the master narrative trope.

8. Here, the term "Mexican" includes people of Mexican national origin, as well as other Latinos perceived to be Mexican.

9. A notable exception is the work of Nicholas Walter, Philippe Bourgois, and H. Margarita Loinaz (2004), which broaches these questions by exploring the "embodied social suffering" of immigrant day laborers who face injury, illness, or disability. The authors highlight the central role played by gender in shaping the social and psychological experience of injury.

10. Levitt (2001, 11) describes social remittances as the "ideas, behaviors and social capital that flow from receiving and sending communities." These resources play an important role in the incorporation of immigrants in the receiving society and at the same time shape social, economic and political life in the sending communities in significant ways.

11. A shape-up was a hiring practice in which workers, particularly longshoremen (waterfront or dock workers), gathered to be selected to work for a shift or for the day.

12. In *The Human Marketplace*, Tomás Martinez (1976, 8) writes that there are street corners in American cities where men can come together in locations that are informal and seek work and where employers as well as employees would arrive by car. Martinez quotes from Theodore Thomas Cowgill's master's thesis, "Employment Agencies" (1928, 20), that "as late as 1834 the city fathers of New York proclaimed that a 'place be designated in every market where those who wanted work could meet with those who wanted workers.'"

13. Valenzuela and Meléndez (2003) note that the day-labor population in New York was composed of one-third from Mexico, one-third from the remaining countries in Central America, and the last third from South America. My research illustrates that the majority race, ethnicity, or nationality of day laborers varies at any given site across the city. While driving through the borough of Queens or Brooklyn, one is also likely to see Indian Sikh male and Polish female day laborers on street corners. See LeDuff 2001.

14. Valenzuela and Meléndez carried out the New York Day Labor Survey in 2003, a breakthrough in the progress of analyzing this complex and often inaccessible working population in New York State. And in 1999, Valenzuela conducted the random-sample "Day Labor Survey" in Southern California, a comprehensive survey of 481 day laborers across eighty-seven hiring sites, including forty-five in-depth interviews and ten case studies of the hiring sites.

## CHAPTER 1

1. While there is no precise measure of informal labor activities, the processes that fall under this heading should not be thought of as random and/or isolated in their activity. For more discussion of the analysis of the dynamics of the informal economy, see Sassen and Smith 1991. See also Sassen 1994.

2. It is clear that the focus of this project was on male immigrants. Although race, ethnicity, nationality, residency status, and age were varying characteristics among the day laborers, gender was not. No women looked for work on this corner, although this was not uniform across the city. In articles on day laborers for the *New York Times*, Charlie LeDuff (2001) and Nina Bernstein (2005) wrote about how women looked for work on a street corner in Williamsburg, a neighborhood in South Brooklyn. Again, I raise this distinction to challenge the current discourse that highlights the advantage of studying day labor in New York City, which offers the opportunity to carry out comparative studies of different populations who day-labor.

3. The labor-force participation rate of undocumented immigrants in the New York area is estimated at 5.7 percent (575,000 persons). Unauthorized immigrants made up 5.1 percent of the nation's labor force (Passel and Cohn 2009). Approximately 117,600 workers are either looking for day-labor jobs or employed as day laborers each day (Valenzuela et al. 2006).

4. In documenting field notes on paper and in tape recordings, all participants were given a code consisting of letters and numbers that represents their city or town and country of origin, age, gender, number of years in New York City and years working in casual day labor, and the session date. For instance, BC22M21_071102 represents a session with a twenty-two-year-old man who had immigrated from Buenaventura, Colombia, that took place on July 11, 2002. Moreover, he had lived in New York City for two years and had been working as a casual day laborer for one year. This coding reference system ensures complete anonymity and confidentiality; as the private investigator, I alone have access to the original data. This procedure was approved by an internal review board of human subjects overseeing the "protection of human subjects" in all research projects.

5. A model of key questions and topics guided the interview, but the interview remained open-ended to allow interesting tangents and breaks to be explored. The majority of the men agreed to tape recording of the interview, but some limited me to writing down notes and key responses during the interview.

6. I translated all words, quotations, and interview sections into English. I chose not to italicize the Spanish, in most instances, to avoid normalizing the English text, marking the Spanish, and thus maintaining a U.S.-based class and race hierarchy: see Anzaldúa 1987; Aparicio 1998; Hill 2008; Sanchez 1992; Zentella 1997. While Spanish was the native language for the majority of the participants in this project, I used English whenever appropriate—that is, at the request of the participant or when the participant was proficient in English. I use quotation marks to mark the first mention of a unique identifier (e.g., "Temps") and for participants' direct quotations when they have been transcribed and translated from audio-recorded sessions. I use block quotations for statements that I recorded on paper from memory and audio field notes, paying particular attention to speech detail and phrasing and taking care to preserve the speaker's meaning.

7. While these cases are underreported as a result of undocumented residency status, many studies have concluded that immigrants are considerably less likely to seek out and receive public assistance: see Cornelius 1981; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Jensen 1988; Massey et al. 1987.

8. As Jane Jacobs (1961, 57) found, "The casual public sidewalk life of cities ties directly into other types of public life." See also Anderson 1978; Liebow 1967.

9. "Papers" can refer to legitimate or false documents, such as a passport or driver's license, used to establish legal residency or authorization to work.

10. A coyote is a person who smuggles humans into the United States.

11. "Viejo" in English means "old man." In addition, the term "viejo" was used to describe a man who had a lot of experience or a man who had worked as a day laborer for a long time.

12. Elijah Anderson (1990) examined how nonverbal communication in interactions worked through a lens of race, ethnicity, and color. Much like his observations, my fieldwork illustrated how the interactions of these identity constructs operated in an urban public setting.

13. "Old heads" in Anderson's *StreetWise* (1990) acted as role models for the "young heads" who were young black men. "Old heads" were important figures in the community whose efforts were to instruct and instill values of hard work, family life, respect, and a sense of purpose.

14. All observations and statements were recorded on paper or on tape soon after events at the field site. Most of the men had clearly stated that they would not allow me to use a tape recorder or a camera during our visits, though this changed as I spent more time on the corner. Thus, these places were useful spaces for the immediate recording of field notes following our sessions.

15. The numbers quoted were stated in a personal communication with a staff member of the Asociación Tepeyac. This conversation occurred after a conference held at the City University of New York Graduate Center on September 6, 2002, that addressed the mobilization of the Mexican population in New York City. From the families who came forward, sixty-six persons who had been reported missing were still undeclared, thirty of whom were from Mexico.

16. "La Migra" is a Spanish term for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and its agents. INS, which was established in 1933, was a single agency responsible for legal immigration and enforcement of border and port-of-entry points in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2

1. As noted in the previous chapter, the Regulars were Latino and Eastern European immigrants looking for work at this site who showed up to the corner practically every day. A second group of day laborers, the Temps, showed up at the corners less frequently and were U.S. citizens, mostly young African American or Puerto Rican men.

2. "Hispano" translates as "Hispanic." The label generally refers to people from Latin America who trace a connection, culturally and historically, to Spain. The category is ambiguous in its usage but was the popular label used on the East Coast, mainly among Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, South Americans, and Cubans. For an extensive and rich study of the origins of the Hispanic and Latino category and identity, see Mora 2014. On the corner, "moreno" translated to "black" or "brown." The men used it to refer to anyone they thought was of African descent, and it was used interchangeably with "negro," which translated as "black." The men from Latin American countries comprehended race and color across different categories, such as "moreno," "zambo," or "trigueño." These terms also translated differently in usage across the men. On blackness and racial discourse, see Golash-Boza 2011; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Sue and Golash-Boza 2009.

3. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994, 55) outline "racial formation" as the

"socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed."

4. Cordelia Reimers (1985) conducted an analysis of earnings across different ethnic and racial groups, arguing that a lack of English proficiency was a significant handicap in immigrant participation in the labor market. My fieldwork supports Reimers's findings but also reveals the paradox of native English fluency: see Kasinitz 1992; Stoller 2002; Waldinger 1996; Waters 2001.

5. This is similar to what Philip Kasinitz and Jan Rosenberg (1996) found in their study of employment in a Brooklyn neighborhood with a high concentration of poor people who were also African American. Kasinitz and Rosenberg found that black immigrants were favored over African Americans, and non–Puerto Rican Latinos were favored over Puerto Ricans (Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; see also Newman 1999; Tienda 1989; Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Barbara Reskin and Patricia Roos (1990) also discuss "raters' preferences" as an integral structural property of the labor queue. See also the Devah Pager, Bruce Western, and Bart Bonikowski (2009) study of the substantial racial discrimination in low-wage labor markets in New York.

6. See Katherine Newman's (1999) study of fast-food workers in Harlem, which illustrates ethnic social networks and stereotypes that are useful in excluding workers, especially in favoring immigrants over citizens.

7. In a study of West Indians living in New York City, Kasinitz (1992, 36) wrote about how racial and ethnic identity participated in the political arena in New York City: "Thus while white immigrants stand to gain status by becoming 'Americans'—by assimilating into a higher status group—black immigrants may actually lose social status if they lose their cultural distinctiveness."

8. For a discussion of the implications of race, ethnicity, and skin color in interactions in urban public settings, see Anderson 1990.

9. Señor Delgado migrated from Colombia to New York about two years before I arrived on the corner. While I list his age as twenty-two, it was never clear to me whether this was factual. In an earlier exchange, he told me he was twenty-five, which I noted in my field notes on that day. While an error in recording could explain the discrepancy, other men on the corner told me that Señor Delgado was older than twenty-five. It is not improbable that the men were not fully truthful with me, although I did find in my fieldwork they more often withheld information than misrepresented facts. I explain further in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 3

1. Once more, the words "undocumented" or "unauthorized" are acceptable labels that are used throughout the book when referencing individuals who do not possess an immigrant status that affords legal permission to live and work in a country. The term "illegal" is used only to mark the master narrative that characterizes the legal status of immigrant workers on the corner, which produces the social, economic, and political meanings that shape how we interpret them.

2. The text for Senate Bill 1070 is available at http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf. The text for House Bill 56 is available at http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/acas/searchableinstruments/2011rs/bills/hb56.htm.

3. For a comprehensive examination of this debate, see McCann 2006.

4. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, 8 USCA, §§ 1324a–1324b.

5. This was one of the less frequent opportunities in which I was able to record an exchange with an employer on-site. Most exchanges with employers were captured in my field notes, written or audio recorded, immediately following the exchanges or at the end of my visit. Audio-recorded interviews with employers were with people with whom the men on the corner were familiar, mostly because the men had worked with them more than once.

## CHAPTER 4

1. For a discussion of the private and public lives considered appropriate for men and women in Mexican society, see Gutmann 1996.

2. For an examination of gender as a structure of social practice, see Connell 1995. Also, R. W. Connell's chapter on the masculine body analyzes the masculine body as a symbol of a social practice that refers to what bodies do. That is, gender (masculinity) is generated through social relations and is not determined by biology such that social relations are reduced to the body.

3. "Ser" is the infinitive "to be" in Spanish. The men used the phrase "ser hombre" to mean "to be a man" or "being a man." These translations are used throughout the text.

4. "Bruto" describes a person who is stupid, crude, or a bully. "Malcriado" means "poorly raised"; it describes someone who is ill-mannered or who behaves immaturely, rudely, or badly. On the corner, the term was often used to chastise young adult day laborers when they acted like children.

5. Robert Courtney Smith (2006, 96) writes, "An alternative image of masculinity is that of the modern migrant, who retains elements of ranchero masculinity but pragmatically adapts to the new context where his partner must also work, where the state interferes with ranchero prerogatives such as using violence, and where the man then defends such changes in a revised gender ideology. Men who live this alternative masculinity participate in an ongoing critique of traditional ranchero masculinity; men who embrace the more macho image engage in an ongoing defense of it."

6. I thank Nikki Jones and Lieba Faier for their insights on this particular section concerning the instruction that the men were giving and receiving about making and becoming good workers.

7. Although at times I was uncomfortable, these were opportunities in my fieldwork that provided insight into the men's understandings about relationships between men and women.

8. Like Santiago, many of the men initially reacted with disbelief about my marriage because my actions—specifically, standing in a public space with men—were uncommon for a woman in their culture, especially for a married woman. They also suspected that I was dishonest about my marriage to discourage personal or romantic interest from the men at the site.

9. See the description and significance of the role of "old heads" in Anderson 1990.

10. Matthew Gutmann (1996, 17) describes the production of masculinity as "what men say and do to be men [ser hombre], and not simply what men say and do."

11. Robert Courtney Smith writes, "We must keep in mind that gender relations in the United States offer their own models of male privilege and female subordination and this is

not a context that we can only see and understand in Latin America and Mexico. And there is not a complete break from the old model, either. The combining or selective strategy of accepting/rejecting parts of the model is what stabilizes daily life for many of these men in the U.S." (Smith 2006, 122).

## CHAPTER 5

1. Estimates of the number of undocumented persons living in the United States from 2001 to 2003 ranged from 9.3 million to 9.7 million (Passel and Cohn 2010). An estimated 11.3 million unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States in 2014, approximately 3.5 percent of the nation's population. The number of unauthorized immigrants peaked in 2007 at 12.2 million, when this group made up 4 percent of the U.S. population (Passel and Cohn 2015).

2. U.S. citizens and permanent residents can petition for certain categories of family members. See U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services at https://www.uscis.gov/family.

3. Cecilia Menjívar's study (2000) counters what she considered a problematic assumption about immigrant networks as stable and functional sets of relationships. In being sensitive to ethnic, gender, and generational differences, Menjívar offered a distinctive account of the complex character and workings of this network.

4. James Coleman (1988) explains the eventual productions of social capital from social networks as a function of obligation and trust, which are inherent in relationships.

## CHAPTER 6

1. "Found spaces" are places for which people have created uses that are different from the original formal design and purpose.

2. The urban labor market or day-laboring district was called the yoseba, which means a "place where people are gathered" (Gill 2001: 4, 242). Gill found that the day laborers valued and were attached to the network of relationships they found at the yoseba, which represented an idealized hometown or community.

3. "New" in this context does not necessarily mean that this was the first time the men had come to this corner. In this situation, I describe these men as "new" to indicate that I did not recognize them from my previous visits. Some, such as William, had looked for work on these corners the previous summer, before my fieldwork began, but were not familiar like Santiago, Luis, and Jerome.

4. Emphasis added.

5. The objective of the Latin American Workers Project, which was founded in 1997, is to improve working conditions and secure the civil rights of laborers, particularly low-wage Latino workers. Vincent Gentile was the bill's primary sponsor during his tenure as a state senator. The Latin American Workers Project and Women's Day Laborer Committee also jointly operate a second job center in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, that provides space for Latina, Eastern European, and West Indian women to look for day-labor jobs in domestic service, including child care and house cleaning.

6. Valenzuela and his colleagues found that wage theft was the most common abuse that the men experienced in the day-labor market. Nearly half of all day laborers report-

ed that they had been denied payment, and half of the population reported having been underpaid.

7. I use "free day" to refer to days when the men decided not to look for work, although they spent some of the day on the corner to participate in its socializing aspect.

8. As Reimers (1985) found in her analysis of earnings across different ethnic and racial groups, a lack of English proficiency was a significant handicap in immigrants' participation in the labor market.

9. Though irregular, I scheduled times to meet with one small group of men who gathered at a nearby park to play basketball on Sunday afternoons. Since they met often, they occasionally invited me to join them, and these meetings frequently became impromptu English lessons.

10. The neighborhood surrounding the work site has experienced an increase in the Latino residential population, along with increases among Chinese and Middle Eastern residents. Since one could frequent businesses that catered to a Spanish-speaking clientele, the need to learn English was somewhat offset. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 population statistics, Latinos constituted 19.8 percent of the residential population in Brooklyn (up from 7.2 percent in 1990), while in New York State, Latinos constituted 15.1 percent of the total population (up from 5.5 percent in 1990).

## CHAPTER 7

1. After meeting with the district manager of Community Board Seven, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Human Service Cabinet. The cabinet consists of subcommittees that meet monthly to focus on specific concerns raised by community residents. Currently, the major areas of concentration are education, housing, community resources, and health care.

2. Although the majority of interviews in the men's homes took place inside their apartments, interviews also took place at times in courtyards, on building stoops, and in backyards.

3. From my fieldwork, it was my understanding that the expansion of the work site was, in part, attributed to two major events. The first was an increase in visits from local law enforcement to the work site following September 11. The police instructed the men to "spread out" and refrain from gathering in large groups on the four corners. As a result, the men spread out over the adjacent corners of the nearby intersections. The expansion allowed for more day laborers to look for work at this particular site. I briefly discussed this in a report prepared for the Russell Sage Foundation concerning the social and economic implications of September 11 on undocumented people living in New York City. The report was cited in Nancy Foner's *Wounded City* (2005). At the same time, there was an intensifying conflict among day laborers, local residents, and businesses at a major site in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, which spanned a main avenue of several intersections. Talks were conducted with all parties, including local politicians and advocacy groups—specifically, the Latin American Workers Project, a formal day-labor center in South Brooklyn whose opening also partly explains the growth of the workspace at my field site. Although many of the men left the avenue in Bensonhurst to find work at the center, some men still preferred to seek work opportunities on the street corner and thus traveled to other places in the city. As a result, my site became one of many alternative workspaces for these men.

4. For some engaging research published on this topic, see Burawoy 2003; Duneier 2011; Jerolmack and Murphy 2017; Pattillo (1999) 2013; and Scheper-Hughes 2000.

5. Valenzuela and Meléndez (2003) located two sites in New York City where women looked for work in casual street-corner markets.

6. "Aventura" is a Spanish term used to mean a fling or brief affair.

## CONCLUSION

1. Sassen goes on to explore the trends in the changing types of jobs, growth and declines in the economy, and changing nature of advanced economies to understand the conditions and circumstances that encourage the proliferation of and participation in informal labor activities.

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