

“We’re Just Not Blended Yet”: The Case of Latino Day Labor in Prince William County

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## ABSTRACT

### “WE’RE JUST NOT BLENDED YET”: THE CASE OF LATINO DAY LABOR IN PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

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When communities enact bans or tighten restrictions, and increase the level of enforcement against their local immigrant population, it becomes increasingly risky for immigrant day laborers to make themselves visible in public settings (Claffey 2006; Cleaveland & Pierson 2008; Jonas 2006). This report examines how jornaleros, as legally vulnerable labor market participants and socially marginalized residents of Prince William County (PWC), strive to attract gainful employment and economic advantage for the families they have left behind. The principal research question asks the following: Constrained by their dialectical relationship with anti-immigrant communities, how do we begin to understand the social role that jornaleros play in their struggles to publicly engage juridically private space? Based on my past year of ethnographic fieldwork among both native citizens and immigrant day laborers in PWC, I describe in this paper how the hostility of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiments transitions into active aggression

against Prince William's jornalero community. I then show how these jornaleros, many of whom are undocumented, develop nuanced *tactics* (De Certeau 1984), sometimes working collectively, for balancing the opportunities and threats that their visibility generates within this social context.

## **Introduction**

“I have four years here, but it serves no purpose to be here anymore. I can no longer save money, and so many police are arresting only Hispanics. We come here to build; we come here to get ahead. But the contractors have stopped coming because of the minutemen. The minutemen have taken the jobs from us. Every Saturday, every Tuesday, every Thursday, all the sudden they come with their video cameras. They take videos of us and the contractors. They put it up on the internet and threaten each contractor that comes to pick up undocumented Hispanics. So the majority of contractors don't stop anymore. But what did we do? I speak for myself and for those who come to work. We're here from five in the morning until five in the afternoon. Why do they come against us when for years, for years they have favored the work that we (Latinos) do for them? It's those Minutemen! They have that slogan, “We're going to cleanse Manassas of the Hispanics!” But why?”

Immigrant day laborers, or jornaleros, who are comprised mostly of Latino immigrants, typically gain temporary employment one day at a time by making themselves routinely visible in a well-known and clearly designated public place. These worker areas are known as “Shape-Ups,” and it is within such a setting that jornaleros do exactly that. They shape up, competing with each other to gain the attention, and ultimately the (informal) contract of an employer (Claffey 2006; Valenzuela 2003). These places, shape-ups, are positioned socially—not as neutral areas separated from the political and economic spheres that surround them (Lefebvre 1991). Rather, the divisions of power that are culturally developed in these spheres are symbolically etched, and at times, literally written onto these places by those who are in control. But the possibility that a particular group is in power does not presuppose that the symbolic and/or practical place

meanings, once defined, will remain static and unchanged across time. Contrariwise, ascribing place meanings is often rife with conflict between dominant groups and marginalized populations (Cleaveland and Pierson 2009; Lefebvre 1991; Ruddick 1990). The narrative above captures one day laborer's personal frustration with such conflict and his own experience in it as a jornalero struggling to find work in an anti-immigrant community. This paper seeks to analyze this conflict by grounding it in theoretical conceptions of social space (Cleaveland and Pierson 2009; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2005). Doing so pushes the analysis beyond social activity as an effect of physical geography (Duncan & Savage 1989) in pursuit of the more interesting political and economic landscapes embedded in the material *practices of every day life* (De Certeau 1984).

When communities enact bans or tighten restrictions, and increase the level of enforcement against their local immigrant population, it becomes increasingly risky for immigrant day laborers to make themselves visible in public settings (Claffey 2006; Cleaveland & Pierson 2009; Jonas 2006). I unpack how jornaleros, as legally vulnerable labor market participants and socially marginalized residents of Prince William County (PWC), strive to attract gainful employment and economic advantage for the families they have left behind. In so doing, I pose a variety of questions. First, I examine the methods jornaleros use to navigate the political, cultural, cognitive, and emotional mapping of their own visibility, and ask in what ways do these methods affect competition within the local day labor market? I also examine how these marginalized workers alter the place meanings that dominant actors—property owners, nativist

residents, and county police—seek with impunity to impose upon their working environment? Within these questions we find the principal concern of this paper: Constrained by their dialectical relationship with anti-immigrant communities, how do we begin to understand the social role that jornaleros play in their struggles to publicly engage juridically private space? Based on my past year of ethnographic fieldwork among both native citizens and immigrant day laborers in PWC, I describe in this paper how the hostility of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiments transitions into active aggression against Prince William’s jornalero community. I then show how these jornaleros, many of whom are undocumented, develop nuanced *tactics* (De Certeau 1984), sometimes working collectively, for balancing the opportunities and threats that their visibility generates within this social context.

In teasing out the tactical maneuverings of jornaleros in PWC, I identify some of the main obstacles that prevent workers from collectively crafting their own *strategies* (De Certeau 1984; Ruddick 1990) of political visibility. Such strategies could enable significant challenges (Claffey 2006; Cleaveland 2008) to the anti-immigrant ordinances that consistently threaten to push immigrants out of the local day labor market. Since these local laws generally aim to remove undocumented immigrants from the community altogether, such strategies could also abet social movements in two distinct ways. First, becoming politically visible could push back against the unacceptable criminalization of the undocumented. Second, such a push back—if generally aligned with progressive, organized, labor campaigns—could lend stronger numbers and a more powerful voice to

the quandary of workers throughout the U.S.: all workers are more vulnerable now than at any point since the Roaring 20's and the Great Depression eras.

## **Methodology**

This paper combines fieldwork from two complementary studies conducted from March 2008 through February 2009. Research was carried out with the informed consent of native-born residents of PWC and immigrant day laborers who work within this community. Both studies are grounded in ethnographic methodologies. In the primary study, research was gathered from September 2008 through February 2009. This study provides the bulk of the data for this paper. The data for this study were collected through participant observations, unstructured conversations and semi-structured interviews. Research was carried out on a block where Latino immigrants gather to seek day labor in Prince William County, Virginia. The block lies on the edge of a low-income community of town houses and apartment complexes where workers described paying between \$150 and \$300 USD in rent. The workers could walk from these complexes several blocks through their suburban neighborhood to the near by, one-quarter mile stretch of road that served as their prime gathering place for attaining gainful employment.

Along this stretch of road are various businesses: a convenience store, a fast food restaurant, an abandoned mortgage company, and a gas station. A major highway runs nearby, thus making access to day laborers relatively easy for contractors from other areas. I embedded myself within this community of day laborers, and typically spent up to five hours per day, four days weekly, among the group of all male workers. I was

present as jornaleros waited to be hired and while they were harassed by angry PWC residents. This affords my research a perspective of “knowing with” participants rather than dictating knowledge to others about the research subjects (Tedlock, 2000). Within my first week of field immersion, local police mistook me as a jornalero. Police approached me, laughed as they facetiously accused me of possibly casing an abandoned building, and as they frequently did with day laborers, they demanded that I allow them to take my photograph.

Methodological rigor was attained through the four features of naturalistic inquiry outlined by Lincoln & Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Data credibility addresses how accurately findings reflect participants’ experiences. Participation, observation and continuous cross-referencing of facts with multiple research subjects ensure that the data are credible. Audio taped interviews, field notes, and memos are all utilized to ensure data dependability and confirmability. Transferability is the criterion described to determine if the findings of this study can be applied in other settings (Cleaveland & Kelly 2009). This study used the engagement of researchers at two sites (Cleaveland & Pierson 2009) and familiarity with other sociological studies (Valenzuela 2003; Catanzarite 2003) of day labor in the United States to ensure transferability.

In the complementary study, native-born residents were randomly sampled from a purposefully designated geographic area in Prince William County. The area consisted of three separate yet adjacent neighborhoods. Loosely described, one neighborhood is a high income, exclusive, and newly developed housing complex. The second is a middle-

income neighborhood where many residents have described living in the same home for 35+ years. The third is a traditionally working class neighborhood in transition with a high ratio of immigrant families. Many of these families have arrived within the last decade. Various teams of two researchers walked door-to-door through these neighborhoods to collect the data from residents (n=105) who were then asked a series of questions with the use of an ethno-survey. The entire team of researchers contributed to the development of survey questions, and it was carried out in English only. The questions focused on residents' sentiments regarding rapid changes in their communities, immigrants, and immigration policy. While one researcher entered data directly into the computerized survey, the other researcher wrote extensive field notes, thus capturing direct quotations from the research subjects as well as "subtle expressions of emotion displayed through demeanor and body language" (Walter, Bourgois, & Loinaz 2003). Interviews ranged from periods of 30 to 120 minutes in length. No recording devices were used in this series of interviews. Any names used in the report below are pseudonyms so as to protect the research subjects involved. All research protocols were reviewed and approved by George Mason University's Human Subjects Review Board.

## **The Socio-Political Economy of Latino Immigration**

Prince William County's (PWC) undocumented immigrant question has been and continues to be the most heated sphere of local political debate. Arguments over the effects of local immigration are publicly hashed out in the neighborhood streets, and because of the intensity of this local conflict, Prince William's debate has entered into the national political conversation on unauthorized immigration. However, the immigrant question is also transnational in nature as the decisions reached by local governments here have impacts far beyond U.S. borders. As such, it is important that the context of this research be placed both temporally and spatially, not merely at the local and domestic levels, but where it is actually lodged—in the matrices of global political and economic dynamics. However, to do so risks analytic imprecision, and so as to limit the ambiguity that the term “globalization” often produces, I will guide the spatio-temporal lens downward and across time, from the larger economic and political structures to the actions and effects of real people, real decision makers on the ground who, in fact, create the myriad social interlinks we so often generally refer to as globalization.

While immigration is not a new factor in the development of human history, there remains a central distinction in today's version of immigration as compared to its pre 1970's historical processes (Castles & Miller 2003). It is here in the early 1970's that we begin, nearly four decades ago, in the nascent throes of economic liberalism. The

processes of global economic structuration began to shift dramatically during this decade, and both the economic and political movements that have followed through today (Bello 1999; Harvey 2005) have necessarily meant quantitative as well as qualitative transitions in international and domestic (Massey 2007) migration patterns. The restructuring of the economies of northern industrialized states—a transition from manufacturing to service—created a change in the labour market demands of the North—the need for cheap and flexible labor (Dennis 2009; Castles & Miller 2003). The labor supplies to meet these new demands were centered south of the U.S. border, and the consequential exodus of peoples from the global south to the global north, albeit regulated by northern states politically, has increased the quantities of foreign domestic workers located within the industrialized states.

In 1986 the U.S. signed onto the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Then, in 1994, this economic pact transmogrified into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It is through these politically maneuvered treaties that the capital markets of the United States and Mexico have steadily and rapidly integrated. Research strongly suggests that U.S. political policies, set up to protect American labor and culture from the market distortions of competitive foreign workers, have counterproductively increased net in-migration to the U.S. from Mexico. This has occurred in the form of both documented and undocumented labor. Douglas Massey (2007) noted, “Naturally, these movements of goods and services are accompanied with movements of people, as people are what make markets work.” His point is that commodities are inanimate, and that

capital is merely a function of human socialization. In other words, *working people drive capital flows*, not the other way around.

In his study of Farmingville, NJ, a Long Island suburb resembling Manassas in more ways than one, James E. Claffey more specifically states,

“In the past, immigrants tended to settle first in urban areas, and only after finding their way in the culture and economy, move to the suburbs. Now, however, it is strictly a case of labor following capital. The jobs are here, so are the workers...”  
(Claffey 2006)

However, there are added dimensions to NAFTA’s often noted push-pull dynamic, and I would like to touch on two of them here: the rapid decline of real wages in the domestic labor sector and a potential political shift carried to our country on the backs of a foreign demographic. Over the past few decades, the real wages earned within the domestic labor market have declined precipitously. In part, and somewhat ironically, this downward spiral has been driven by the added competition brought on by new workers (Waldinger 2003) who came to the United States to find better paying jobs. This competition has placed a certain vice grip on the American middle class. Andrea Batista Schlesinger, writing for *The Nation* on Feb. 22, 2007, put it this way:

“The populists got it right that the middle class is increasingly squeezed... So it is natural that American workers would be threatened by a large pool of people who accept jobs that pay peanuts. That is threatening!”

Undocumented immigrant workers have not come here merely as rational, individual decision makers; undocumented workers were convinced to come. They have been brought here through transnational social networks (Levitt 2006) and have been received largely with welcome by the business community—executive boards and small business owners alike. In many cases the business community, or capitalist class, has openly

encouraged and nurtured these social networks. Business owners have actively recruited undocumented immigrant workers (Waldinger 2003), massaging these social networks for all they are worth precisely because the undocumented “accept jobs that pay peanuts.”

In other words, undocumented workers are attractive to business leaders because they make up a highly vulnerable population of workers who, unlike protected and organized domestic labor, can be easily manipulated and coerced into working the dirtiest, most dangerous jobs for incredibly long hours, at comparatively dismal wage rates, and with few to no benefits other than a paycheck (maybe). For most workers, they do all this *and* pay into the social support system that continues to protect domestic entitlement programs, even while they themselves are excluded from many, sometimes all of these protective institutions (Bacon 2008). Undocumented workers have played a vital role in the construction and maintenance of U.S. infrastructure over the past decade. This labor population has constructed our roads and laid down our telecommunications networks. Undocumented immigrants have built our offices and universities, packaged and served our food, maintained our lawns, watched our children, done our laundry, made our beds, and cleaned our toilets.

In return they have rarely demanded those benefits many Americans take for granted as job entitlements. Examples include health care benefits, reasonable breaks, reasonable working hours, and workers’ protections from abusive bosses. Additionally, undocumented peoples have routinely been blocked from social mechanisms of mobility as complicated as earning U.S. university educations and as simple as being able to obtain valid driver’s licenses. The dominant American ideology over the past decade has

been to suggest that all this is appropriate, and that doing otherwise would be the undoing of U.S. society. It is this socially entrenched thought pattern that has facilitated the driving of undocumented peoples into the underclass of American work and community life. These and many other structural roadblocks (Bacon 2008) have pushed undocumented immigrants into the margins of American society.

How has this ideology persisted without challenge? Over the past decade the middle class has become increasingly squeezed and immigrant laborers have worked a whole lot for very little, as both foreign and domestic labor have become all the more exploited. (Bacon 2008, Dennis 2009). At the same time, nativists and populist pundits like Rush Limbaugh have stood up and loudly propagated racist stereotypes, effectively scapegoating immigrant workers by sounding an alarm of depressed wages, and sarcastically asking “what part of illegal don’t they understand?” Simultaneously, the U.S. population has become more stratified, and domestic income and wealth disparities have increased to their highest levels since the 1920’s. According to the Human Development Index (HDI 2008), the U.S.—the wealthiest country in the world—ranks 15<sup>th</sup> among industrialized nations in terms of the well being of its general population. While Middle America’s attention was diverted by oversimplified discourses, its income, wealth, working power and autonomy have all been taken by the wealthiest sector of U.S. society (Dennis 2009).

Embedded in this unprecedented shift in social wealth and power, there is a vision that organized domestic labor has continually failed to recognize. American workers have misunderstood that within their divides, they actually share a large swath of common

ground with immigrant workers. While capitalists have used immigrant workers to bust the organizations and social support systems of the American middle class, both immigrant and American workers are exploited populations. In undocumented immigrants organized U.S. labor finds more than 12 million (Passel 2006) unrecognized voices from countries where working people have become accustomed to fighting for all sorts of rights; countries where leftist movements are either on the rise or have seized power all together. These workers are people from Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, etc. These are more than 12 million potential allies in today's progressive political and economic struggles.

Beyond the hue of moral arguments of immigrant human rights, beyond the color line that divides American labor from immigrant labor, we find a material and democratic cause to mutually and empathetically side with undocumented workers. If these 12 million-plus workers were granted paths to a political voice and able to materially earn their enfranchisement, then the probability that they could be manipulated and strategically maneuvered against political and economic progressives could diminish substantially. Not only would union busters and capitalists looking for a "flexible" labor force lose a powerful weapon, but progressives would also gain an economically powerful political voice.

The impetus to recognize this vision has never been so ripe. Since the late '90s—in order to guard against the cultural effects of the incoming movement of foreign labor—the U.S. Government has increasingly militarized its southern border region, but this attempt to keep out undocumented Latin American immigrants failed. Between the years

of 2000-2005 undocumented immigration increased at a rate of 500,000 persons per year (Passel 2006). Based on this growth rate the undocumented population increased from 8.4 million in 2000 to 12 million by 2006 (Passel 2006). The real latent effect is such that the increased risk in border crossing has led to a decreased frequency in return trips to countries of origin—thus increasing net in-migration.

Due to the consequent saturation of traditional immigrant rich regions, this has also meant a sharp spike in historically irregular Latino migratory patterns throughout the U.S. Before the militarization of the border region, the principal points of destination for Latino immigrants were California, Texas, and Chicago. These points have now proliferated to virtually every region of the country (Massey 2007). Furthermore, the boom in the U.S. housing market from the late 1990's through 2005 added to the specific attraction of suburban areas as new points of destination because many immigrants work in the field of or relating to construction (Claffey 2006, Passel 2006). But the housing bubble has now burst, the construction has come to a stop, and the previously abundant capital has been busted. All of the sudden, Massey's need for cheap labor in a "free market" seems suspect because the jobs referenced above by Claffey are gone. However, the immigrant workers who came to fill those positions—and their political ideologies—are still here, and the question of what to do with these jobless or underemployed peoples remains unanswered as our own domestic labor market is at its worst point since the Great Depression era.

In the analysis that follows, I focus the lens of globalization on the plight of Prince William County, Virginia's immigrant day laborer population in order to show the effects

that the restructured American economy has had on what the dominant public and political discourse has marginalized as the enemy other: illegal aliens. NAFTA and the housing market boom brought more immigrants than ever before to the U.S., did so in an unprecedented amount of time—barely more than a decade—and scattered foreign workers across the land. These factors have brought immigrants to places where they would have never previously come, but the markets have now collapsed, and workers from all trades and all backgrounds are losing their jobs, their incomes, their homes, and their dignity. These are tragedies felt by Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, African Americans, *and* Latin Americans.

The analysis below is primarily one of sociological and grounded theoretical inquiry. This does not detract from the fact that the analysis is also a human narrative of fear and violence, pain and suffering, stinging set backs and tiny victories. The report I present is a case study on the contemporary Latin American day laborer in the United States, as immigrant day laborers represent the quintessential exemplar of what it looks like to be an unprotected worker in a “free trade” America. Day labor has also become the most highly visible symbol in the national debate over undocumented immigration. However, this is not merely the sad story of politically “illegal aliens” struggling just to make ends meet. Rather, I present a shared narrative, a story we can all participate in, and one that has been realized, retold, and relived by our grandparents, by our parents, by our generation, and by so many *others* throughout our American history. This is the story of the larger, more deeply rooted history of conflict between capitalist oppression of

working people and the people who work and bleed and struggle to survive under physically dangerous and emotionally unsympathetic labor conditions every single day.

## Why Prince William County?

The (re)telling of this story finds its roots in the South, not the Global South, but the American South, “Down Where the South Begins”: The Old Dominion, Virginia. While the State's unofficial slogan proclaims, "Virginia is for Lovers," Virginians also know that Virginia means "Business." This is a state that, since the 1990's, has been completely open to a new, globalized, unfettered, and ideologically free market economy. As Dennis (2009) puts it,

“While business influence crested, working Americans were expected to accept the axioms of business competitiveness, cost efficiency, and creative destruction as positive, universal norms. Many did, internalizing their misfortune, blaming themselves, believing that the decisions that corporate executives made would ultimately be for the best.”

Here Dennis cites Americans in general, but his larger thesis argues, “Virginia aggressively advanced this ideology, one that fused political conservatism to a zealous commitment to economic growth through corporate incentives” (Dennis 2009).

In order to institute this pro-business ideology, Virginia utilized the tax structure to create monetary incentives for big corporations like AOL, remained uniformly anti-union with a “well enforced right to work law,” and maintained a “pro-business climate toward major policy issues.” Virginia has even forged powerful alliances between its big businesses and its big universities (George Mason, Virginia Commonwealth, NOVA) in order to insure that its workers are being well trained as “flexible team players.” These

are the qualities—flexibility and team player dispositions—workers need in order to be competitive in the still New Global Economy (Dennis 2009). What more could the fast paced corporate world ask of Virginia?

Northern Virginia (NOVA)—Fairfax, Arlington, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, and Manassas—is the driving political force behind the economic decisions that the state has made. During the 1980’s, Regan’s increased defense spending boosted NOVA’s economic growth as the area won huge defense contracts from the government. NOVA retooled during the 1990’s and led the Southern way, as the “Silicon Dominion” became tech savvy in its quest to be globally competitive. The state’s political leaders and media elites led the call to pass NAFTA and even played pivotal roles in bringing the rest of the South on board with this economic agreement (Dennis 2009).

NOVA’s economy boomed, and the area’s political power increased in tandem. In fact, according to the 2008 American Community Survey, by 2006 all five counties were listed among the richest 20 counties in the country by median household income, with Fairfax and Loudoun counties ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the country respectively. But if all the high-income earners were professionals—tech savvy government contractors, private sector wiz kids, and so on—who did all the hard labor? Who built the infrastructure to support an influx of over a half million new residents and workers? As Michael Dennis (2009) points out, 86% of Fairfax County’s population increase came from Hispanics,

Asians, and African Americans, but it is in Prince William County where the housing market boom, the shift in Latin American migratory patterns, and the current market collapse have hit with the most force. In 1990 the population of “persons of Hispanic origin” who resided within the county was an estimated 9,662 persons. This represented merely 4.5% of the county population. In the 16-year span from 1990 to 2006 that number exploded 183% to an estimated 27,338 persons of Hispanic origin. By 2006, the sheer number of Hispanics residing in PWC had more than tripled, and as a percentage, Hispanics now accounted for nearly one fifth the total county population (PWC Government 2008)

It was also in the period from 2006 to 2007 that the housing market began to unravel, and PWC became NOVA’s poster child for what has since become a global economic meltdown. Houses began to lose value,<sup>1</sup> and owners wise to the diminishing opportunity, sold high while they still could. New owners, who were looking for investment properties, rented out rather than residing in their newly purchased houses. They, of course, rented to people who were looking for affordable, temporary housing, or to people who did not have sufficient capital funds to purchase their own homes. The face of Prince William began to shift—it began to change color—and many long time residents began to get nervous about their single most valued asset: their property. They had good reason to worry because property values continued to tank,<sup>2</sup> and anxious townspeople

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<sup>1</sup> Property value data for specific zip codes where research was conducted reflects a 14.5% and 12% decline over the year 2006-2007 (Housing Outlook 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Property value data for specific zip codes where research was conducted reflects an additional 47.8% and 26.4% decline over the year 2007-2008 (Housing Outlook 2009).

could not sell.<sup>3</sup> While not yet aware that their local difficulties were directly linked to a global economic crisis, PWC's long time residents—a traditionally white population—began to look for the causes of their housing market collapse. In a kind of hysteria, the community got swept up and found its principal scapegoat in, whom else but the newly arrived immigrants. It was immigrants, not overleveraged lending schemes that drove values into the ground.

PWC responded to the drastic population increase—and to the economic recession—by enacting one of the most draconian of all anti-immigrant strategies in the entire country (Singer, Wilson, DeRenzis 2009). In 2005, the City of Manassas attempted to rewrite the legal definition of “family” in order to stop large numbers of Hispanics from overcrowding homes—thus destroying their quaint, Southern country culture. The city's chief building official at the time stated, "What we tried to do is define it in a way that was traditional, to make sure these peripheral people start to be winnowed out" (McCrummen 2005). In October of 2006 the City of Manassas requested that Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) train its officers (Goodman 2006). ICE is that peculiar arm of the Department of Homeland Security charged with enforcing federal immigration policy.

By 2007 pressures began peaking and tensions surrounding the local immigrant question reached their boiling point. It was at this time that County police officers began their partnership with ICE. By July, the County Board of Supervisors unanimously

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<sup>3</sup> Home sales data for specific zip codes where research was conducted reflects 42.4% and 34.5% decline over the year 2005-2006 (Housing Outlook 2007) and a further 62.7% and 44.4% drop during the following 2006-2007 year (Housing Outlook 2008).

passed a general resolution denying county services to undocumented immigrants and “ordering police to take a more vigorous approach in checking immigration status”—details were to be filled within 90 days (Goodman 2007). This anti-immigrant political environment gave momentum to area Hate Groups; as of February 2009, there were 13 known Hate Groups in PWC (SPLC 2009). In late August, under the cover of night, one Hate Group—the Ku Klux Klan—distributed pamphlets calling for a ban on “all non-white immigration.” A Klan official in Arkansas confirmed that residents of Manassas had requested the pamphlets (Goodman 2007).

Finally in October 2007, a hotly debated political move at last drew PWC into the national conversation when the County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously in favor of an ordinance called the “Rule of Law” resolution; locals knew it simply as “The Resolution.” The Resolution mandated two things: it denied public services to undocumented immigrants who were homeless, elderly, or victims of substance abuse. Second, it mandated that anyone—even a person pulled over for a routine traffic violation—could be detained and interrogated if suspected of being in the U.S. without documentation. Suspicion was at the discretion of PWCPD, and an individual who could not prove legal residency was to be remanded to the custody of ICE officers for deportation. One resident of Manassas expressed his support for The Resolution to me this way:

“I am all for *legal* immigration, but we are very anti *illegal aliens!* Meaning I strongly support giving authority to police to check whether or not they belong in this country.”

The language of The Resolution has since been altered to remain within constitutionality, but the force and enforcement of The Resolution continues. Prince William County's intensely draconian measures have gripped its day laborer community.

“We know that the laws are anti-immigrant, the racist laws are too rigorous for us because the police sometimes abuse you with their authority. This includes here at the Convenience Store. They come here daily to run off the workers.”

On another occasion, moments after PWCPD had come to a local convenience store to enforce The Resolution, one worker articulated the following sentiment:

“This is the reason that the majority of we muchachos are terrified (amendretados), because, because of this psychological war that they're attacking us from every side!”

## Strategies, Tactics, and Spatial Conflict

“You believe that the United States is good for work, that the North is good! And so you sell your home and leave your family to come here. And now, look what is lost! Without gaining anything. What’s more, to be here receiving abuse from the authorities, and the vulgarities from the people... And within it, all the Americans that yell at you for being here.”

Like most immigrants, jornaleros in PWC have come to the U.S. to earn more money than they are able to earn in their own countries. They come to provide for their families and put their children through school, mostly in their countries of origin. But upon arrival, many workers find that the lived experience of gathering sufficient resources to balance their own survival with the remittances they must send back to their families is contradictory to the expectations they once held. Virginia is a “right to work” state, but for immigrant workers who lack documentation, even the right to attempt to find work has become criminalized. Jornaleros struggle against the constant aggression of hostile property owners, violent nativist residents, and an often-abusive county police force as they strive to find paid work to feed themselves and their families. Consequently, the gap could not be greater between day laborers’ prior beliefs about the American dream and the realities most workers face when they reach Prince William County. I asked two jornaleros how often they find work. One worker responded, “Two times... nothing and that’s it. And at times, not even one day, like today. It isn’t certain that one is going to work. [pause] No. [pause] One comes for...” “For the adventure!” the other worker

sarcastically interjects with a laugh. The first worker continues, “One has to come to see what there is, but you don’t say that I’m going to work, nor I’m going to the job, noooo. [deep, solemn pause] No, one time a week, at times two, and weeks [he shakes his head] there’s no work for nothing.”

Workers in PWC live on very little, and many live in Section 8 housing near the Shape Up. During better economic times some workers reported living on their own, in small basement apartments, and many reported paying as much as \$300 in rent per month. However, with the current global economic meltdown, jornaleros in this study have begun to downsize. They share smaller, more cramped apartments with up to six other workers in order to reduce rent costs. Some workers now report having cut rent in half by sharing space with more people. Others report going without food to ration funds and sustain housing. Their apartments are barely furnished, scarce of supplies (kitchenware, soap, food), and there are few modern conveniences within them. I was invited into the apartment of some workers and captured the following in a field note:

As I sit in the middle of the living room area, I notice how empty this all is. There is no couch, no recliner, no coffee table. There is only me and I am sitting in a simple fold out chair, an extra that Renaldo pulled out from the corner for me to use. I look at the dining room area, where three other workers are sitting leisurely, in their own fold out chairs, as they watch Spanish language programming on a tiny analog television set. There is no natural light as the blinds are all drawn shut over the windows. The walls are completely bare and unpainted. The only thing hanging is a single portrait. It’s a small, 8x10 print of the “The Last Super,” and it clings neatly to the wall, overlooking the workers at their little eating table.

Workers acquire few resources, and they do so with difficulty and back breaking labor (Nicholas Walter, Philippe Bourgois, H. Margarita Loinaz 2003). But what resources the workers are able to gather—a small, shared shelter in Section 8 housing,

knowledge of the local geographic terrain, and a distant comradeship with other workers—they have learned to mold and creatively bend to their own advantages. This is their daily struggle, manipulating the constraints of their political, cultural, cognitive, and emotional environments in order to remain active in the field of labor. What's more, this very human battle is faced on two fronts: on the one, they must operate within an intensely anti-immigrant political climate, and on the other, these people must somehow find work as the global economy enters all out crisis.

The central meeting point for the workers is the Convenience Store. To the workers, the Store is not merely a grocery market, but it is also a labor market. For all intents and purposes, this store is also a Shape Up. One worker explains,

“Well, for we workers, we meet at the Convenience Store and it's important in respect to all the workers. We wait here, outside... Here, where all the contractors already know that close to the Store one comes to pick up the workers. We can be to the side, we are also on the corner near the Store, like within a block of the Store.”

The workers gather at or near the Convenience Store every morning beginning at approximately 5am. They enter the store early to buy coffee and sandwiches for breakfast. They talk among each other and often with a female clerk who is friendly to them. The jornaleros give her the nick name, “La China.” She is from an Asian ethnic background, but has a strong command of both English and Spanish. The workers report that she is “a very good person” (*muy buena gente*), and that “she cries for us and our problems.”

While the jornaleros have been able to maintain working relationships with some of the Convenience Store clerks, they have constant conflicts with the storeowner, who we will call, Raman.

Worker: “Yes, in reference to the owner. He calls the police here and there. He calls the police because perhaps one or two people are there in front of the Convenience Store.”

As the property owner, Raman is in charge of ensuring the security of the business’s dominant place meaning. For Raman, the Convenience Store is simply that: a convenience store. This is a place where customers come to purchase beer, cigarettes, food, soda, and coffee. Upon the completion of their transaction, customers are supposed to leave the store grounds. Raman has posted “No Loitering” signs all around his property to make his position clear, and at times, when workers stand for too long too near his store front, he calls the police.

Raman, himself an immigrant from India, uses his advantage as the storeowner over and against the workers. Still, this is where the workers come to find employment, and for them, this is a Shape Up as well as a store. Both the constant presence of workers on store grounds, conspicuous by their worker garb and racial background, and the fact that trucks frequently use the Store parking lot to negotiate with and hire jornaleros, act against Raman to blur the ascribed, dominant place meaning of Raman’s business to something between “Convenience Store” and “Shape Up.” As in the following field note, Raman constantly seeks to maintenance the dominant place meaning by chasing jornaleros away as they make their attempt to wait for work.

Raman arrives at the store. It’s another particularly cold and rainy morning. As he walks toward the front door from his car, he takes note of five workers and me,

standing under his building. The workers are trying to keep dry while waiting for a chance at being hired. In a sarcastic and unpleasant tone, Raman yells to us, “You got shelter?!” Ten minutes pass, and he reemerges from within the store. Flinging wide open the door, he thumps out of the store and points at the workers. Raman yells, “You all have to leave right away! A customer just complained, you have to leave now!” Raman claims that Corporate “is tired of their bad press, and *they do not want to be a symbol of illegal immigration. They (day laborers) give us a bad name!*” (emphasis added)

In investigating the role that jornaleros play in this struggle over place meanings, we must interrogate the power relationships between workers and those in control. Raman’s advantage in this struggle, as well the advantage of local nativist citizens and county police, finds its locus in the stability afforded him as the property owner. His actions fall into the category of *strategy*, which is defined by De Certeau (1984) as

“the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as the subject with will and power (a business, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats can be managed.”

While the jornaleros do act against Raman’s dominant place meaning, these ways of acting back ought not to be read as so many forms of resistance. It is important to note that there is no concerted, organized effort by jornaleros to turn the tables. Jornaleros merely seek to remain in the market in order to find work, or in their own words,

“They don’t give you another place to look for work. All human beings need to survive, and this is why we meet here at the Convenience Store.”

"This is an important place for us because here we grab a little job, one or two small jobs a week and we have enough for food, so we can continue to exist.”

“How else can I help my family? So I always come here to look for work. Even though they take my photos and take photos of my passport, it doesn’t matter! I am always going to come here.”

Jornaleros' status as "illegal aliens," ascribed by the nativist community in which they work and live, constantly marks them as a highly vulnerable population. As with most stigmatized and marginalized peoples, PWC's day laborers lack control of, and in this sense are alienated from the places within which they operate. Jornaleros cannot write anti-nativist laws, they cannot call the police when the storeowner verbally abuses them, and they have no advocacy group to guard against the constancy of offensive, degrading, and abusive police sanctions. Still, the workers' life chances depend, quite literally, on how visible they can appear to local contractors. The jornalero's main advantage in creating opportunities to be noticed by contractors, while simultaneously trying to keep under the radar of those who are in control, is not spatial but temporal in form. Instead of etching out their own space, workers rely on time, waiting for space to open up to them while "poaching" on the space controlled by the host community. A transient, fleeting moment here and there is just enough time to create a small opportunity to "grab a little job... enough for food, so we can continue to exist." In following the line of argument put forth by De Certeau (1984), jornaleros work within the arena of *tactics*—rather than *strategies*. In order to define a *tactic*, it is worth quoting De Certeau in some length.

"A *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power... It is a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision," and within enemy territory... It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them... a tactic is an art of the weak."

On one occasion, I was speaking with the storeowner about the workers. Raman says, “Look, I don’t hate them. The problem is that they bother my top clientele. They chase away all my top customers.” In that particular moment I look up and watch as the workers make good tactical use of Raman’s strategic terrain. A vehicle pulls into the parking lot to pick up some workers. Raman continues, “You see, a big truck like this...” Raman raises his hand to point at the Dodge Dakota mid-size pick up truck and goes on,

“It parks here, and they come and jump on it. That scares customers away. And I understand that they buy here also, but then they just throw the trash! We clean up three times a day, and still it’s not enough!”

While in the field, I would frequently take note of litter strewn behind the Store or in the bushes lining the store property. Raman’s frustration with the trash boiled over one day and is captured in the following field note:

...Then out storms Raman, charging straight at us. He begins yelling at the workers about all the trash. Present for hours, I try to calm him by asserting that these men were not at fault for the litter. Raman responds, “No?! Look at this! Come, Come!”... Raman points to all the litter around him. Frustrated, he says to me, “Look! Look at all this mess!” He looks back to the day laborers who are still standing on the curb and says, “Don’t you think I should arrest them for this?!”

Garbage, dirt, and appearing unclean are concerns not only of the Store owner but of the jornaleros as well. This is a concern over which day laborers will, at times, mobilize collectively for a common cause. Even though the workers lack strategic control over the properties upon which they operate, they do exert tactical command over some of the activities within these settings. While Raman seeks to maintain his dominant place meaning, the workers effectively toil to preserve their blurred definition of the same physical space. In so doing, many workers often express concern about the appearance of the property, and as one worker notes, they do so “because we know this is the only place

where we meet for work, and we need to care for it.” Over the course of time of this study, I never recorded a single instance when a day laborer threw trash on the Convenience Store property. However, on numerous occasions, I did observe the jornaleros walking the property, picking up trash, and depositing it in nearby dumpsters. In this way, workers can be seen mobilizing in some collective fashion in an attempt to maintain their more blurred place definition of Shape Up and Convenience Store.

When asked how often he chases workers away, Raman replied, “I tell them to move from here every day.” Generally the workers do leave when Raman asks them to, but they only move as far as they must, and they go no further. Jornaleros manipulate property lines, which are “organized by the law of a foreign power,” and they maneuver through time to navigate the demands that Raman and others make of them—a fact that has not escaped Raman’s attention. In a conversation between Raman and me, I inquire, “I notice that there are very few workers here this morning. Do you know why that is?” Raman responds, “They wait to see my car. If they see it, then they don’t come.” He points to the grassy hill area across the street and explains, “See!? They go over there, but when they see my car go, then immediately they come back.”

I frequently noticed this cat and mouse activity play itself out between Raman and the jornaleros. The workers make effective use of time, shifting from place to place depending on the specific tension that confronts them. In order to jockey pressures placed on them by the Convenience Store owner, the jornaleros will gather early in the morning. Then, not long after Raman arrives, usually between 9am and 11am, the workers tend toward the periphery of Raman’s store property, or depart altogether to some other

nearby property. Often Raman will leave the Store in the early afternoon, and at times he does not return until the next day. Between 1:30 and 2:00pm, the workers will slowly recentralize themselves at the Convenience Store in order to make a final push to be noticed by potential employers. In the winter months, they call it quits around 4pm, but the summer affords longer, warmer days, and so many workers stay out until 6 or 6:30pm before they decide to head home. This schedule is kept with general rigor, and it reflects the workers tactical utilization of time to manipulate physical territories over which they lack strategic control.

## **The Strategic Violence of White Power**

Raman is by far not the workers' only problem. The influx of immigrants into PWC and the decline in economic standards have been met with community wide anti-immigrant sentiments. When questioned about racial tensions in the community, one resident states, "You definitely can talk to your neighbors and they're very concerned about how the neighborhood has gone. We feel forced out!" By "we" the resident means what "used to be a middle class working neighborhood." Another resident adds, "In all of Manassas there's this tension. You can't escape it. We don't mean it, but," the resident pauses for a moment in apparent exasperation, "but I'm tired! Our social system is being dragged down. These things rub me the wrong way because I pay my way. I work hard!" A third resident simply claims, "Minorities don't fit in here. We're just not blended yet."

We're just not blended yet? On the face, such ideas seem unacceptably racist, but respondents were not shy with their comments. So it is entirely inaccurate to believe that these sentiments are deplorable by anybody living in today's world. Some people, some groups, and some media outlets do find these responses to be perfectly normal and acceptable. In Prince William County, these sentiments dominate political and community life. Here I begin to piece together the propagation of racism with the violent actions nativists take against their day laborer community.

Populist pundits, such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, tend to fan nativist sentiments with dubious and at times nefarious reporting that reaches national audiences. However, while obvious, the right wing media outlets are not the only anti-immigrant game in town. The group Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) tries to hold media accountable for unreliable and slanted journalism, and in a 2006 "Action Alert" FAIR pointed to CNN's Lou Dobbs and Jack Cafferty as two leading members of the media who are constantly adding fuel to the populist, and increasingly popular, middle class, anti-immigrant fire. Dobbs is quoted as stating, "The invasion of illegal aliens is threatening the health of many Americans." He also commented,

“...they actually keep a registry of cases of leprosy. And the fact that it rose was because -- one assumes -- because we don't know for sure -- but two basic influences -- unscreened illegal immigrants coming into this country...”

Compare Dobbs's statement with this field note:

The respondent's greatest worry is disease control, which he links to immigration. He cites leprosy as increasing in incidence from 30 to 700 cases in the U.S. He does not state a time frame or any alternative explanation for the increase. He does state that it is a problem of unsecure borders.

Meanwhile, Jack Cafferty, is quoted in response to the peaceful national marches for immigrant rights of 2006:

“March through our streets and demand your rights. Excuse me? You have no rights here, and that includes the right to tie up our towns and cities and block our streets...pull the buses up and start asking these people to show their green cards.... And the ones that don't have them, put them on the buses and send them home.”

Compare Cafferty's widely aired statement with the following response given by a PWC resident when asked: what should be done about immigration into the United States?

“When you catch an illegal alien, you take everything they own, sell it, then use

the money to buy their plane ticket back. They'll get legal the next time!"

There is no coincidence in the resemblance between the media statements and the anti-immigrant sentiments above. Such populist pundits are widely aired on television, radio and Internet. Their viewers are national and include people in Prince William County.

These racist sentiments are reflected over and over again in the anti-immigrant statements made by area residents. When asked about the principal drawbacks of living in this community, nativist residents state:

"The ethnic groups that are living here have changed. The crime rate is high now versus even 5 years ago. I would feel comfortable when my children were small. Not any more!"

"I'm not a type to confront people. I tried to talk to a guy, he didn't speak English! I went "Bah!" (with a wave of both his hands), and walked away!"

"The housing gone down, school gone down, crime rate up, and basically just a different group of people living here. We've finally hit bottom!"

"I loved it, but I hate it now! We had a community and a railroad and now it's all changed. There's a lot of shady characters walking around, you know? And I have a lot of photos of them!"

Area residents report feeling "more bitter. I feel like we're the minority!" Other residents report that "they're very concerned about how the neighborhood has gone. We feel forced out!" These sentiments escape the reality that 80% of the community is native born (PWC Government 2008). However, what these sentiments do capture are growing fears of the constructed "other," Latin Americans as "illegal aliens."

As I note above, the encroachment of the other has indeed been rapid, and the racism and nativism so openly expressed here by residents of PWC, often translates into taking direct action against the jornaleros at the Convenience Store. These actions take various

forms, but all involve finding creative ways to torment and abuse the day laborer population. While in the field on one occasion, I observed a black S.U.V. slowly drive by, stalking the jornaleros as they waited for work at the Convenience Store.

The windows of the vehicle are rolled down. Both occupants are female and the passenger pulled out a camera. She begins taking photos of the workers while the other female laughs from her driver seat. The workers have all become nervous and are signaling each other with screeching loud whistles and shouts about what is taking place. The vehicle has turned around at the intersection, and the driver is making another pass as both occupants laugh at the noticeably anxious jornaleros.

Nativists often come to the convenience store to harass and frighten the workers. They bring their photography and video cameras and take pictures of the workers. As is illustrated above, they think it is funny when workers show emotional signs of disruption like fear, anger, and anxiety. To directly obstruct workers life chances, nativists take videos of contractors who try to hire workers. As it is a crime to knowingly hire undocumented peoples, they threaten to turn the videos and photos over to authorities. Many of these videos are then uploaded onto video share websites like YouTube and can be viewed within an instant.

When nativists threaten potential employers, workers are the people who pay the price of the contractors' criminalization because in the face of such threats, contractors simply stop coming. The work dries up, and jornaleros are left out in the cold to struggle to find some way to pay rent and buy food. In order to pay rent, some workers report borrowing money from other people. As well, growing numbers of workers report going without meals stating, "We survive by the good nature of other people." This worker references the packages and money that charity groups and individuals infrequently stop and give to the workers.

Jornaleros remain highly alert of possible confrontations with nativists precisely because of the risks they bring to workers' life chances. Some day laborers take notes on problematic vehicles, while others jot down descriptions of nativist residents to share with fellow workers. One vigilant jornalero reports,

“I always notice the movements of those who call the police, and I even have two or more license plate numbers of some of those people—those who condemn us and come to take videos.”

Still, taking notes and jotting down descriptions appears to be false security when confronted by the manifold devices nativists utilize to torment workers. Another method that nativist residents have developed in order to harass the day labor community is to come to the store, purchase some goods, and upon leaving, simply call the police. Police report that the calls are anonymous, and that the callers generally claim day laborers are causing problems at the Store. I capture one such confrontation between a nativist resident and the jornaleros in the following field note:

A woman—5'3", elderly, and Caucasian with dark, short, and curled hair—approaches the Convenience Store from the southwest intersection. Worker conversation dies as she approaches. She passes by us without a word. Banter resumes. Before she enters the store, she pauses to complain about the day laborers to the Sherriff, who is getting his morning coffee. The Sherriff does nothing... Some time has passed, maybe 5 minutes. The lady comes back out of the store and has again walked passed us toward the direction from where she first came. Only a few yards from us she pulls out her cell phone and places a call. She looks back at us and takes a head count. We all suspect that she has called the police... Most workers decide to leave. Five minutes pass, and a county police cruiser comes racing around the north east corner of the intersection, headed straight in our direction.

As is illustrated above, workers often respond to possible confrontations with nativist residents by silencing themselves. Again, based on time, they only silence themselves as long as it takes for a resident to pass by. As soon as is socially acceptable, normal

conversation starts back up. However, when silencing is not enough to stop provocation of nativist residents, workers take more evasive action and leave the Convenience Store altogether. Generally they scatter to various areas, and not as a group. They don't run, they walk because they do not want to give the appearance that they have done something wrong. In the incident above, I notice some workers move to the Gas Station across the road. Others walk up the street to the grassy hill area—what workers refer to as “la montaña.” Still, many others go a bit further away to the public sidewalk area of the Northeast intersection. Here, jornaleros generally find some comfort in the parking lot of their Section 8 housing complex, although this space is also quickly being encroached upon by “no trespassing” and “no loitering” signs—effective mechanisms of worker surveillance, policing, harassment, spatial and social control. If any real trouble appears, usually in the form of police aggression, these workers disappear into the shadows of their own shared apartments. In a couple hours or even the next day, when conditions improve and the risks of visibility decrease, workers reemerge so as to make themselves again noticeable to los contratistas, the contractors who seek their services.

## Los Rótalos

Over the course of this study, I observed and participated in many examples of workers tactically maneuvering around the commands of P.W.C. police officers. Early on in the investigation, I realized that the Convenience Store is not the only place where workers stand to make themselves noticeable to potential employers. In their hunt for jobs, day laborers often position themselves in various geographic areas along the quarter mile stretch of road near their housing. Various businesses and properties exist on this stretch of road: a convenience store, a fast food restaurant, an abandoned mortgage company, a gas station and an area known to workers as “la montaña.” I documented the jornaleros standing at all these sites. Also in the initial stages of this study, when police ran workers off one of these properties, the workers would wisely shift to the temporary safety of a different property because it had temporally different juridical or legal standing.

...Pointing to the abandoned mortgage company, the officer says, “You gotta stay off this property.” The second officer says, “If (Convenience Store) doesn’t care, they don’t mind you being here, that’s fine with us. You can’t be on the property from here over. OK?” I again said, “This side of the yellow line then?” With a wave of his hand, the first officer says, “Unless they come out (of the store) and say something.” I yell over to the workers who were still standing around the disposal. I tell them to move over a couple feet onto the other side of the yellow curb (property line). Another worker helps me direct them as to where to go.

This tactic was generally successful in provisionally deflecting police threats.

Officer: “You see that sign there, “No Trespassing?” That means everybody can get arrested right now for standing here!”

If workers are arrested then it’s a one-way ticket home via federal prison. The way current laws are written, it also means they have no chance of ever becoming legal residents. However, if day laborers stand over here, “this side of the yellow line,” then waiting for work becomes momentarily acceptable to police—at least until “they,” nativist residents or the store owner, “come out...and say something.”

In the end, each property followed suit with the Convenience Store and little by little, began erecting nice, shiny, red and white “No Loitering” and “No Trespassing” signs. In August, 2008 the abandoned mortgage company put up No Trespassing signs. The owner of La montaña erected temporary, then permanent signs in October. In February 2009, even the Section 8 housing community erected their own no loitering signs against the workers, on whom they rely for monthly rent incomes. Each attempt to publicly mark these juridically private properties is another strategic act in the struggle to maintain dominant place meanings over the areas where jornaleros subversively seek daily employment.

Police are constantly called to these properties to enforce no trespassing and no loitering signs. One morning, while drinking coffee and speaking with a worker, I was mistaken for a day laborer.

...Then the officer began to speak. He said, “Let’s go!” His voice was calm and controlled, yet direct and authoritative. My worker friend and I look at each other. I look back at the officer, and before I have a chance to speak, he says, “Vamos de aquí!” At this point I realize the officer thinks I too am one of the workers.

Normally workers acquiesce to immediate demands police make of them. However, I respond differently, “Why is it that we have to leave?” The officer, apparently surprised by a response articulated in English, pauses and only replies after some hesitation. He points and says, “The sign, there’s no loitering.”

Researcher: “I’m sorry, how does the law define loitering exactly?”

Officer: “Standing in such a way as to block normal traffic of an establishment.”

Researcher: “Well, clearly as we were leaning against the building, away from the door and not in the middle of the walkway, neither myself nor my companion was blocking any traffic.”

Officer: “It’s also whenever an officer of the law tells you that you have to leave.”

None of the store owner’s or residents’ activities would carry much weight against the day laborers were they not backed by an often utilized threat of force. Known as los rOTALos to the workers (literally - signs that say turn around), these signs are the manifestations of the division of power that exists between jornaleros and proprietary actors. They are symbolic markers of dominance physically inscribed onto the places where workers seek employment, and serve to constantly remind jornaleros of who is (and who is not) in control. Los rOTALos give moral authority to property owners and nativist residents who call the police, and to the police, these No Loitering/ No Trespassing signs grant the legal authority to badger, harass, and abuse workers until workers have no choice but to leave. As the police articulate, this authority comes with considerable discretion: “It’s also whenever an officer of the law tells you that you have to leave.” Because of these signs and local proprietary laws, Raman and nativist residents are effectively able to leverage the PWCPD to harass and terrorize workers. One worker recounts his experience:

“What happened was that the lieutenant had a black car. And the squad cars parked like this [Javier makes an expression to show that the police blocked off all exits with three different cruisers] and he says “No moving!” I was here on the yellow line [yellow painted curb separating properties] and we all sat their—some 13, 14 people. And one by one they asked us for our documents, and names, addresses where we live, and cell phone numbers or beepers. So, we gave them our information and just like they had asked for our info they then took our photos. We were then sent home [with the warning], “The next time we come and we find you here, we’re going to arrest you all... Now we have your photos. We will arrest you.”

At times, police need not even exit the vehicle in order to make workers leave.

The Police have come two times today. The first patruya (squad car) came at around 7am. The second came at roughly 9am. There were no direct confrontations between the workers and police. On both occasions, the police never even exited their vehicles. They just sat in surveillance of the area for roughly 5 to 10 minutes. The first time the workers left the area with no other hint given by police. The second time, the officer gave a wave of his hand from inside the patruya to signal the workers to move it along. This is the reason, compounded by the inclement weather, that there are now few workers at the site today.

The principal aim of a day laborer is to make himself visible and appear attractive to contractors in order to gain employment, but this ongoing strategy of intimidation—performed by proprietary actors, nativists, and police in order to maintain dominant place meanings and rout the undocumented from the community—exerts unimaginable pressures on these people. These strategies utilize countless mechanisms of worker terrorism, and they bring very real and very heavy material costs for the workers who might only be able to find one or two jobs a week. When police make raids on the shape up, jornaleros are forced to leave the area, forced to disappear, effectively removing themselves from the day labor market. The life chances of the day laborers are sharply undercut because police disruptions constantly deny them opportunities to gain already scarce supplies of income.

## **Roadblocks to Collective Action**

The day laborers and I would often speak of workers organizing and mutual cooperation between jornaleros as ideas to help stem the negative effects that local nativism and police harassment have on employment opportunities. One worker states, “There’s no organization, that’s where power comes from.” The data points to some basic conclusions in culling the question: What are the roadblocks to organizing worker strategies of visibility and collective action? First, and as I have argued elsewhere (Cleaveland and Pierson 2009), marginalized workers need stability and advocacy in order to ground any strategic work or push-back against dominant actor interventions. Jornaleros in Prince William lack these two forms of social capital. On the first point, there is no legitimate worker center or shape up where day laborers are permitted to wait for work without harassment and abuse from local nativist residents and county police. As to the later, many successfully organized day laborer populations (Fine 2006) have been able to leverage resilient and resourceful English-speaking activist groups to champion their cause. This type of advocacy is nonexistent here in Prince William County.

Secondly, though more telling of the effects of protectionless work life, the workers present themselves as roadblocks to building more strategic initiatives. While some normative actions do result in a form of collective cooperation between workers, in the

absence of stable waiting grounds and advocate resources, quotidian labor activity is largely marked by aggressive, individual competition. I captured one example of these competitive tactics in the following field note:

A man showed up to the Convenience Store. He was older, long gray hair. He said that he was looking for somebody who spoke English. One worker spoke in heavily accented English proclaiming, "I speak." Because the job was not for a couple of days, the employer asked for the worker's cell phone number. The worker had no cell phone. The employer said that he could not use him, but would if he had a phone. Still, the employer gave the worker a stack of business cards. Later, after the employer had left, another worker asked the man for one of the business cards. I waited in silence to see if the worker would give up one of the cards or keep them all. Then the worker smiled slyly. He shook his head and said, "No! I don't have any." Then he quickly laughed. Finally, still looking at me, he said in English, "This job is mine. I'll get a cell phone, then call him. No, this job is all mine! \$12.50 an hour! No."

On another occasion I observed the following:

A moving truck just pulled up. Dodging oncoming traffic from both directions, two workers sprinted across the road, toward the truck. Both workers darted to the passenger side. One worker managed to jockey himself closer to the door than the other man. This allowed the first worker to grab the door handle. Using his body to block, the first worker then jumped up into the truck with little difficulty. It appeared as if the other worker was going to make it in also, but the first worker shut the door on him. So worker two was forced to back off. He slowly walked back to the group waiting under a tree.

Far from mutual cooperation and collective action, the effects of such driven competitiveness are mutual suspicion and distrust between workers. Neither of these characteristics cultivates fertile ground for counter strategy development. One worker articulates these sentiments as he recounts the following experience:

"Between us, as you can see, there's no trust. There is no trust because of the example I was telling you. I say to this guy, "Look, there's an American that gave me his telephone number so I can talk with him on the day. Do me a favor and call him because I try and the phone that I have, the area code 571 doesn't work." I have to call with a phone card and I don't have any phone cards. So, as he has a cell phone with a national plan... in the moment he does me this favor, he dials

the number, and the phone accepts it, but nobody answers, right? So afterward he says to me, "Look, nobody picked up." Right? "A recording answered." And me, like a dummy, I forget a little, and what's he do? He calls the number that I gave him, and there he goes and steals the job! There I was asking him for a favor, and he's taking advantage of the trust I placed in him. And here, nearly everybody is like this. Almost everyone!"

## Beyond Fear and Tragedy

We began this analysis with a fatigued and frustrated day laborer asking one simple question: “But what did we do?” While perhaps unaware of the consequences of their actions, the presence and daily activity of jornaleros have directly challenged the dominant place meanings of their host communities. In the process, workers have assaulted the culturally engrained political and economic symbols of the nativist population. As a result, a simple convenience store has become a front line of a transnational culture war, and the costs of this war are indeed high for the entrenched workers who engage its battles. Their everyday lives have become laden with volatility, intolerance, and fierce conflict.

- Researcher: I don't believe people know what takes place out here.  
Worker 1 : That's because they don't come out to ask, they don't bother to visit us. They're giving a bad name to Hispanics, that's the thing. These Minutemen are always giving us a bad name.  
Worker 2 : It's racism.  
Worker 1 : It's like in Pennsylvania. They say they killed a worker up there.  
Researcher: Near Hazleton?  
Worker 1 : Yea! Just for being Hispanic.  
Worker 2 : And the police are always beating Hispanics. Sometimes people get killed, too. On the television, they had one there and they put him down on the ground. He was handcuffed and the abusers (police) that caught him watched as the other cops beat him. Here too they tackled a guy, and the police—BAH! BAH! BAH! [sound of police beating a person] We have so many demands—the police always, the Minutemen, racists! “White Power! Poder Blanco!” They drive by here in their trucks.  
Researcher: What do they do?

- Worker 1 : They shout at us, all angry with their Confederate flags.  
Researcher: And are you guys afraid of these people?  
Worker 1 : Of course! Because this is what they do! [Hypothetically] We'll be a group standing there and BRRRRRR!! [He imitates the motion and sound of an automatic rifle gunning down a group of workers]  
Worker 2 : They're the ones (nativists) who provoke the authorities against us here in the streets.

Even within this conflict, jornaleros try to carve out any space they can from which to wait safely for underpaid work, but to the jornaleros here, nothing is truly safe. These men grapple for every scrap of food they can afford, and they labor under back breaking conditions for every penny they earn. Because they do not earn much and much of what they earn is sent to their families, workers live with very little. They also live in constant fear—"This is the reason that the majority of we muchachos are terrified..."—that anti-immigrant sentiments might one day transgress the lines of mere harassment and transmute into armed nativist violence. Prince William County harbors 13 different Hate Groups (SPLC 2009), and some, like Help Save Manassas, have made direct targets of the county's immigrant population, which is overwhelmingly comprised of Latinos. So for these jornaleros, and for those people who work in similar anti-immigrant communities, this is a legitimate fear to have. (Claffey 2006; A.P. Jul. 2008; A.P. Nov. 2008)

Added all up, day laborers' work lives are fraught with instability, volatility, and insecurity. They lack legitimate staging grounds to prospect for work without harassment and perhaps begin to develop community based narratives and strategies of collective action. Without the resources that native advocacy groups are able to bring to the table, it is unlikely that workers will be able to actively mobilize to etch out legitimate space to

call their own. The result of the instability in day laborers' work lives does translate into volatility in their working relationships with each other.

“We're not OK with the situation. It's difficult. But there is also a problem that we're not all conscious (as a group). This one has a work permit, that one knows English, and still this other sees better or is younger! We're so divided. It would be different if we could all unite, and we all became reflexive of actual needs.”

Workers do mobilize in small-scale ways such as to clean litter from the store grounds. However there is no larger strategy or politics of visibility with which to place a human face on a social tragedy labeled as “illegal.” Instead of developing collective strategies of visibility, workers spend their time either tactically maneuvering around hostile nativists and police or engaging competition with each other for scarce employment opportunities. Jornaleros, who are highly constrained to the point of being squeezed by this ongoing cycle, frequently utilize cut throat tactics to challenge and weaken each other within the local day labor market. Workers take advantage of any immediate opportunity that might represent a shot at a paid job, even if this opportunity comes at the cost of their fellow day laborers. Of course, the system is strategically tilted to the disadvantage of workers, and the predictably patterned chaos of every day experience coerces jornaleros into taking such actions. But herein lies the workers' tragedy: every time one worker takes advantage of another worker, all day laborers suffer. By playing the market in such a cynical way, jornaleros in P.W.C. actively contribute to the cyclical culture of violence that constitutes the habitual practice of their everyday lives.

However, one must battle against the idea that this is *their* problem. Workers from the entire landscape of this country—citizen and immigrant, authorized and undocumented—

face these same basic dynamics of competition, distrust, vulnerability, and persecution. Day labor was once the province of Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and African Americans; all these groups are tied to Latin Americans by a shared history of oppression, struggle, and small and large political and economic victories. If caught without proper documentation, African Americans in the antebellum period were rounded up and incarcerated back into the system of chattel slavery. They were separated from their homes, their friends, and their families for—among other things—lack of a piece of paper. This was a practice within a system that now evokes viscerally nauseating reactions from much of contemporary Western society. It is not difficult to make the jump from this historical inhumanity to that suffered by today’s highly vulnerable population of undocumented immigrant workers. Like their historical predecessors, Latin American day laborers—and undocumented immigrants in general—are *people* who have been dislocated by the structural shifts of the global political economy. Jornaleros without documentation are *human beings* who have been denied political rights and legitimacy within their host country—the United States—whose economic and political policies are directly related to the very causes of their dislocation. Jornaleros are *workers* who have been marginalized and stigmatized by national policy, by right wing ideology, and by openly racist nativism. Like African Americans of the antebellum period, if caught by ICE, mothers are separated from children, husbands from wives; they are taken from their friends, and in many cases from their homes. Some undocumented immigrants are carted back to their countries of origin, but many are simply thrown in jail; here the cycle of violence is perpetrated even further (Bernstein 2009).

Undocumented immigrants are working human beings. The people who took part in this study are representative of a growing underclass of workers that is vulnerable to the manipulations of employers, aggressive citizens, and police brutality. However, the workers in this study also exemplify a human resiliency to find ways to struggle through dangerous political and economic environments to accomplish even small things against unimaginable odds. These jornaleros have developed nuanced tactics that take advantage of time in order to manipulate hostile and fear invoking socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic environments. The othered presence and actions of day laborers play off the cultural-spatial norms and power structures of long established peoples. This “playing off” acts on and alters the place meanings set by the host community. Here a store becomes a workers’ waiting center as well as a pick-up-and-drop stop for employers. To nativists, this represents an assault on their cultural, juridical, and economic spaces. Thus a simple convenience store further becomes one of the various front lines of a growing cultural, political, and economic conflict between nativist communities and immigrant populations across the country.

Within this social context we begin to understand jornaleros as both representatives and representations of emerging cultures that, under certain spatio-temporal conditions, may (or may not) come into direct, antagonistic conflict with host communities. For now, Prince William County’s emerging jornalero culture continues to limp forward, but the municipality’s current social conditions are such that this culture’s future is tenuous. The county’s day laborer population has dwindled under the constant attacks I capture in this document. Some evidence suggests that workers are moving to nearby counties with safer

political-economic conditions such as Fairfax and Arlington. Workers also report leaving for proximate states in the Carolinas, Maryland, and even as far as Ohio. The official path taken by Prince William County has not been economically or politically beneficial to its residents (Singer, Wilson, DeRenzis 2009). Foreclosure rates are among the highest in the country, and both native and immigrant populations describe a poorer quality of life. Should more creative and positive alternatives to meet these difficult circumstances continue to be neglected in other communities, Prince William County's nativist trend will continue to grow nationwide. Host communities, day laborers, and larger immigrant populations will increasingly suffer in such a scenario, but futures are not inevitable, and it is possible that such communities will begin to work together to stem the violence and conflict that Prince William's current social circumstances have come to represent.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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