

# Organizing Lessons

## The Taking Freedom Series

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Edited by José Calderón and Victor Narro

Freedom is not something that anybody can be given. Freedom is something people take, and people are as free as they want to be.

—James Baldwin

# Organizing Lessons

## Immigrant Attacks and Resistance!

EDITED BY

José Calderón

Pitzer College

and

Victor Narro

UCLA Labor Center



Published in  
association with SEIU

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## ABOUT US

### SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) unites two million diverse members in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. SEIU members working in the healthcare industry, in the public sector, and in property services believe in the power of joining together on the job to win higher wages and benefits and to create better communities while fighting for a more just society and economy that works for all of us, not just corporations and the wealthy. SEIU members believe that there can be no economic justice without racial justice, and SEIU's Racial Justice Center drives the union's anti-racist agenda and supports its commitment to become an anti-racist organization. Visit [www.seiu.org](http://www.seiu.org) to learn more.

### CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES

The CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies (SLU) is the University's newest School and the only interdisciplinary program in Labor and Urban Studies in the nation. We are committed to preparing students for leadership in public service and social advocacy and to providing opportunities for career advancement and economic security.

With undergraduate and graduate degree and certificate programs in Labor and Urban Studies, SLU offers students opportunities to examine the world of work and workers from the perspective of diverse, working-class communities. Its curriculum includes economics, history, politics, and research methods as well as

theoretical and practical courses in labor and community organizing and administration. With monthly forums and conferences, SLU is a hub of activity for labor and community advocates who work toward social change.

SLU is a School for students who want to put their commitment to social justice into practice. Our students work in unions, municipal agencies, and government. Our faculty includes world-class scholars and expert practitioners in labor, non-profit institutions, and government.

## MIT COLAB

The Community Innovators Lab (CoLab) is a center for planning and development within the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP). CoLab supports the development and use of knowledge from excluded communities to deepen civic engagement, improve community practice, inform policy, mobilize community assets, and generate shared wealth. We believe that community knowledge can drive powerful innovation and can help make markets an arena for supporting social justice. CoLab facilitates the interchange of knowledge and resources between MIT and community organizations. We engage students to be practitioners of this approach to community change and sustainability.

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

**José Zapata Calderón** is emeritus professor in sociology and Chicano/a Latino/a Studies at Pitzer College and president of the Latino and Latina Roundtable of the San Gabriel and Pomona Valley. He received an AA from Northeastern Jr. College, a BA from the University of Colorado, and a PhD in sociology from UCLA. As the son of immigrant farm workers from Mexico, he has had a long history of connecting his organizing and academic work with community-based teaching, participatory action research, and critical pedagogy. As a professor at Pitzer College and a community organizer in the Inland Empire region, he has advanced the building of community-based leadership in the defense of immigrant and education rights and the building of multiracial coalitions. From 2013–2015, he served a two-year term as a board member of the Los Angeles County Board of Education and presently serves on the College For All Coalition, Coalition for a Better Los Angeles, the Pomona Covid-19 Action Committee, and the People's Think Tank. He was one of the national founders of the URBAN-Based Research Action Network and the American Sociology Association Latino and Latina Studies Section.

**Victor Narro** is a nationally known expert on immigrant rights and low-wage workers; he has been involved with immigrant rights and labor issues for over 35 years. Currently project director for the UCLA Labor Center, Victor's focus is to provide leadership programs for Los Angeles's immigrant workers; policy, legal, and organizing campaign planning for unions and worker centers; and internship opportunities for UCLA students. Victor is core faculty for the Labor Studies Program at UCLA and core faculty for the Public Interest Law Program and lecturer in law for the Critical

Race Studies Program at UCLA Law School. Victor was formerly the co-executive director of Sweatshop Watch. Prior to that, he was the Workers' Rights Project director for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA). Before his tenure at CHIRLA, Victor worked in the Los Angeles Regional Office of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF).

## TAKING FREEDOM SERIES INTRODUCTION

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In early 2017, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) commissioned the MIT Community Innovators Lab (CoLab) to scan the United States and identify local community organizations standing up on a range of social justice issues amid the nation's growing climate of intolerance. Over a period of thirty days, CoLab found more than 1,100 organizations working in more than 250 cities on issues ranging from economic justice and the Fight for \$15 to attacks on immigrant communities, police violence, environmental justice, and Islamophobia. Most of the organizations were grassroots, headed by people who themselves were directly affected by the issues they address, with a focus on people-of-color leadership. In talking with these organizations' leaders, we found a desire to develop analytical frameworks to better understand current conditions, evaluate options to respond, and plan alternatives. The Taking Freedom book series was born from this need.

Taking Freedom—a collaboration between SEIU's Racial Justice Center, MIT CoLab, and CUNY's School of Labor and Urban Studies—is intended to help unions and activists deepen their understanding of the issues that are playing out now in the news, in communities, and in daily lives. It is a jumping-off point for conversations with coworkers, neighbors, and others—a way, as the public's grip on facts is slipping, to help people find their way and develop their ability for independent thinking and analysis.

The series is intended to help discussion leaders and facilitators prepare for the ongoing conversations that we hope will follow. The books address a wide range of issues, from labor activism to health care, urban policy, and more. They push to expand readers'

understanding of the structural injustice that has plagued the United States in its past and present.

Each book also includes discussion questions, encouraging readers to apply these questions to their own lives. How are the effects of systems of oppression creating challenges for activists and union members as individuals and communities?

These books are not intended to be a final destination or a final word on the subjects presented. They are simply a means of inspiring readers to look more closely at how they could take on the challenges of social injustice. In turbulent and uncertain times, anyone may be called on to lead, anyone may be called on to facilitate change, and anyone may be called on to call out injustice.

It is our hope that the Taking Freedom series will inspire readers to seek out, join, and begin actions that will positively impact the many pressing systemic issues of our time. It is our hope that these books will untangle the connections between systems of oppression, so that the path to solidarity will become increasingly clear. Last, it is our hope that these books will embolden union members and activists to become leading voices within their communities and beyond.

We invite readers to spend time with these texts and to discuss them within your organizations, communities, and families. These books should challenge and engage you. We look forward to seeing how you use them as a learning and organizing tool.



## INTRODUCTION

In November of 1994, Californians passed Proposition 187, which would have cut off a number of health and social services, including access to public education, to undocumented immigrants and their children. Proposition 187 was conceived by a group of extreme right-wing groups and elected officials as part of an effort to target immigrants in California. As the initiative's authors worked to generate support, then-governor Pete Wilson (R) was running for reelection against then-state treasurer Kathleen Brown (D), who was leading by double digits in the polls. Needing a wedge issue to drum up his base and increase his chance for reelection, Governor Wilson made Proposition 187 and scapegoating immigrants for the state's economic downturn the hallmark of his campaign. Proposition 187 created a spark in the immigrant rights movement.

During the two weeks leading up to the elections in mid-October, immigrant rights groups, student groups, community groups, and



unions came together to mobilize 150,000 people in a massive march from Boyle Heights in East L.A. all the way to City Hall. This historic event was one of the largest immigrant rights marches during that time. The strong grassroots campaign forged a new generation of young immigrant activists to mobilize and commit their lives to the struggle for immigrant rights. Middle and high school students soon followed suit. A few days before Election Day, 10,000 students from over 30 L.A. schools left their classrooms and took to the streets. Although Proposition 187 passed on Election Day, it was successfully struck down in federal court three days later. The campaign to defeat this initiative propelled today's immigrant rights movement.

The current debates about immigration raise questions about not only the reform of immigration policy but also the meaning of “American citizenship” and the future of the nation. The Trump administration used the rhetoric of deporting “criminals” to detain and deport hard-working immigrant families who are not criminals but simply undocumented. This includes Central American families fleeing violence and exploitation by multinational corporations rampant in their countries. These families have migrated to the United States and seek to renew their right to remain every year. This includes Mexican families who have overstayed their visas or who have been deported and, although contributing billions to the economy, are now categorized as felons. It includes Black undocumented immigrants<sup>1</sup> who are 10.6 percent of all immigrants in the immigration system yet who make up 20.3 percent of immigrants facing deportation on criminal charges.<sup>2</sup>

Immigrants have few protections afforded to them and lack most due process rights once in immigration proceedings. On top of legal threats, American media outlets continue to exacerbate public fear and have played a major role in building support for discriminatory measures against immigrant communities. For

example, a 2019 report by the USC Annenberg School's Norman Lear Center found that one-third of immigrant people featured on television were associated with crime in some way, even though according to government data, immigrants commit less crime than native-born Americans. In addition, this report found that 11 percent of immigrant characters depicted on television were associated with incarceration, while less than 1 percent of immigrants are actually incarcerated. Since 1990, the U.S. government has deported four to five million people, the vast majority after 9/11.

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Mirroring these harsh security and enforcement policies are the political and social contradictions of a globalized consumer-based economy that has come to depend on exploitable low-wage labor in the manufacturing and service industries, catering to a demand for rock-bottom consumer prices and tending to middle-class and affluent clientele who count on a multitude of personal services. During the past 30 years, 25 percent of the U.S. workforce has performed low-wage work in industries where immigrant workers comprise the majority.

While anti-immigration campaigns are creating fear and uncertainty in immigrant communities, these attacks have spurred the advancement of an immigrant rights movement that has become increasingly multiracial and intersectional. It is these broad-based coalitions that have pushed varied political representatives to support local policies to prevent law enforcement and other agencies from cooperating with immigration officials and to protect the rights of immigrants and communities of color in opposing the oppressive policies that the Trump administration forced on states and cities throughout the country.



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Many educational institutions, city governments, churches, and labor unions are passing resolutions to defend the rights of our undocumented communities and building coalitions to oppose racial profiling and police violence, ensuring the civil rights of our LGBTQ

communities and fighting for permanent residency and citizenship policies that don't create guest worker programs or expand existing ones but do provide labor protection to workers.

The development of cross-border alliances with movements in Mexico, Central America, Latin America, Haiti, and more are part of a movement that understands that immigration patterns will not significantly change solely through United States-driven immigration policies. Movements of organized resistance are pushing for an end to systemic repression and for fundamental changes where all immigrants are recognized as human and social beings, not just workers.

This book focuses on selected readings from a community of immigrant rights activists, labor activists, and activist scholars working in the organized resistance movements for immigrant and workers' rights. The readings discuss the historical policies that have produced contemporary immigration flows in the United States; analyze the racialized, gendered, and class character of these movements of people; and explain how and why these flows have changed over time. The readings articulate how immigration policy is related to larger questions of nation building, racialization, political participation, and social and economic inequality. Finally, the readings discuss the vibrant and increasingly intersectional organized resistance against these repressive policies within the immigrant rights and labor movements. ■



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE 2006 IMMIGRANT UPRISING

## ORIGINS AND FUTURE

Victor Narro, Kent Wong, and Janna Shadduck-Hernández

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

For almost three months between March 10 and May 1, 2006, five million mostly Latino immigrants and their supporters filled the streets in over 100 cities throughout the United States. The marches and rallies were led with a clear message of dignity and respect for hard-working immigrant families. Immigrant families—many

of them women and children—came out of the shadows of society to demand justice for their contributions to the well-being of many.

In this article, we call attention to two key points. First, the massive mobilizations of this three-month period were not part of “a new movement” or a resurgence of an old one. Rather, they were part of a wave of actions that connected with the trajectories of local labor and community efforts on immigrant rights. These efforts catapulted the immigration issue to a higher level of national visibility. Second, these mobilizations were incorporated into a long-term strategy that involved civic action campaigns and political leadership efforts to create a sustainable national movement for comprehensive immigration reform.

*SOURCE: Victor Narro, Kent Wong, and Janna Shaddock-Hernández, “The 2006 Immigrant Uprising: Origins and Future,” New Labor Forum (Volume 16, Issue 1), pp. 49–56. Copyright © 2007. DOI: 10.1080/1095760601113381.*

“For almost three months between March 10 and May 1, 2006, five million mostly Latino immigrants and their supporters filled the streets in over one hundred cities throughout the United States.

For three months between March 10 and May 1, 2006, five million mostly Latino immigrants and their supporters demonstrated in over one hundred cities throughout the United States. The marches and rallies demanded full rights for immigrants and opposed the anti-immigrant legislation pending in Congress. Immigrant families—

women and men, grandparents and grandchildren—came out of the shadows of society to demand justice and equality.

On March 25, in Los Angeles, close to one million immigrants, largely without guidance from labor or community leaders and

organizations, responded to the announcements on Spanish language television, radio, and newspapers, and participated in one of the largest mobilizations in U.S. history. This mobilization was a major wake up call for the immigrant rights and labor movements. Many immigrant rights and labor leaders were surprised at the magnitude of the opposition to the recent anti-immigrant legislation. Soon after the massive L.A. march, however, labor and immigrant rights groups joined together with immigrant communities throughout the country to launch a series of mobilizations and protests that culminated in the largest International Workers’ Day demonstrations in U.S. history. The irony of the historic May 1st mobilizations was that they were not led by the U.S. labor movement, but rather by immigrant workers themselves. For many of the marchers this was their first time participating in public demonstrations in this country.

Two million marched through the streets of Los Angeles between the March 25th and May 1st mobilizations, close to half a million in Chicago on March 10th and May 1st, and 350,000 in New York on May 1st. In Los Angeles, 40,000 students staged the largest school walkout in U.S. history to join the demonstrations. Other cities throughout the country held the largest demonstrations in their history—10,000 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 25,000 in Madison, Wisconsin, 5,000 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and 6,000 in Des Moines, Iowa, to name a few. The

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marches took place in rapid succession, sometimes with little or no preparation.

These mobilizations reflected a “perfect storm” that connected local immigrant rights campaigns to a national surge of anger and fear among immigrants in response to draconian anti-immigrant proposals before Congress. The most notable was the Sensenbrenner Bill, passed by the House of Representatives, which would have criminalized undocumented immigrants and those organizations that provide them with assistance.

What made the March 25th mobilization unique was the spontaneous outpouring from the immigrant community. The marchers, many of them immigrant families with children, turned out on their own and organized their own routes when the main march route was too small to handle the overflowing masses of people. On the streets, marchers wore white shirts and carried homemade signs opposing HR 4437. The chants of “*no somos criminales!*” (we are not criminals) dominated the atmosphere. The aerial photos showed a sea of white-clad demonstrators moving towards L.A. City Hall in never-ending motion. Immigrants made their voices heard and sent a strong message to Congress. The March 25th mobilization was the largest ever in Los Angeles and one of the largest in the history of the immigrant rights and civil rights movements.

The mass mobilizations tapped into a powerful sentiment that extends beyond the issue of immigrant rights. The massive marches embodied a basic struggle for dignity and respect for hard working immigrant workers and their families. The challenge for labor, currently lagging behind the momentum, is to rise to the occasion and to play a leadership role in building and sustaining this movement.

## LABOR’S CHANGING ROLE IN THE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The American labor movement has historically opposed immigrant rights. During the 1980s, unions were at the forefront in demanding “employer sanctions” as part of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which established civil and criminal penalties for employers who hire undocumented immigrants.

During the AFL-CIO national convention in Los Angeles in 1999, unions representing immigrant workers demanded a change in labor’s stance on immigration policy. In 2000, the AFL-CIO’s executive council took a historic step by passing a resolution calling for unconditional amnesty, an end to employer sanctions, and an increase in workplace protections for immigrants. The AFL-CIO’s reversal in position shifted the political climate around immigration dramatically.

Then, in 2003, UNITE HERE initiated the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, inspired by the Freedom Rides of the civil rights movement. Forty years after the Freedom Rides of the 1960s, more than nine hundred immigrants and their allies boarded buses to Washington D.C. to demand basic rights and civil liberties for immigrant workers. The Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride forged a new coalition of unions, immigrant rights groups, community organizations, worker centers, and religious groups, and brought national attention to the status of immigrant workers and the legal barriers to equality that they face.

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This crucial work within the labor movement in support of immigrant rights made labor's near absence from the planning of the major spring 2006 uprisings difficult to fathom. Divisions within the labor movement and within the immigrant rights movement over strategy and immigration policy reform account, in some degree, for this state of affairs.

## THE POLICY SPLIT WITHIN LABOR AND THE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS MOVEMENT

After the 2004 reelection of George Bush, the political landscape relating to immigration reform changed dramatically. One major development was the creation of the New American Opportunities Campaign (NAOC), a national coalition that included Service Employees International Union (SEIU), UNITE HERE, National Immigration Forum, NCLR, and other labor groups, and more local immigrant rights organizations. NAOC's outline of a strategy for immigration reform included a guest worker program with a path to legalization. This position was in sharp contrast to other labor unions and immigrant rights groups that strongly supported what they considered true comprehensive immigration reform without a guest worker program. NAOC worked closely with the staff of Senator Kennedy and Senator John McCain to introduce an immigration reform bill.

Another major development that increased divisions within labor and the immigrant rights movement was the creation of the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC). EWIC is a coalition of businesses, trade associations, and other organizations from across the industry spectrum concerned with the shortage of both skilled and lesser skilled ("essential worker") labor. EWIC has worked with the administration and Congress to push forward

immigration reform issues that cater to the interest of U.S. companies and their need for essential workers. Current immigration law restricts the hiring of foreign essential workers. SEIU, NCLR, and National Immigration Forum are among labor and immigrant rights groups that have forged strong alliances with the national chamber of commerce and other business groups within EWIC. This pro-business alliance has raised the ire of other unions and immigrant rights groups throughout the country.

From the standpoint of the AFL-CIO and some organizations within the immigrant rights movement, the legislative strategy of NAOC contained major weaknesses. First, it counted on a Left-Right coalition to get a comprehensive bill out of the Senate by the end of 2004, and then to have the House adopt a similar measure. Secondly, because getting Republican support became a criterion for what this coalition considered a viable bill, the consequence was a series of legislative proposals that failed to include any labor rights for workers even after the AFL-CIO and others fought hard to get worker protections in the final compromise.

When the McCain-Kennedy bill was introduced, the AFL-CIO took no position, because its affiliates were split. But President Sweeney sent a strong memo to his staff out-lining concerns with the bill. On the other hand, NAOC members strongly supported the legislation. In 2005, when the Change To Win Federation was founded, splitting organized labor, this further exacerbated the divisions on immigration policy. But even with the Change To Win Federation unions, there were diverse viewpoints and positions on the different issues of the immigration reform legislation in the Senate.

These internal divisions became more apparent during the congressional debates in the Senate after the passage of HR 4437 (the Sensenbrenner Bill). The compromise bill that emerged was the Hagel-Martinez bill, currently being debated within the



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House-Senate Conference Committee. The Hagel-Martinez bill contains a three-tier “path to citizenship” as well as a guest worker program that has generated intense debate within the labor movement. It makes a major concession to anti-immigrant forces in the form of strong enforcement measures, increased border security, and new employment verification systems.

The NAOC member groups, most notably the National Immigration Forum, NCLR, SEIU, and the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, supported the Hagel-Martinez bill as a first step in providing legalization for millions of immigrants. They viewed guest worker provisions as a necessary compromise in order to obtain some type of legalization that will create momentum for a more comprehensive package in the future. In light of the post 9-11 political climate and the Republican majority in Congress, what constitutes a reasonable compromise has been a source of intense debate within the labor and immigrant rights movement.

The AFL-CIO, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, National Day Laborer Organizing Network, and other immigrant

rights and labor organizations support comprehensive immigration reform for all immigrants without a guest worker proposal and harsh enforcement measures. The AFL-CIO came to adopt its most comprehensive policy statement ever on immigration reform at its executive council meeting immediately following the Senate debates. Due to the divisions within the Change to Win Federation unions over the guest worker and other components of the Hagel-Martinez bill, the unions of the new federation adopted their own position statement.

Efforts to affect immigration policy, however, opened the door to historic opportunities for forging new alliances. For example, the AFL-CIO and National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) recently announced a formal partnership where the AFL-CIO’s national office, state labor federations, and central labor councils will work to fight back any federal, state or local legislation that targets day laborers. The AFL-CIO’s legislative department has committed to work with NDLON to fight any attempts to introduce bills that would target day laborers or day laborer worker centers.

In addition, NDLON and the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) are working together to forge a national organizing initiative in the private residential construction industry.

## STRATEGIC DIVISIONS: TO BOYCOTT OR NOT

The issue of a national boycott on May 1 touched off another series of debates among labor and immigrant rights organizations. Joined

by other networks around the country, the March 25th Coalition pushed for a major national boycott. “The Great American Boycott” called on workers to stay home from work, students to stay home from school, and consumers to spend no money on May 1. The March 25th Coalition made the boycott the centerpiece of their call for the Massive May Day march in Los Angeles. In contrast, coalitions and networks like the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the We Are America coalition, and other immigrant rights networks supported a national day of action where immigrant families, workers, and students would engage in public actions that would not expose them to negative consequences from boycotting, such as termination from work, and suspension from school.

The debate on the boycott generated philosophical differences over tactics. Some leaders such as Dolores Huerta and leaders from the United Farm Workers Union, Cardinal Roger Mahoney, and other immigrant rights leaders viewed a boycott as part of a larger strategy requiring enormous preparation and planning. On the other side, the March 25th Coalition advanced the more radical tactic of the boycott to demonstrate the dependency of the U.S. economy on immigrants and the political power of immigrant workers.

Within labor, unions were divided on whether or not to support the national boycott. Some progressive union locals tended to support the boycott. This was the case with many SEIU, Teamsters, and Laborers’ union locals throughout the country. On the other hand, there were other union locals that felt it would be irresponsible for them to advocate a work stoppage that was in violation of their contract, and potentially illegal. In the end, most coalitions on both sides of this issue were able to unite on May 1. In Los Angeles, for example, both coalitions joined in unity to support an entire day of action.

Whether it was called a national day of action or a national economic boycott, May 1 had a tremendous impact on local economies throughout the country. Certain commercial districts in Los Angeles and other cities witnessed a complete shutdown of businesses on May 1. In fact, many employers supported their immigrant workers and allowed them to participate in the boycott and mobilizations throughout the day. Hundreds of factories, restaurants, and stores closed as a consequence of the boycott, while millions stayed home from work and school.

## BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE MOVEMENT

While spontaneous outrage against legislative efforts to diminish the rights of immigrants sparked the national protests, their future ability to transform local conditions depends upon ongoing coalitions in which labor must play an essential role. The disparate cases of North Carolina and Georgia indicate the degree to which the immigrant rights movement relies upon concerted union organizing of immigrant workers and vice versa.

Lumberton, in southeastern North Carolina, borders the South Carolina state line. No one would have ever expected a May 1st mobilization in this small southern town. For many years, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) had been organizing a large workforce of immigrant workers at the Smithfield meat processing plant. This organizing effort enabled UFCW to develop a working relationship with key community groups. But the March 25 march generated a new type of collaboration that moved beyond local labor issues towards the general call for immigrant rights. The March 25 march helped to strengthen the coalition work in Lumberton.

UFCW and community partners created the Pro Justice Coalition. This coalition mobilized workers in Lumberton to march to nearby



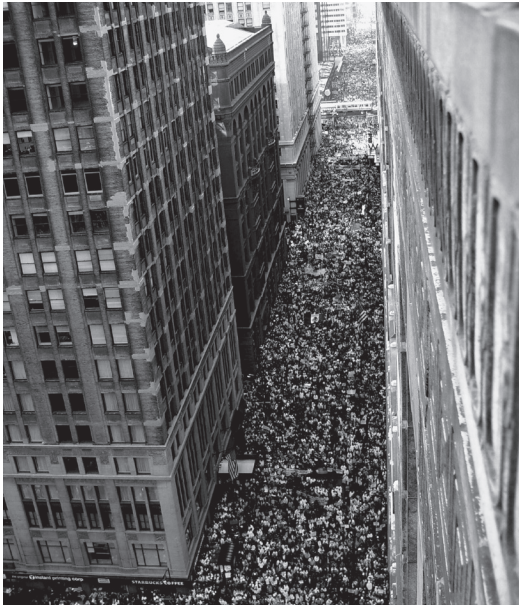


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Wilmington, to support a larger demonstration and the call for a national boycott. During the month of April, the coalition reached out to immigrant families, including those who recently arrived from Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala. The coalition expected a few hundred people to assemble at the Lumberton fairgrounds for the four-mile march to Wilmington City Hall. Instead, five to seven thousand immigrants showed up and participated in the largest march ever in this part of North Carolina. Immigrants were joined by some African American and white working families. The Smithfield plant gave the workers a day off so they could participate in the march.

On April 10, 2006, 50,000 demonstrators filed through Atlanta's streets as part of a national campaign for immigrant dignity. Turnout for the event was much larger than had been predicted. Marchers wound their way through neighborhoods on the north-east side of the city, and many carried American flags chanting as they marched through mostly Latino neighborhoods.

Georgia is part of the new destination circuit for Latino migrants. Cities like Dalton, Georgia, in the northwest corner of the state have witnessed a 60 percent increase of Latino students in their school system in less than fifteen years. While Latino workers from Dalton's enormous carpet industry joined protesters in the state's capital, very few labor organizers supported this mobilization from that region. In recent years, Georgia has witnessed a backlash against immigrants and their families. As a right to work state, Georgia has never been union friendly. Nevertheless, UFCW members, primarily from Georgia's major cities, were present in small numbers at the demonstration. Still, immigrant workers who seek to organize in the state's poultry, agriculture, and carpet industries in rural areas or small towns are primarily doing this organizing on their own or through community organizations, and continuously face retaliation from employers and hostile community residents.

One week after the demonstration, on April 18, 2006, the Georgia General Assembly adopted Senate Bill 529 entitled the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act. This piece of legislation would require police and employers to report undocumented immigrants to immigration services, and would deny state services to undocumented adults living in the state. Unless overturned by the courts, it is scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2007.

As a response to SB 529, on April 21, 2006, tens of thousands of workers responded to a boycott call and did not show up at their jobs in protest of the passage of the bill. Organizers of the Georgia protest estimated that as many as 80,000 Latinos participated in

“ Cities like Dalton, Georgia, in the northwest corner of the state have witnessed a 60 percent increase of Latino students in their school system in less than fifteen years.

the one-day work stoppage across the state. According to community groups, organized labor only played a minimal role in coordinating the stoppage. On the same day hundreds of people converged on the steps of the Georgia Capitol, some wrapped in Mexican flags holding signs reading: “Don’t panic, we’re Hispanic” and “We have a dream, too.”

On May 1, 3,000 people demonstrated in front of the Atlanta state capitol at noon. The crowd consisted largely of younger immigrant workers, many of them accompanied by their families. Though the security was intense, the rally went ahead without incident for several hours. Several elementary school teachers who had taken the day off to show support for immigrants held banners with slogans such as “Educators for Immigrants.” University and college students from across the state similarly mobilized to attend the rally. Moreover, in Vidalia, home to the famous onion, agricultural workers stayed home from work in record numbers in solidarity with the marchers in Atlanta. Though working under difficult conditions, the immigrant rights movement is growing in Georgia. Governor Sonny Purdue, who signed Senate Bill 529 into law, will likely face increased pressure from immigrant and worker rights groups. The role of organized labor within these campaigns has yet to be defined.

The recent mobilizations between March 10 and May 1 highlight the emergence of a massive, national civil rights campaign for the rights of millions of immigrants. Today, various coalitions are advancing a plan of action that focuses on voter registration, citizenship drives, community forums and future major mobilizations and rallies. The massive demonstrations have re-energized the immigrant rights movement in their demand for comprehensive immigration reform.

The Republican-controlled Congress refused to act on immigration legislation in the 2006 session. Pressure will continue during

the next Congressional session to enact meaningful immigration reform. Anti-immigrant forces will continue to demand more border enforcement, restrictive guest worker programs, and punitive measures against immigrants.

Given the present political climate, the U.S. labor movement can play a crucial role in developing a national agenda for immigration reform. The basic demands for legalization of undocumented immigrants, repeal of employer sanctions, family reunification and enforcement of workplace rights for immigrant workers represent the hopes and aspirations of millions of immigrants. These are also demands that represent the hope and future of the U.S. labor movement.

Immigrant workers will continue to play a crucial role in major industries throughout the country. Immigrants have been and will continue to be at the forefront of union organizing campaigns. The labor movement should take the lead in this fundamental civil rights movement of our generation. This would send a clear message to immigrant workers that labor is on their side, and would strengthen prospects for greater immigrant worker organizing in the future. ■

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Were you involved in any of the marches during this time period in 2006? If yes, what was your experience? Did you create any perspective on movement and base building? If no, has reading about these marches shaped any view or perspective on the overall struggle for immigrant rights?
2. In light of the failed attempts in 2007 and 2013 to pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform in Congress, how can

we revive another groundswell of mobilizing immigrant communities similar to the massive marches of spring 2006?

3. One outcome of the mass mobilization of 2006 was the immigrant rights movement framing and promoting the message “Hoy Marchamos, Mañana Votamos” (“Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote”). How has this message translated into policy and organizing efforts around the country? Can you think of examples?
4. What are the cross-movement connections between the immigrant rights marches of 2006 with the current national mobilizations against police violence and in support of Black lives?



## CHAPTER TWO

### IMMIGRATION RAIDS IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

#### A HISTORICAL PATTERN AND ITS RESPONSES

José Calderón

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Migration results from a real need for low-cost labor in this economy and has caused a historical pattern by the U.S. government to scapegoat immigrants when the country is experiencing economic downturns. However, anti-immigration efforts address only supply, or the flow of unauthorized migrants, without reducing employer



demand for this labor or changing economic opportunity in migrants' countries of origin. In the present situation, immigration policy should be inverted to allow immigrant workers the right to work here and receive legalization rights leading to citizenship while also building the economies of other nations, particularly in Central America. The concentrated enforcement strategy has resulted in greatly magnifying the physical danger associated with entry into the United States. It has also stimulated organized vigilante activity on this side of the border with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") and, to a lesser extent, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) carrying out unjust immigration raids. While these attacks create fear and division among working people, there are also exemplary pro-immigrant broad-based multi-racial coalitions and strategies that have been successful in defending the rights of immigrants in this period.

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On June 4th and 5th of 2004, a Mobile Patrol Group from the U.S. Border Patrol station in Temecula, California, carried out a series of immigration sweeps in Southern California cities that resulted in the arrests of 420 Latino immigrants. In addition to creating a climate of fear and hysteria in immigrant communities, it also affected citizens and residents who, for the simple reasons of having brown skin, were stopped by the border patrol and questioned about their citizenship status.

Similarly, in January, 2007, in the Inland Empire region and in other parts of California, a series of immigration raids, named Operation Return to Sender by ICE (Immigration Customs and Enforcement)

officials, resulted in the arrests of over 760 immigrants. As part of this deportation project, the raids resulted in more than 13,000 arrests nationwide (ICE 2007). Calling them "sweeps" rather than raids, Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials claimed that their enforcement was only aimed at targeted fugitives who had overstayed their visas or who had ignored deportation orders. Yet, numerous eyewitness and news media accounts reported that this was not fully the case. The *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper, in a January 23rd article, reported that ICE agents, in addition to the so-called 119 immigrant criminals that they targeted in Contra Costa County, "also picked up 94 other undocumented immigrants they encountered in the process" (Hendricks 2007, B-8). In an article by the Associated Press on January 23rd, where reporters rode along for the first day of the "sweeps" in Orange County, they reported that the agents "fanned out to houses in Anaheim and Santa Ana" and that the criminal fugitive that they arrested was merely a 29-year-

old undocumented immigrant "wanted for a driving under the influence conviction" (Flaccus 2007). At a second stop where the agents were looking for a "convicted rapist" (that had moved out weeks before) they, "instead, arrested six men who could not provide legal papers" (Flaccus 2007). Timothy Aiken, deputy director of ICE in San Francisco, commented "We want to go after the worst of the worst; we go after people who have ignored a judge's order—but we can't be blind to someone who doesn't have lawful status in the U.S. We wouldn't be doing our job if we ignored these

“ In the present situation, immigration policy should be inverted to allow immigrant workers the right to work here and receive legalization rights leading to citizenship while also building the economies of other nations, particularly in Central America.

people” (Hendricks 2007, B-8). By their own words, immigration officials admitted that their actions were random, creating a climate of fear and tension in immigrant communities. In the city of Pomona, there were various eyewitness accounts where immigration agents used the pretext of going after so-called “convicted fugitives” to stop and detain people randomly. For example, the husband of Pomona resident Maria Morales, a mother of two children, was picked up off the street as he walked to his job. In an incident near the Pomona Day Labor Center, ICE agents claim that they went to the area in search of a “criminal.” Eyewitnesses, instead, saw them chase after immigrant workers who were looking for jobs in that area. Similar reports emerged from residents at a local apartment complex in Pomona where, under the pretext of looking for a “fugitive,” [ICE] began to knock on doors and arrest individuals randomly. These types of actions are confirmed as occurring in other parts of California by Jerry Okendo, President of the Northern California League of United Latin American Citizens chapter. He is quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as criticizing ICE agents for carrying out “sweeps” in the cities of Concord and Richmond without “properly identifying themselves” and carrying out arrests without search warrants. According to Okendo, ICE agents “were sweeping through apartment complexes and picking up anyone who could not provide proof they were living in the United States legally” (Hendricks 2007, B-8). Richmond

City Councilman John Marquez complained that ICE agents “were identifying themselves as police” helping to break up the good relations that he said had been established between the police department and the Latino Community.

“By their own words, immigration officials admitted that their actions were random, creating a climate of fear and tension in immigrant communities.”

## HISTORICAL PATTERN OF IMMIGRATION RAIDS

The character of these recent raids follow a historical pattern by the U.S. government to round up immigrants when the country is experiencing an economic downturn or when there are social conditions and cutbacks that need a scapegoat. When the economy went downward during the depression of the 1930s, for example, the U.S. Government gave consular offices the charge of deporting anyone who might add to the “public charge rolls” (Bernard 1998, 67). During this period, at least half a million people of Mexican origin were put on trains and deported (Acuna 2000, 220–225; Gonzales 1999, 146–149). In the early years of the depression, any Mexican-origin person who applied for welfare, unemployment, or any type of social service was forced to leave the country under the U.S. government category of “voluntary repatriation.” Approximately half of those deported were U.S. citizens, a clear violation of both their civil and human rights.

Raising concerns over national security issues as a result of World War II, the U.S. government instituted the Smith Act in 1941 to deny visas and deport anyone who “might endanger the public safety” (Bernard 1998, 67). A similar bill, the Internal Security Act, was passed in 1950 to deport anyone suspected of being a member of the Communist Party or any of its affiliated organizations (Bernard 1998, 69).

When the U.S. entered World War II, and there was a need to fill labor shortages in agriculture, the federal government established the Bracero Program (Acuna 2000, 285–289; Takaki 1993, 391–392). The program was extended after the war as Public Law 78 and was justified as a means of meeting labor shortages caused by the Korean War. The program ended in 1964 with 5 million

“ With the establishment of a regulated labor pool, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service began a massive drive known as “Operation Wetback” to deport undocumented immigrants to Mexico.

Mexicans used in the peak years between 1954 and 1962. With the establishment of a regulated labor pool, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service began a massive drive known as “Operation Wetback” to deport undocumented immigrants to Mexico. Again, similar to the round-ups of immigrants during the depression, Operation

Wetback grossly violated the civil rights of Mexican immigrants including those who were legally in the U.S. as citizens and permanent residents (Calavita 1998). Hundreds of Mexican-origin people were arrested and harassed. They were threatened and forced to produce “proof” of their citizenship. Only a few of the thousands of those deported had formal hearings. When the project ended, more than a million persons had been deported to Mexico (Barrera 1979, 116–30).

## CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS FOR RAIDS

In this contemporary period, on an international level, there is a movement of immigrants from poorer countries to more developed ones (Sutcliffe 1993, 84–107). The response in the U.S. and in European countries has been twofold: on the one hand, the companies (and even some government officials) see the need for immigrants to fill employment voids (particularly when these countries are faced with an aging population). On the other hand, these countries do not want to acknowledge them as human beings with basic human rights.

There are “open borders” for multi-national corporations when it comes to investment, trade, and moving jobs (Sutcliffe 1998). However, when it comes to the free migration of immigrants, the meaning of democracy does not exist. That is why there is a backlash to this meaning of democracy in Latin America where a growth in international investment has meant increasing unemployment and the forced removal of the peasantry from their rural lands to the urban cities (Gonzalez 2001).

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Up until September 11, 2001, there was a movement toward some form of legalization for the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. However, after September 11th, the issue of immigration became a national security issue. The most significant measure was the passage of the USA Patriot Act which allowed wide latitude for law enforcement agencies to conduct searches, to use electronic surveillance, and to detain persons suspected of being terrorists. The act expanded the definition of “terrorists” for the purposes of removing any immigrants certified by the U.S. Attorney General as having engaged in terrorist activities (Hom, 24–26).

## THE RAIDS AND NATIONAL SECURITY

It was in this climate that California experienced the recall of Governor Gray Davis in November 2003 and where his opponents raised the specter of immigration as an issue of national security.



One candidate Tom McClintock went as far as to promise that he would use the full strength of the National Guard to patrol the border. The eventual Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who had supported Proposition 187 (a ballot initiative to deny social services, health care, and public education to undocumented immigrants) and had been listed on the Board of an organization, U.S. English, that advocates the exclusive use of English in public institutions, used the issue of national security as a reason for turning down a bill that would have given immigrants the right to obtain a driver's license.

“In accordance with this perspective, U.S. Border Patrol officials have argued that the immigration raids are connected to the “war on terrorism.”

In accordance with this perspective, U.S. Border Patrol officials have argued that the immigration raids are connected to the “war on terrorism.” When Tomas Jimenez of the Border Patrol was asked by a Channel 54 reporter on the reasons for raids that were carried

out in 2004, he responded that “the mission of the Border Patrol, the primary objective at this time, is to prevent the entering of terrorists and terrorist arms to the United States” (Noticiero 2004).

In a meeting with various representatives of Latino organizations in the Inland Valley, Border Patrol officials agreed with Jimenez's assertions and proposed that the raids were about “intelligence gathering.”

At the same time, the Border Patrol officials proposed that these raids were “routine” and not part of any change in national strategy. They proposed that the actions were only part of a local plan initiated by the officials in the Temecula office. The contradiction is that, when asked if they had the power to stop the raids, their

response was that they needed to confer with the Deputy Director in the region and with “higher-ups” in Washington. Those “higher-ups,” such as Department of Homeland Security Under Secretary Asa Hutchinson, only backed off and tried to place the blame elsewhere when they were pressured by Congressional members of the Latino Caucus and massive demonstrations throughout California.

It is no coincidence that the 2004 raids took place a few months before the national elections. For, in addition to the long history of scapegoating immigrants during an economic downturn, this country has had a history of politicians attacking immigrants to get elected or re-elected. The most prominent example is that of California Governor Pete Wilson who, in 1994, in order to take the blame away from his administration for an ailing economy, created an image that immigrants were taking away jobs, ruining the schools, and overtaxing social services. He personally took the reins of Proposition 187 and used its momentum to get re-elected (Hayes-Bautista 2004).

Similarly, before the election, President George Bush presented an immigration proposal that boiled down to nothing more than a contemporary revised “Bracero” program. On the other [hand], President Bush had to simultaneously prove to the conservative wing of the Republican Party his toughness on immigration.

Pressured to stop the raids in Southern California, the lower level officials consistently replied that they were in no position to stop

“For, in addition to the long history of scapegoating immigrants during an economic downturn, this country has had a history of politicians attacking immigrants to get elected or re-elected.

the raids and that they had to confer “with Washington” higher-ups for any change in strategies.

Meanwhile, fifty Republican Congressmen, under the leadership of Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo, signed a joint letter on June 26, 2004, praising the actions of the Border Patrol and urging Hutchison to continue the raids. In their letter, the lawmakers proposed that “this kind of interior enforcement is desperately needed across the country” . . . and that “the success of the unit operating from the Temecula station is ample evidence of the need for this activity nationwide” (Tancredo, June 26, 2004).

As a follow-up to these actions, the conservative wing of the Republican Party ran openly one-issue anti-immigrant candidates against the Latino representatives, such as Congressman Joe Baca and Assemblywoman Gloria Negrete-McCloud, who openly opposed the raids. In California’s sixty-first Assembly district, for example, a retired police officer Alan Wapner challenged incumbent Assemblywoman Negrete-McCloud through open support from California Governor Schwarzenegger and through the use of leaflets and press conferences that called for securing “our borders through beefed-up border patrols” and improving the “tracking of illegal aliens by linking governmental databases, births, deaths, and immigration status” (Wapner for Assembly 2004).

## ORGANIZED RESPONSE TO RAIDS

An important lesson in the aftermath of the immigration raids in 2004 and 2007 in the region was the response by Mexican and Latino organizations.

Within a week of immigration raids in 2004, various organizations including *Estamos Unidos*, *Hermandad Mexicana de Ontario*,



Photo by Mike Von on Unsplash.

the Latina and Latino Roundtable, The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) and the Riverside-based National Alliance for Human Rights came together and organized a seven-mile march calling for an immediate stop to the raids. The march, beginning in the city of Ontario and ending in Pomona, drew an estimated 10,000 participants. The Spanish language newspaper *La Opinion* called it the largest demonstration in the history of the Inland Valley region (Vega 2004, 1). Joining the march were various Latino elected officials who played a role in pressuring Asa Hutchison to stop the raids. Congress Representatives Joe Baca and Hilda Solis took the lead in securing support from members of the House Committee on the Judiciary and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus for an emergency meeting with Hutchison. In a press statement on June 13, 2004, Congresswoman Hilda Solis raised her concerns to the U.S. Border Patrol in Washington, D.C. “about recent U.S. Border Patrol activity in Southern California that has led to great fear and confusion among residents throughout the region . . . about reports that the recent Border Patrol activity

in Southern California included stops on Public Streets . . . about possible racial profiling.”

In a letter dated June 18, 2004, members of the House Judiciary Committee wrote to U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge “to immediately halt these ill-considered enforcement actions and work with us on undertaking those reforms of our immigration system that our nation so badly needs.”

In response to these letters, Asa Hutchison met with Southern California representatives and admitted that the raids did not follow Department of Homeland Security policy (Baca, June 25, 2004).

The continued coalition efforts helped to ensure the re-election of the various representatives, including Congressman Joe Baca and Gloria Negrete-McCloud, who had been the targets of statewide and national attacks by the right wing of the Republican Party.

Other marches in the ensuing years against immigration raids and legislative proposals aimed at criminalizing undocumented immigrants and their supporters resulted in broad coalitions taking to the streets in cities all across the country. On March 25, 2006, over a million people marched in Los Angeles against H. R.

4437, a bill that would make it a felony to reside in the U.S. as an undocumented individual. As a result of the massive protests, the bill died in the U.S. Senate. In January, 2007, in response to the Operation Return to Sender Raids, a coalition of organizations including the Labor Council for

Latin American Advancement (LOCLOAA), the Latina/o Roundtable, CHIRLA, the Latino Student Union, and the National Day Labor Organizing Network came together and organized a march of

hundreds calling for an immediate stop to the raids. Five months later, on May 1, 2007, a coalition of thousands of immigrants and their supporters marched throughout Southern California, including the Inland Empire, in support of a comprehensive immigration bill and against the federal government’s increase in immigration raids at the workplace and in targeted communities.

## RISE OF A PROACTIVE ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY TO ENFORCEMENT

In advancing an alternative to the enforcement strategies advanced by Homeland Security, the Bush Administration, and right-wing conservative groups and politicians, a proactive trend has emerged that is focusing on policies to support the legalization of immigrant workers.

On March 31, 2005, as part of a movement to support a new direction for immigration policy, the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute brought together a broad cross-section of immigration rights leaders in Los Angeles to discuss the impacts of border enforcement on Latino communities. The speakers included University of California Professor Wayne Cornelius who argued that the increased enforcement strategy of the U.S. government has only resulted in undocumented immigrants staying longer in the U.S., a higher percentage using the services of professional “coyotes,” and an increasing number who have faced physical danger and vigilante activity associated with entry into the U.S. (Cornelius 2004). At this same conference, immigration attorney Peter Shey, Executive Director of the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law, proposed the need for a movement that could pressure the U.S. government in enacting a reasonable statute of limitations for immigrants already in the country. In advocating that the immigrant rights movement organize proactively rather than defensively, Shey proposed

“In response to these letters, Asa Hutchison met with Southern California representatives and admitted that the raids did not follow Department of Homeland Security policy.”

putting an end to the backlog of immigrant applications already in process. According to Shey, “we are at an all-time high of 2.6 million pending applications, 1.8 million of which are ‘relative’ applications” (Shey, March 31, 2005).

“The speakers included University of California Professor Wayne Cornelius who argued that the increased enforcement strategy of the U.S. government has only resulted in undocumented immigrants staying longer in the U.S., a higher percentage using the services of professional “coyotes,” and an increasing number who have faced physical danger and vigilante activity associated with entry into the U.S.

work in agriculture for another 360 days during the next six years, they can apply for permanent residence status.

Various other coalitions, including the Latino/a Roundtable, LCLAA, the Inland Valley Coalition for Immigrant Rights, The UCLA Labor Center, and the Coalition for Humane Immigration Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) have been advancing this proactive trend by organizing citizenship/voting registration drives and sponsoring forums on legalization legislation such as the Dream Act. The Dream Act would permit undocumented immigrant students who have grown up in the U.S. the rights to receive in-state tuition in all institutions of higher education and to apply for legal status.

In addition to organizing farm worker marches throughout the state to protest the immigration raids that took place in 2004 and 2007, the United Farm Worker’s Union has spearheaded a coalition of over four hundred organizations, representing agriculture, business, church, and immigrant advocacy organizations in support of the Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits, and Security Act. The AgJobs legislation would grant half a million undocumented farm workers temporary legal status if they work at least one hundred days as farm laborers over an eighteen month period. If they

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## CONCLUSION

Although immigration laws and raids are once again being used by the U.S. government and various politicians to attack immigrants as threats to the national security, the immigrant rights movement has seen the rise of a new trend that is not just reacting to attacks by the border patrol, right wing anti-immigrant groups, and nativist legislation. The immigrant rights movement has been effective in stopping immigration raids each time that they have emerged in various localities. At the same time, the movement has been effective in building coalitions that are uniting diverse groups and communities in advancing strategies and policies aimed at turning back the post-September 11th provisions that have increased the categories of “deportable” crimes and that have further criminalized undocumented workers. This emerging trend, demanding “legalization” for the 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., has shown how a united proactive response can be effective in exposing the scapegoating of immigrants, mobilizing support for pro-immigrant legislative policies, and building broad community-based coalitions to defend the civil and human rights of all immigrants and their supporters. ■



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the historical and economic reasons for U.S. government-led immigration raids? How are these immigration raids tied to a history of using structural racism as a means of pitting workers and communities of color against each other?
2. Explain some of the common anti-immigrant responses to the movements of immigrants from economically poorer countries to more developed ones?
3. How have elected officials used the issue of "national security" as a tool to influence public opinion and boost their own election campaigns?
4. What are some examples of proactive strategies that can be used to build a multi-racial movement, as part of the broad racial justice movement, that exposes the scapegoating of immigrants, mobilizes support for pro-immigrant legislative policies, and builds broad community-based coalitions to defend the civil and human rights of all immigrants and refugees?



## CHAPTER THREE

### ORGANIZING IMMIGRANT WORKERS

#### ACTION RESEARCH AND STRATEGIES IN THE POMONA DAY LABOR CENTER

José Calderón, Suzanne Foster, and Silvia L. Rodriguez

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

“Organizing Immigrant Workers: Action Research and Strategies in the Pomona Day Labor Center” shares important lessons on the conditions of restructuring that have brought forward a growth in the informal economy and the rise of day labor centers (such as the Pomona Day Labor Center) to defend immigrant workers’ rights. It describes the

bottom-up strategies that have used a participatory model of organizing to build leadership and ensure the voice of the workers. This model has had three participatory components including the following:

- **Ensuring the basic civil, labor, and human rights of day laborers by involving them in advocacy efforts on immigrant and refugee policies that support permanent residency and speedy legalization with labor law protections.** This strategy has been effective in building the leadership of the day laborers and working with cities to support sanctuary and oppose any cooperation between police agencies and local governments with ICE, helping to pass such legislation as a bill requiring employers to require proper court documents before allowing immigration agents access to the workplace or to employee information, organizing against unjust checkpoints and turning this movement to the passage of bills allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses, and erasing the word “alien” from California’s labor code. It has also protected undocumented immigrants from housing discrimination, workplace raids, and the expansion of immigration detention centers. A good example of these efforts are the immigrant rights coalitions that emerged when the Trump administration sought to deport over 400,000 with Temporary Protected Status. Organizations such as National Day Labor Organizing Network (NDLON), Central American Resource Center, Los Angeles (CARECEN-LA), and the National Temporary Protective Status (TPS) Alliance led a network of over 70 Temporary Protective Status (TPS) committees throughout the nation in training new immigrant rights leaders and bringing two class-action TPS justice lawsuits that were able to block Trump’s termination of the program affecting half a million people from six different countries.



- **Developing employment opportunities through outreach and marketing strategies organized by day laborers** that include the implementation of popular education; ESL and participatory education models to involve day laborers in outreach efforts through house meetings; immigration rights community forums; wage claim cases; visits with legislators; and coalitions with union, faith-based, and community-based organizations. In the city of Pomona, day laborers march every year in the Christmas parade with a flyer sharing the contributions of day laborers and urging residents to “open their doors for a job.”
- **Advancing a practice of civic engagement by involving day laborers in their communities** through getting involved in voter registration, voter turnout, and education forums; getting day laborer representatives appointed to city commissions; organizing for the right of undocumented parents to vote in school board and city elections; lobbying for bills to provide safe schools for immigrant children and to ban the use of public funds to aid federal agents in deportation actions; and implementing workshops for students and parents in qualifying for and defending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) program as well as how to obtain a matrícula consular card (an official identification document issued by the Mexican government).

These strategies have used the everyday services of education and employment assistance to promote critical dialogue and participatory democratic engagement among day laborers.

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After a local ordinance was passed in the city of Pomona, California, to get day laborers off street corners, a city policeman confronted a day laborer about his inability to read an antisolicitation ordinance in English. Asking a student to interpret for him, the policeman shook his finger as he scolded the day laborer:

He is in violation of the law. If he is going to sit here now and say “I don’t, understand, I don’t speak English,” he has to make a decision. That decision is, you can either learn to speak English to function in society, because that’s what the signs are, they are in English, or find himself in violation of the law. It’s that simple . . . learn English or go to jail. (Beetley-Hagler 2000)

The action of this policeman, captured on videotape by then-Pitzer College student Andy Beetley-Hagler, is not an isolated case. It is how city officials and law enforcement agencies have responded in many urban and suburban communities where Latino day laborers, known as *jornaleros*, congregate on street corners to seek jobs. Groups of men can be found gathering on urban street corners, hardware store parking lots, and truck rental facilities looking for work. These are men who do not have permanent jobs but are driven to work by circumstances on a day-to-day basis. According to a study conducted by Abel Valenzuela (1999), director of UCLA’s Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, “Day laborers are overwhelmingly Latino, predominately from Mexico.”

Changes in immigration laws and regional economic restructuring are credited for the thousands of Latino immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and other Central American countries entering the United States and accepting jobs in the low-wage and low-skill service sector (Soja and Scott 1996). The passage of the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965 increased the total number of immigrants

admitted to the United States and inadvertently gave opportunities to approximately five million immigrants in the service sector (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). The deindustrialization of Los Angeles led to a loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector, a restructuring process of growth in “high-skill, high-tech” employment, and the rise of a service sector based on low-wage workers and an informal economy (Pastor 2000; Valle and Torres 2000; Soja and Scott 1996; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). As Los Angeles deindustrialized with the loss of steel, automobile, and tire manufacturing between 1965 and 1992, new jobs were generated in the informal and service sectors that paid low wages, were nonunionized, and offered few protections and benefits. These transformations have contributed to a growth in both the Latino population and the low-wage manual labor pool that is used to advance economic growth (Soja 1996; Milkman 2000; Milkman and Wong 2000).

Some of these Latino immigrants have become part of the informal economy as day laborers or workers who are hired on a

temporary basis in both the service and commercial sectors. The informal economy is characterized by low wages, usually paid by an employer in cash, and working conditions that are unregulated (Sassen 1994, 2001; Pardo 1998). In the Southern California region, it is estimated that there are twenty thousand day laborers looking for work on a daily basis (Afiorve, Osborn, and Salas 2000). Of this number, 78 percent are Mexican,

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20 percent Central American, 1 percent U.S.-born, and 1 percent born elsewhere (Valenzuela 1999).

With an increase of day labor sites and corners, thirty cities in the Los Angeles region have adopted some type of municipal ordinance against the solicitation of work in public spaces (Toma and Esbenschade 2000, 57). Some of

these ordinances have been in response to complaints by local residents and businesses. Others have been as a result of an anti-immigrant sentiment that has been propagated by right-wing organizations and politicians who have blamed immigrants for everything from the loss of jobs and social services to the cyclical downturns in the U.S. economy (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996, 445–55; Acuna 1996, 158–64). Pomona’s Ordinance 3814, approved in June 1996, fines workers up to one thousand dollars and/or places them in jail for up to six months if they solicit employment on any street, public area, or parking lot. The city of Ontario, California, passed a similar ordinance prohibiting the solicitation of employment on public streets and at unauthorized commercial and industrial parking areas (Clark 2000, A1).

Unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) have responded to these attacks by organizing immigrant workers and supporting legislation to give complete amnesty to undocumented workers. However, they held back on organizing day laborers. Hence, other grassroots groups, organizations, and individuals have recognized the need to fill that void (López-Garza 2000, 162–63; Toma and Esbenschade

“Pomona’s Ordinance 3814, approved in June 1996, fines workers up to one thousand dollars and/or places them in jail for up to six months if they solicit employment on any street, public area, or parking lot.”

2000; Acuna 1996, 197–98; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 221–29; Valenzuela 1999; Jones-Correa 1998).

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“ This chapter focuses on a collaborative effort in the city of Pomona, where college students, a faculty member, community advocates, and day laborers joined together to establish an official site from which day laborers could negotiate employment.

site from which day laborers could negotiate employment. This case study is part of a larger story taking place throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area and the United States, where workers are creating partnerships and coalitions to build power and defend their rights.

Our findings show that day laborers are difficult to organize. Unlike other low-wage workers such as janitors and gardeners who are

more established in specific locations with specific employers, day laborers are highly mobile and dependent on different employers on a daily basis. These difficulties have manifested themselves in the use of various strategies to organize day laborers. One strategy depends on a top-down (business-union-type) model that excludes the voices of the workers and simultaneously uses antisolicitation city government ordinances and law enforcement agencies to force day laborers off the streets. Another strategy, the participatory model, focuses on improving the long-term conditions of day laborers by advancing services aimed at improving their quality of life and involving them in the policy making and leadership building. This chapter, inasmuch as it is about building collaborative relations, is also about the different strategies that are being used to organize day laborers.

## THE POMONA DAY LABOR CENTER

The Pomona Day Labor Center is situated in the city of Pomona, which is located thirty miles east of downtown Los Angeles. Similar to the demographic changes taking place in Los Angeles, Pomona's overall population has grown from 131,723 in 1990 to 149,473 in 2000, a 13.5 percent change. The population changes between 1990 and 2000 have resulted in the proportion of Latinos in the city's population growing from 54 percent (77,776) to 65 percent (96,370); Asian/Pacific Islanders remaining at about 7 percent (from 9,846 to 10,765); African Americans decreasing from 14 percent (19,013) to 10 percent (14,398); and Whites decreasing from 26 percent (36,687) to 17 percent (25,348) (U.S. Census Bureau 1990, 2000).

Since opening its doors on January 5, 1998, the center has been located in a business center west of downtown and east of the Corona Freeway. A Contractor's Warehouse is located on the south side of the business center. Employers gather materials at the Contractor's Warehouse and then proceed to hire workers who congregate in the parking lot. *La esquina*, as the corner in front of the center where some workers wait for employers is called, has an eighteen-year history of serving as a gathering place for day laborers.

On entering the center, a long bar-shaped table awaits the employer or employee. From this table a staff member greets employers and registers day laborers for employment on a first-come and first-serve basis. A roster is used to keep records about who works on any given day, the hours worked,

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the salary received, and the employer's information, such as license plate numbers. The day laborers who do not go on a work assignment for the day are given priority on the roster the following day.

Behind the table are some filing cabinets and office supplies, which are next to a used computer that sits on a desk. A plain wall, constructed by the day laborers, separates the front desk from a long room. The walls, painted a plain green by the student interns and day laborers, display various posters, including one with a United Farm Workers' Union flag. On any given day, one can see workers watching television at one corner of the room as others work diligently at a table of computers. At the other corner, half a dozen workers are observed sitting around a folding table playing cards. This room is also the site for various Pitzer College student-led efforts, which include language training, health care referral, and immigration rights services.

## CAMPUS/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

A partnership between Pitzer College and the day laborers in Pomona developed out of a common interest in community building. Pitzer College, a coeducational liberal arts college located in the city of Claremont with an enrollment of approximately 850 men and women, has had a history of encouraging social responsibility through student participation in community service learning projects.

The authors of this article reflected this ethos by carrying out research and participating in various organizing efforts alongside the day laborers in Pomona. As part of a course in the spring of 1997 called "Restructuring Communities," Professor José Z. Calderón had college students interning in various local movements so that they could work with community activists. One of

the student groups began to work with Fabian Nuñez, a community activist and Pitzer student (who is now the speaker of the California State Assembly). Meanwhile, Pomona city officials were debating ways to implement the municipal ordinance approved in 1996 to remove day laborers from public streets. Professor Calderón and his students joined Nuñez, day laborers, and other Pomona community organizers in packing city hall to protest the ordinance. When city officials defended their actions by claiming that all day laborers were undocumented, Pitzer students presented evidence proving that permanent residents also made up a portion of those who solicited work on the street corners. Using Valenzuela's aforementioned 1999 study on day laborers, the students showed the council that a portion of day laborers had resided in the United States for ten years or more.

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In addition, Pitzer students explored other alternatives to the punishment and incarceration proposed by city officials. Pitzer students visited day labor centers organized by the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), which receive more than one hundred thousand dollars each from the city of Los Angeles. They gathered crucial information on the success of well-established day labor centers, which led to a funding proposal for a similar center in Pomona. The funding information in particular has been extremely useful in the struggle to receive more financial support from the city of Pomona and from private foundations for the Pomona Day Labor Center.



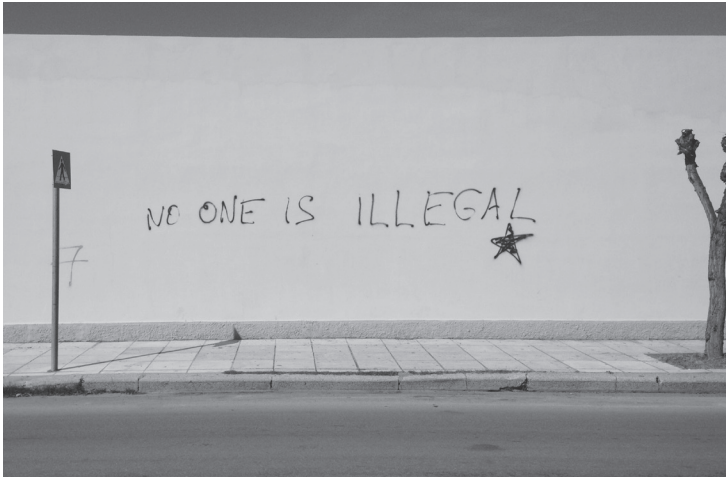


Photo by Miko Guzik on Unsplash.

Ultimately, the Pomona City Council supported the establishment of a day labor center near the most popular day laborer corner. Although calling it “unlawful” to solicit work in public spaces, Ordinance 3814 proclaimed that a “designated day labor center” was the only “lawful” place to solicit work in the city. Subsequently, a coalition of community organizers and students formed a nonprofit organization, the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center (PEOC), which received fifty thousand dollars in seed money from the city of Pomona’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to establish a day labor center (Tresague 1997). The city also appointed a board of directors that included city commission members, some independent consultants, and community representatives. Resulting from the college’s involvement, the city council also appointed Professor Calderón and various students to the board.

An on-site director was hired to oversee the daily operations of the center. A lawyer on the board who had organized a day labor center in Glendale, California, suggested that the PEOC hire directors from outside the center. Unfortunately, due to high overhead costs and a lack of consistent financial resources, the PEOC was unable to pay the director a substantial wage or offer adequate benefits.

This placed most of the pressure on the site director, because he worked 7 days a week and 365 days a year. Without adequate funds to hire a staff that could take care of the operational needs of the center, the burden of administering the nonprofit organization fell on the shoulders of the board of directors.

Embedded in the allocation of the seed money was the city’s expectation that the center would be able to become self-sufficient. As a way to achieve self-sufficiency, the original organizers of the center encouraged the workers to pay dues of thirty dollars per month. Although the dues collec-

tions were sporadic, with many workers not paying at all, the dues eventually dropped to twenty dollars and then to ten dollars. The initial seed money and workers’ dues, although helping to sustain the center’s operation for two years, was not enough to cover the total costs. With the help of Pitzer College’s Center for California Cultural and Social Issues (CCCSI),

Professor Calderón urged more of his students to use their research at the center to write funding proposals to the city and various private foundations. Although the grants were relatively small and not enough to hire a full-time executive director, they were instrumental in keeping the center in operation.

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## PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The summer of 1999 served as a critical turning point in the development of the center. Under the direction of José Calderón,

Pitzer students Suzanne Foster and Silvia Rodriguez (along with fellow student Jill McGougan) served as participants and researchers at the Pomona Day Labor Center from June 1999 until April 2000. They talked to the day laborers and listened closely to their experiences, including their transition from the corner to the center and their life stories. The methodology of participant observation was used in order to collect information about the center and to build a successful organization. The three students taught English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, trained new student interns working at the center, helped to advance the development of a health project, and wrote proposals to foundations for funding. Suzanne Foster, co-vice president of the center's board of directors in 2000, wrote a senior thesis entitled "Empowerment Services and Social Change at the Pomona Day Labor Center." Jill McGougan, who has served on the center's board of directors since 2000, also wrote a senior thesis entitled "The Internal and External Factors Impacting a Day Labor Center."

In contrast to traditional research methods, our research team focused its inquiries on those issues that primarily benefited the day laborer community. Rather than setting ourselves apart from the community that we were researching, we sought to participate alongside the day laborers in finding solutions to the problems

that they were facing (Nyden et al. 1999). We applied aspects of the action research method, where both the researchers and community participants collaborate to produce knowledge with the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and analysis (Greenwood and Levin 1998). The kind of change that

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this methodology refers to is one that is pragmatic and involves the community participants in the decision-making process so that they can negotiate having more control over their lives. Our research team participated in all aspects of the day labor center's activities. We informed the workers about our research and shared our findings as a means of advancing collaboration around grant proposals, policy changes, and board decisions. Because of the highly mobile character of day laborers based on their fluctuating opportunities for work, we were not able to involve them directly in the research methodology on a daily basis. Nevertheless, we shared our research processes, findings, and written work with them.

In seeking to apply a methodology that could involve the workers in the research process, the research team began with the premise that trust had to be an essential component of a just relationship with the day laborer community and that this could only be accomplished through equal participation and compassion. Raul Gomez, an ex-day laborer who visited the center in June 1999, expressed to Foster the importance of having mutual respect as a foundation for the success of any project at the center. He commented that “the workers are very sensitive to being talked down to or to being made to feel stupid,” and that without respect on the part of all the participants, the researchers “shouldn't volunteer, nor should anyone else.”

The research team took this advice into serious consideration as it met with CHIRLA, the Institute

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of Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA), and the Community Learning Network (CLN) in order to assess their methods of organizing day laborers and use of popular education. Based on our meetings with these groups, our research team determined that the so-called top-down model of organizing is an ineffective way to organize day laborers and that a more effective model is one that emphasizes “worker participation, confrontation, pressure from arenas other than the worksite itself, and strategic planning” (Sherman and Voss 2000, 84).

## TOP-DOWN ORGANIZING MODEL

The top-down model of organizing day laborers can be compared to the traditional models of unionism that rely primarily on dues in exchange for a staff that handles the problems of the members (Sherman and Voss 2000). This type of organizing places the primary power in the hands of the staff and treats the worker as a secondary participant.

This business-unionism model best characterized the practice of two consultants working on day laborer issues for a national hardware supply company. The consultants (whose names have been changed) began their participation with the Pomona Day Labor Center when the nonprofit board of directors was in its developmental stages. Alice Smith, one of the consultants, described herself as a student from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) carrying out research on day laborers. The other consultant, Winston Nelson, introduced himself as a lawyer who volunteered his services to help establish day labor centers in the region. Both of the consultants immediately moved into leadership positions at the center by claiming that they had created models for establishing day labor centers in other Los Angeles area cities like Glendale and El Monte.

When the center first opened, Smith and Nelson implemented a membership structure in Pomona that they had used in other cities. This structure defined members as those who used the services of the center and paid the thirty dollar dues. Smith and Nelson originally imposed the dues component as a means of persuading the workers to follow the center’s rules and to develop a basis for self-sufficiency. They negatively labeled those day laborers who chose not to become members of the center as *piratas* (pirates), a name that workers at the center continue to use to this day. Further, they persuaded some of the first directors of the center to portray the *piratas* publicly as being drug and alcohol users. The directors were also trained by Smith and Nelson to enforce the ordinance and use the police to force the *piratas* to register as members of the center. This tactic involved getting members of the center to distribute fliers at the parking lot entrance that spoke negatively about the *piratas*, advising employers of the city’s ordinance, and calling on employers to hire day laborers only from the city-sanctioned center. Smith used cameras and two-way radios to pinpoint the so-called *piratas*. The center’s director was instructed to call the police to report fights and disturbances, even when such activities were not happening. Later, the police officers realized that the calls were placed solely to instill fear and to force the workers to become members of the center and to generate revenue. Two police officers were present at a board of directors’ meeting on August 18, 1999. They announced that they would no longer respond to what they called “fraudulent calls.” Even after the police department took this position, Smith and Nelson insisted that the phone calls were necessary to implement the ordinance and to stop the growing concentration of day laborers on the corner.

The strategies used under the direction of Smith and Nelson divided the day laborers, created conflict between those who were considered members of the center and those who were not,



The strategies used under the direction of Smith and Nelson divided the day laborers, created conflict between those who were considered members of the center and those who were not, and increased animosity between the day laborers and the center's board of directors.

and increased animosity between the day laborers and the center's board of directors. Subsequently, the board of directors began to question Smith and Nelson on criticisms raised by the day laborers about the workers' lack of representation in the center's decision-making processes. For example, pursuant to the recommendations of Smith and Nelson, the board of directors agreed to

charge the day laborers thirty dollars per month in dues. According to Smith and Nelson, these were the wishes of the day laborers themselves. Later, through a meeting between members of the board and the day laborers, the board learned that the workers had never voted or reached a consensus on paying this amount. According to the workers, the idea of paying dues and the amount were imposed on them by Smith and Nelson.

The board also questioned Smith concerning the reason that worker representatives no longer attended the board meetings, as prescribed by the bylaws of the organization. She reported that the worker representatives had problems with their board membership and "had decided to resign." Smith did not explain the reasons for the workers' resignations nor did she attempt to recruit more day laborers to the board. Instead, Smith committed herself to being present at all the meetings and serving as a liaison between the board and the day laborers. Meanwhile, Nelson proposed a change in the organization's bylaws to have a five-member board instead of the original eleven to thirteen members, five of which were designated as day laborers. Although Nelson's proposed bylaw

change was never voted on, the day laborers stopped coming to the meetings and Smith took the liaison position.

By January 1999, Nelson and Smith had moved into the positions of president and treasurer of the board of directors. Since the other board members did not have the time to devote to these positions, no one objected to their appointments. Their role as liaisons, however, resulted in a lack of communication between the board of directors and the day laborers. Further, the day laborers began to raise questions about the center's expenditures and, in particular, how their dues were being used.

## THE NEEDS OF THE WORKERS

Although recent studies of new immigrants have found a high rate of labor force participation and a low usage of public assistance, this does not mean that they do not have needs related to quality-of-life issues (Pastor 2000). Largely because of their undocumented status, day laborers turn to places such as day labor centers to help provide employment and education opportunities.

The research team soon learned of the day laborers' criticism of Smith for her failure to implement the English classes she had promised for at least a year. From the day laborers' perspectives, English was essential for gaining employment, negotiating a decent wage, and contesting mistreatment. Manuel Gonzalez, one of the day laborers at the center, emphasized this point at a general membership meeting. He said that



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the day laborers had all agreed to come to the center in the beginning because it promised job training, English classes, and other benefits, but the workers never received these services. He was angry because the workers had been promised these programs and services but had received only an organized system of work distribution, shelter, and a bathroom. As reported in Foster's July 1999 field notes, the workers didn't even have any drinking water.

Smith and Nelson's strategy centered more on meeting employers' needs for workers who worked hard and did not question anything or complain. This exemplifies the situation that some studies describe where employers prefer immigrant workers as a "controllable labor force" that works hard and keeps quiet about working conditions for fear of deportation (Ong and Valenzuela 1996).

The desire of the day laborers to improve their quality of life required a move beyond the marketplace strategies of supply and demand. It demanded that the workers be treated as "subjects," not as "objects," in the process (Freire 1993). This was a difficult transition to implement, particularly when the workers were caught in the immediacy of survival. Author Henry Giroux proposes that the "notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labor process and the need of capital accumulation" (1983).

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The necessity of trading labor for wages becomes the primary focus of many people's realities, although critical thinking, culture, and power are perhaps equally significant. The labor process does not freely allow access to education and critical thinking because of its strong demands on people. Although gaining employment is an essential

piece of the puzzle, attaining empowering education and services significantly aids a strategy for organizing workers.

The urgent requests of the members of the center for certain services demonstrated that, although employment was a priority, it certainly was not the only valued goal. For example, several men wrote "*superar*" (to advance, or succeed) when asked what they most wanted on their membership application for the center. Although an equal number, if not more, answered "work" to this question, it could not be denied that these men had additional goals and dreams that deserved to be addressed. One man, Miguel Venustiano, answered the same question on July 5, 1999, in this way: "*Quiero triunfar, para sacar adelante a mi familia, y asi devolverles la felicidad y la paz que ellos me ofrecen*" (I want to triumph, to move my family forward, and by doing this return to them the happiness and peace that they have given me).

The experience of a seventy-five-year-old immigrant worker at the center exemplifies this issue. Originally a farmer in Mexico, Pepe Sanchez is considered a grandfather by the day laborers and placed in honor at the top of the roster list for jobs daily. Realizing that Sanchez was getting too old to work, the site director looked into the possibility of obtaining some type of social services for him. As with other immigrant workers, the case has become entangled in the bureaucratic process of proving permanent resident status. The day may well come when Sanchez is physically unable to work but has no one to look out for him. This elderly day laborer's case brought forward the need to move beyond employment services to also provide immigration rights, education, and health care services at the center. The center

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The men at the center have a wide range of skills and educational levels. Some have not completed a sixth-grade level of education, whereas others have earned their university degree in their country of origin. Some have completed or almost completed high school in the United States. Others have received training all of their lives, in different areas like manufacturing, construction, or agriculture. Although there is no lack of skills at the center, there is a lack of knowledge regarding local resources and services that would allow the workers to improve and build on what they already know or even earn a more advanced degree. Some workers, like Tomas Rios and Antonio Guerrero, do not feel that they can attain their goals in a system that is not in their language, or in a country that is not officially their own. Attaining these skills or knowledge can improve their socioeconomic status, improve their outlook on life, and help them find permanent employment. This knowledge and provision of services are essential to their empowerment as human beings and as working immigrants.

Smith and Nelson pitted the need for employment against the need for other types of services. Calderón's field notes from June 22, 1999, reflect a meeting between our research team and Smith in which she claimed that the most effective strategy for running a day labor center was to implement what she called a "union" model. This model, according to Smith, allows the workers to restrict the supply of their labor and to force the employers to pay a living wage above the minimum. Smith suggested that the union model was currently used at the center. She added that this strategy had resulted in the day laborers agreeing collectively on a minimum hourly wage of \$7.00 to charge employers. She stated that other day labor centers (particularly those directed by the

organization CHIRLA) implemented the "social service agency model that do[es] not have a collective minimum wage" and "will accept paying the workers only \$5.00 an hour, and even below." Smith went on to explain that the service model practiced by CHIRLA resulted in the day laborers using the centers primarily for the free services and not to reach financial stability. "The day laborers protest against freebies," said Smith during our meeting. Our research of CHIRLA day labor centers revealed that they do have an established collective minimum wage of \$8.00 an hour and, as described later in this chapter, that they provide access to an array of services.

One Pitzer student researcher, Heather Miller, found that some day laborers shied away from available services, but not for the reasons stated by Smith. As the Pomona Day Labor Center began to sponsor health screenings and eye exams, it was noted that some day laborers hesitated because of their immigration status and because of their need to make work the primary focus of their lives. Others openly mentioned a lack of trust in established institutions (Miller 2001).

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## THE PARTICIPATORY MODEL FOR DAY LABORER ORGANIZING

Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, in *Building Bridges*, propose that successful organizing strategies among workers, in addition to ensuring their full democratic participation, involve the

advancement of coalitions between worker and community organizations “that go beyond the traditional limits of collective bargaining” (1990, 196).

CHIRLA and IDEPSCA are carrying out all aspects of this participatory model when organizing day laborers. In mid-1999, the research team met with two CHIRLA representatives, Day Laborer Project coordinator Pablo Alvarado and Worker’s Rights Project coordinator Victor Narro. They introduced their projects and their methods to involve day laborers in all facets of the organizing effort. Alvarado explained that in 1989, CHIRLA assisted the city of Los Angeles in opening the first day laborer site in the nation, located in Harbor City. CHIRLA organizers assisted in the creation

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of the site, but did not get directly involved in the operation of the center. Rather, the Harbor City site was considered a pilot project and was first operated by the city of Los Angeles. In 1990, the city opened another site in North Hollywood. Between 1989 and 1996, both centers were operated by the Los Angeles Community Development Department. The

department viewed the day laborers’ presence primarily as a health and safety issue, and therefore did not allow the workers to organize or to initiate marketing campaigns about the center.

CHIRLA soon began to move beyond informal organizing at street corners to organizing around the issues that affected day laborers throughout Los Angeles. During this time, CHIRLA’s efforts were concentrated at one corner in the Ladera Heights community, where there was a local movement to criminalize day laborers. Here, CHIRLA organized a multiracial coalition to defend the

rights of day laborers and to protest against a citywide initiative targeting day laborers. In 1994, the Los Angeles County supervisors passed a local ordinance, similar to the one later passed in the city of Pomona, against labor solicitation on public and private property in unincorporated areas. Rather than calling for any specific penalty, the supervisors left it up to property owners to implement the ordinance. In response, CHIRLA developed a “free speech zone” where collaboration occurred among the police, local residents, Home Depot, community organizations, and the day laborers. The Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission facilitated collaborative meetings where a number of conflict resolution sessions were held between the residents and day laborers. These sessions resulted in policies that benefited the status of day laborers in other areas throughout the county. In addition to ensuring respect for free speech areas for day laborers, it advanced the implementation of similar “human relations models” in places such as Woodland Hills, the area centered in Maria A. Gutierrez de Soldatenko’s discussion of Justice for Janitors in this volume. Here, government officials sought to stop the concentration of day laborers on corners by employing police on horseback. CHIRLA proposed the alternative of organizing day labor centers as community-based organizations that included the voices of day laborers. According to the CHIRLA representatives, the city of Los Angeles began receiving a great deal of criticism for not finding solutions to day laborers gathering on corners, an issue that some city officials categorized as *el patito feo* (the ugly duckling), or a problem that no one wanted. In 1996, the city of Los Angeles sought to address this issue by releasing requests for proposals (RFPs) and inviting community organizations interested in administering the various day laborer centers to submit bids. In the first round of RFPs, CHIRLA and IDEPSCA were the only agencies that applied. City officials opened up another round of RFPs with the intention of getting more applications, with

no result. In the absence of other interested organizations, CHIRLA and IDEPSCA were given a contract to operate the various sites and to implement various conflict mediation programs. According to Calderón's field notes from July 6, 1999, CHIRLA and IDEPSCA were then receiving up to \$112 thousand from Community Development Block Grant funds annually for each of four different centers.

Moving beyond the health and safety models developed by the city of Los Angeles, CHIRLA introduced three participatory components for organizing day laborer centers:

1. Ensure the basic civil, labor, and human rights of day laborers by involving them in advocacy efforts on issues that directly affect them.
2. Develop employment opportunities through outreach and marketing strategies organized by day laborers.
3. Advance a practice of civic engagement by involving day laborers in their communities (initiating volunteer community cleanups, remodeling old housing, organizing soccer leagues, and so forth).

In contradistinction to the perspective of Alice Smith, the CHIRLA representatives rejected the idea of day laborer organization being narrowly configured along the lines of a service agency model. Mayron Payes, a CHIRLA organizer, explained that CHIRLA uses "different approaches" to ensure the "full participation" of the day laborers. CHIRLA provides services such as assistance with wage claim cases both to encourage participation in the center and to defend workers' rights. He added that these services do not make workers more dependent, but improve the conditions of their lives so that they can fully participate in all aspects of civil

society. Since the majority of the day laborers are Latino, CHIRLA has sought to tap the cultural aspects of this particular community. Payes gave various examples of this approach, including the organization of a soccer team, a *teatro* (theater) group, and a musical group. In addition, a group of workers was collaborating at that time to produce a newsletter for day laborers. Other day laborers join in a yearly day labor conference where organizing strategies are discussed. For Payes, these "nontraditional" approaches to organizing allow "day laborers to participate, to grow as persons and as a community, and to reduce their alienation." In terms of empowerment, the CHIRLA representatives also spoke about another group of day laborers organizing themselves into a union, El Sindicato de Jornaleros.

The workers have also organized themselves and lobbied their state representatives to pass a bill supporting the right of undocumented workers to obtain driver's licenses or state-sanctioned identification cards. In this way, CHIRLA representatives claim, day laborers move beyond the individual needs of getting a job and securing good wages to organizing around the policies that affect their everyday lives.

“ CHIRLA introduced three participatory components for organizing day laborer centers:

1. Ensure the basic civil, labor, and human rights of day laborers by involving them in advocacy efforts on issues that directly affect them.
2. Develop employment opportunities through outreach and marketing strategies organized by day laborers.
3. Advance a practice of civic engagement by involving day laborers in their communities (initiating volunteer community cleanups, remodeling old housing, organizing soccer leagues, and so forth).



“ The leadership school provided a forum for discussion and education on how institutions function in the United States, how the global economy affects day laborers, and how they can become participants in the decision-making process.

CHIRLA supported this process of empowerment by holding a day laborer leadership school. The leadership school provided a forum for discussion and education on how institutions function in the United States, how the global economy affects day laborers, and how they can become participants in the decision-making process. The success of the lead-

ership school could be seen at the day labor centers and corners, where the workers take the lead in implementing their own rules, devising their own processes of distributing work each morning, holding general decision-making assemblies, and participating in monthly advisory board meetings.

CHIRLA's strategy of organizing has been implemented in the approximately 150 corners throughout Los Angeles where day laborers gather. Since it is impossible to acquire funding for so many day labor centers, Pablo Alvarado states that CHIRLA has found an alternative by building collaborative relationships among residents, city officials, and day laborers at these various sites:

With a little organizing and conflict mediation, we have been able to turn tense situations at some of these corners into places where the workers have negotiated their responsibilities to these communities by developing agreed-upon rules of conduct and designated employment pickup sites.

CHIRLA and IDEPSCA utilize a participatory model based on popular education in the delivery of their services and in their organizing principles. Similar to various workers' rights centers organized

in Los Angeles, the work of CHIRLA and IDEPSCA goes beyond social services. Their organizing principles empower the workers. The workers understand the world around them. In addition, they receive leadership training to create changes in their conditions (Bonacich 2000, 146). According to the CHIRLA representatives, this holistic approach serves the needs of the day laborers and advances the goal of creating "self-sustaining communities."

## POMONA'S DAY LABOR CENTER: BUILDING THE PARTICIPATORY MODEL

An effort to duplicate the participatory model at the Pomona Day Labor Center faced a serious challenge. The research team discovered that Smith and Nelson had been writing fraudulent progress reports to the city of Pomona claiming to be implementing various services at the center, including ESL classes; translation and mediation services between workers and employers; referring workers to appropriate agencies for services; and conducting tax workshops (City of Pomona 1999). This same report revealed some important figures that the day laborers had no knowledge about:

A help to the Pomona program are the materials and expenses donated by [a national hardware supply company] of \$9,280.40 in the last year, and the two consultants paid by the [company] to facilitate the program, a lawyer [Nelson] and a day laborer organizer [Smith] who organized [a nearby city's] program as well as others (\$55,532.50 in the last year, actual billed hours). (City of Pomona 1999)

Smith and Nelson were asked by the center's board of directors to account for these funds. As noted in Calderón's field notes from November 17, 1999, a board member requested an itemized budget

reflecting how the consultant fees were spent, the conditions under which the funds were granted, and the actual use of the funds in relation to the center. Nelson's response to the request was that the consultant fees were not anyone's business but his own, and that he didn't ask where anyone else's "personal paychecks came from."

Under fire from the day laborers and the board, both Smith and Nelson resigned their positions as treasurer and president, respectively. Their resignations gave way to a more democratic process in which workers were involved in decision making at the center, the development of partnerships was strongly emphasized, and the particular services that the workers had been asking for were finally implemented.

A partnership developed that, like the participatory model, sought to use a holistic approach with a combination of employment opportunities, leadership training, various services, projects, meetings, and organizing efforts to sustain the center. Through a collaborative effort with the Community Learning Network (CLN), an organization based at Claremont Graduate University, several Pitzer students (including the coauthors) began to develop an ESL curriculum for the center. CLN's organizers advised the Pitzer students on implementing a participatory action model of

education and organization that focused on the community's assets rather than its deficiencies (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). The model CLN used seeks to overcome the practices of many community initiatives, which, rather than advancing a "positive capacity-building venture," serve only to perpetuate "feelings of

“The model CLN used seeks to overcome the practices of many community initiatives, which, rather than advancing a “positive capacity-building venture,” serve only to perpetuate “feelings of dependency.”

dependency” (Kingsley, McNeely, and Gibson 1997). CLN sought to advance this community-building process by assessing the needs of the community, connecting to its skills and resources, and working on common issues.

The CLN organizers and the Pitzer students used focus groups as the primary vehicle to gather information on the needs and assets at the center. The focus groups identified the needs for work, ESL classes, and information on immigrants' rights. The focus groups also determined that the men had a vast amount of personal knowledge about their experience as immigrants, crossing physical and political borders, and trading their labor for wages. The ESL classes, then, were taught in such a way that acknowledged the workers' experiences and areas of expertise. Further, the curriculum helped to draw out the workers' opinions on issues at the center and other needed resources.

This participatory model of communication and education was implemented with the intention of empowering the workers to examine critically the issues in their realities, to connect them with other issues in a process of problematizing their similarities, and to reflect upon their common themes for social change (Freire 1993, 89). Through the process of dialogue, the students and teachers together created a curriculum that focused on experiences and themes that were important to them, including employment, tools, and health (Bentley 2001).

“This participatory model of communication and education was implemented with the intention of empowering the workers to examine critically the issues in their realities, to connect them with other issues in a process of problematizing their similarities, and to reflect upon their common themes for social change.”

A health project emerged after a student found out that a worker was very ill and did not have access to health care. After the student took this individual to a doctor, many other workers asked for similar help. A partnership was soon created between the center and the Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona and regular health screenings and health referrals were implemented. More than thirty medical interns and doctors from Western University's Pomona Community Health Action Team (PCHAT) performed physical exams at the center. Eighty workers attended the health fair and more than fifty workers received physicals—some for the first time in many years.

Presently, Pitzer students continue to expand the health project to include eye and dental care. One man, in his sixties, had experienced difficulty with his vision for ten years. When the students took him to get an eye exam and bought him glasses through the program, he related that a whole new world had opened up to him. Now he could see things around him that he had never seen before.

An immigration rights project was also launched at the center. An immigration rights lawyer held a workshop on recent changes in immigration laws. Some student interns were involved on various legal cases, including one where an employer refused to pay three workers a total of three thousand dollars owed to them. Through the simple process of training and educating the workers on how to prepare and file a small claims suit, the full amount was eventually retrieved.

## TRANSFORMING LOS ANGELES THROUGH COALITION BUILDING

With the transformation of the Los Angeles region to a postindustrial urban economy there has been an expansion of high-wage professionals, on one end, and low-wage unorganized manual

laborers, on the other. These developments have led to an increase of day laborers in the informal economy, which has resulted in various efforts aimed at organizing them.

Some initiatives, led by conservative anti-immigrant groups, have sought to abolish various services and programs, such as bilingual education and adult literacy programs, that can help build the economic and political capacity of immigrant workers (Ono and Sloop 2002; Crawford 1992; Calderón 1989). There are others who promote municipal ordinances either to criminalize day laborers or to promote their exploitation as a cheap labor force. What these groups have in common is a top-down strategy that aims at dividing immigrant workers from the working class and excluding them from the growing political voice and clout of a growing Latino and “minority majority” population.

The story of the implementation of participatory strategies through collaborative partnerships described in this chapter shows that there is no contradiction between the use of education as a service and an organizational form that is inclusive of the day laborers' voices and leadership. Through the use of nontraditional methods that allow for critical dialogue and the involvement of the participants, the goals of an empowering education can be achieved. Ira Shor, a pacesetter in the field of critical education, defines the goals of an empowering education as relating “personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change” (1992, 15). The collaboration between Pitzer

“ The story of the implementation of participatory strategies through collaborative partnerships described in this chapter shows that there is no contradiction between the use of education as a service and an organizational form that is inclusive of the day laborers' voices and leadership.

College and the Pomona Day Labor Center, although confronting many obstacles, has advanced the development of a participatory action model between the day laborer and campus communities, a culture of bottom-up decision making by all the partners involved, and a connection between the needed services of day laborers and an organizational form to advocate for their rights. ■

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some factors that have led to the rise of a service sector based on low-wage workers and the growth of an informal economy?
2. Given this country's history of dividing workers through blaming immigrants for depressing wages and taking jobs, why is it important to organize immigrant workers in the informal economy? How does the use of popular education and worker participation build unity in understanding the source of racial disparities and in mobilizing resistance to these anti-immigrant attacks?
3. Why would construction corporations promote a top-down form of organizing based on services, enforcement, and non-participation of the workers?

## CHAPTER FOUR

# WE CAN'T TALK ABOUT IMMIGRATION WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGING BLACK IMMIGRANTS

Kovie Biakolo

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

There are about four million Black immigrants in the United States, including more than 600,000 Black undocumented immigrants, many of whom have experienced trauma in our immigration and carceral systems. So much of the Black immigrant experience in the United States is caught between the country's immigrant narrative of

hope and the sometimes severe realities of living a Black experience and surviving a cruel and inhumane immigration system. This article for *Yes! Magazine* by Kovie Biakolo discusses how with strong, rich roots in the United States, Black people are part of this country's immigration narrative. A writer and multiculturalism scholar, Biakolo argues that as we struggle with racial violence and its impact on the lives of Black community members, we must acknowledge that immigration is a racial justice issue. It is a Black issue. Even though Black immigrants make up less than 9 percent of the undocumented population, they make up over 20 percent of all immigrants facing deportation on criminal grounds or alleged criminal offenses, according to the Black Alliance for Just Immigration. Among all immigrants, Black immigrants are nearly three times more likely to be detained and deported because of an alleged criminal offense. In the country's imagination, Black immigrants are seldom envisioned among the surging waves of those moving from Central American to the southern U.S. border in 2018 and 2019 or among the estimated 11 million or so undocumented immigrants who live in the shadows of this country—including “dreamers,” who have emerged as the new face of that group. The struggle for justice for all immigrants is part of a larger racial justice movement that demands full equality and investments in Black immigrants and their liberation. We cannot end detention and deportation and anti-immigrant policies until we address the fact that our current immigration system is rooted in anti-Black racism.

SOURCE: Biakolo, Kovie. “We Can’t Talk About Immigration Without Acknowledging Black Immigrants,” *Yes! Magazine*, July 7, 2020. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2020/07/07/black-immigrants-united-states>. Reprinted under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

This year, New York City celebrates the centennial of the Harlem Renaissance, the cultural movement that helped shape the intellectual, artistic, and social life of Black people. Before the

coronavirus pandemic that shut down the city, cultural events and musical tributes had been held and were planned in Harlem, the neighborhood that characterized and gave the era its name.

The Harlem Renaissance transformed Black identity and self-conception, not just in the United States, but throughout Black spaces, globally. The depth of this reach was not only a result of the movement's impact, but also a testament to new patterns of Black migration.

Millions of African Americans formed the Great Migration, escaping the racial terror and plantations of the Jim Crow South in search of new opportunities in the urban North. Simultaneously, a small but significant wave of Black immigrants began coming to the U.S. from the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas, later to be joined by immigrants from the African continent.

The arrival of Black immigrants was driven in large part by many of the same forces that brought other waves of immigrants to this country—pursuing education, safety, economic opportunity, fleeing the impact of U.S. policy, or following the path of family members who came before them. And all these groups would live alongside each other in established Black northern communities and, perhaps, for the first time, the African diaspora encountered itself in a new way.

“The Harlem Renaissance kind of represents that moment in which you have these varying groups of people coming together, working out their differences and trying to work out the meaning

“ A writer and multiculturalism scholar, Biakolo argues that as we struggle with racial violence and its impact on the lives of Black community members, we must acknowledge that immigration is a racial justice issue.

of their relationship to the United States and to the British empire and so forth . . .” says Dr. Michael Gomez, New York University’s Silver Professor of History and Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies. He’s also founder of the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora. And, he adds, “out of that moment comes this cultural efflorescence where people, Black people, are beginning to see themselves very differently.”

Whether drawn by force, choice, or necessity, Black immigrants have strong, rich roots in this country. And their expanding numbers over the past two decades add to its growing diversity overall and

that of the Black population in particular. The African American experience in this country becomes the experience of all Black people—including the current uprising after the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis.

Patrice Lawrence, a Jamaican American who is interim co-director of UndocuBlack Network, an advocacy group of current and formerly undocumented Black

people, says: “It’s not possible to talk about immigration in this country without acknowledging Black immigrants . . .”

Immigrants such as Garfield Brown, who was 40 when he moved to New York City from Jamaica nearly 20 years ago. Leaving his job as a banker to pursue new opportunities in the States, he went on to establish his own construction company. Brown’s sister, who had immigrated earlier, encouraged him to start a new life with his family in New York, where, over the years, all of their siblings had relocated.

“Having been a professional in my country and having worked in my country for a long time, doing well, I wanted a different footing somewhere else, something in the first world that I could also do well . . .” he says. “I became a small-business owner, and that has propelled me greatly into the American experience.”

Brown believes it takes a certain kind of person to leave their home country to try to make a new life somewhere else. They are motivated differently, he believes, because in coming here they risk much and often feel a need to ensure the sacrifices are worth it. Success is imperative because failure could mean returning home empty-handed.

## THE “AMERICAN” EXPERIENCE

If Black identity in the United States, in general, experienced a rebirth in the Harlem Renaissance, Black immigrant identity can trace, at least in part, some of its modern origins to the period. Initially, many Black immigrants, who today number about 4.2 million across the U.S., resettled in New York and mostly northern states—not exactly a beacon of racial harmony, but a perceived respite from the Jim Crow South in a post–World War I U.S.

This pattern didn’t change until the civil rights movement and the passing of The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which ended the de facto discrimination in immigration policy on non-Northwestern Europeans. The law allowed for more people from different parts of the world, including Afro-Caribbean and Black Latinx people who already had closer ties to the United States because of their proximity, but also, for the first time, a significant number of immigrants from the African continent.

A 2010 article in *Smithsonian* magazine on the changing definition of what it means to be African American shows that during

the 1990s, some 900,000 Black immigrants came to the U.S. from the Caribbean. An added 400,000 came from Africa and still others came from Europe and the Pacific rim. “By the beginning of the 21st century, more people had come from Africa to live in the United States than during the centuries of the slave trade,” the article says. “At that point, nearly one in ten Black Americans was

an immigrant or the child of an immigrant.”

All these new Black immigrants and those coming after would help shape our understanding of the community today—how their stories fit into the larger immigration

narrative, their experiences of Black life, and the unique challenges the community faces today.

For Nana Gyamfi, the U.S. immigration narrative emphasizes the Mayflower stories of White immigrants while excluding Black immigrants, framing their experience only within the African-American context.

“As Black immigrants coming to the country . . . integration into the United States means that you’re integrated into that racial, political context,” Gyamfi says. “And so you integrate into becoming basically, African American, Black American. And all of the anti-Blackness, the discrimination, the bigotry . . . all of the things that Black folks who are multigenerational in the United States experience, now become transferred over to you.”

Gyamfi describes herself as an ABG, an American-born Ghanaian. Her father immigrated to the U.S. in 1966, a year after passage of the immigration act, to pursue his graduate education in engineering at the University of California, Berkeley.

An attorney and organizer for 25 years, she also serves as executive director of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, the largest Black-led immigration rights organization in the country. Its goal, she says, is not just to educate, organize, and advocate on behalf of Black immigrants, but to “unite Black immigrants and African Americans under the umbrella of racial justice . . . racial, political, and economic justice.”

Some Black immigrants arrive in the U.S. having bought into its immigration narrative as a beacon of hope for the huddled masses, she says. Many are woefully unaware not just of its insidious racial politics and economic and social difficulties but the hard and important work by African Americans to gain some of the rights and benefits Black immigrants enjoy.

“I think it’s no different than African Americans escaping racial terror from the South going North to Chicago and New York, or coming West to Los Angeles, [thinking] it was going to give them the same joyful future that it was giving their White counterparts, and [finding] out differently,” Gyamfi says.

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## EDUCATION AS A GATEWAY

Elizabeth Okwirry Mitchell’s father, like Gyamfi’s, also came to the U.S. to pursue an education, part of a wave of budding young scholars from Kenya who arrived in the 1960s to prepare to lead a newly independent nation.



Mitchell was born in Kenya at the behest of a grandfather who insisted his first grandchild be born in the African country. She returned to the U.S. and left several more times before returning permanently in the 1980s as a 20-year-old.

Though she returned then as a visitor, somewhat reluctantly and missing the comforts of home, Mitchell said her American god-mother, a college professor, encouraged her to stay and enroll in college, switching her visa status from visitor to student.

While she ended up postponing college to start a family, education remained a deeply ingrained part of her experience. It's a familiar path for many African immigrants—even today. The result is an educated population that often exemplifies the African immigrant experience. Pew Research, for example, shows that 59 percent of Nigerian immigrants hold bachelor's or advanced degrees—double that of the U.S. population overall. Less known are the legal hurdles African and all Black immigrants encounter, regardless of their immigration path.

## IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION LAWS

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, U.S. immigration laws shifted drastically, and perhaps, with contrasting motivations. In the wake of the Refugee Act of 1980, as crises flared up across the world, the U.S. increased the number of refugees it would take in, leading to vibrant Somali communities in places such as Columbus, Ohio, and the Twin Cities of Minnesota. At the same time, new laws established precedents that began to criminalize immigrants. The most notorious was the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which expanded the reasons for which immigrants, including those with permanent legal status, could be deported.

In the country's imagination, Black immigrants are seldom envisioned among the surging waves of those moving from Central America to the southern U.S. border in 2018 and 2019. Or among the estimated 11 million or so undocumented immigrants who live in the shadows of this country—including “dreamers,” who have emerged as the new face of that group.

People such as Emmanuel Olawale Ajomale, known by his artist moniker, Mannywellz, who as a 9-year-old in 2003 came to the U.S. on a visitor's visa from Nigeria with his mother and a sister. Having taken a similar immigration path, his father was already living and working in Maryland, without legal documents, as a musician in a church and then in real estate.

As a teenager, Ajomale saw his father deported, a possibility that he knew he was subject to from the time he understood that overstaying his visitor's visa as he, his mother, and sister had done, also made them vulnerable to removal.

He applied for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals shortly after the Obama administration passed the Act in 2012, protecting him from possible deportation and allowing him to legally work in the U.S. Last month, the Supreme Court ruled that the Trump administration can't immediately end DACA as the administration had planned, a temporary but important win for immigration advocates.

Now, Ajomale uses his music not only to share his strong Christian faith, but to shine a light on issues like immigration, as in “American

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Photo by Fibonaci Blue, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/44550450@N04/25934143138>, Creative Commons (CC BY 2.0).

Dream,” one of his most-streamed songs in which he chronicles his family’s undocumented experience.

“Even when you received that [DACA], a lot of us still lived in shadows . . .” he says. “I just came to the realization that my story is really powerful, and my life could be a testament or testimony to encourage and push people.”

The work of advocating for people such as Ajomale and other Black immigrants rendered virtually invisible in the nation’s immigration narrative falls to a growing number of Black immigrant-led groups. For example, the Black Immigration Engagement Initiative, a working group of the New York Immigration Coalition, worked alongside a number of organizations to advocate for the New York State Dream Act. Passed in 2019, the measure provides undocumented students access to state-administered grants and scholarships. The group also pushed for passage of Green Light New York, the campaign that allows New Yorkers to obtain drivers licenses, regardless of their immigration status.

Similarly, the UndocuBlack Network fights against the erasure of people whose stories are seldom told in the media, lobbying for

long-term legal status for vulnerable Black communities, Lawrence says. Working alongside other organizations in 2019, for example, it helped secure permanent status for Liberian immigrants who qualified for Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure, a program that grants them work permits and temporary reprieve from deportation.

Another area where Black immigrants exist in the shadows is in U.S. detention, where they make up a disproportionate number of those facing deportation on criminal grounds, according to 2014 ICE data analyzed by Black Immigration Engagement Initiative and New York University’s Immigrant Rights Clinic. The consequences of detention are particularly dire for Black transgender immigrants, who like other trans detainees, are often attacked, assigned to the wrong facility based on gender, or denied proper medication.

Roselyn Berry, an Afro-Latinx steering committee member of the Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project, which advocates for Black queer and trans migrants, recalls the case of Udoka Nweke, a gay Nigerian who sought asylum on grounds that he faced potential violence at home because of his sexual identity. He was immediately detained upon arrival in the U.S. in 2016 and subsequently held for 19 months.

“He was targeted and forced into detention, denied access to mental health services that he desperately needed because he had tried to commit suicide multiple times . . . while in ICE custody,”

“Another area where Black immigrants exist in the shadows is in U.S. detention, where they make up a disproportionate number of those facing deportation on criminal grounds, according to 2014 ICE data analyzed by Black Immigration Engagement Initiative and New York University’s Immigrant Rights Clinic.”

Berry says. BLMP launched a campaign to win his release—and won. “We were able to find him housing, get him access to a work permit, and just recently, he was actually granted asylum,” Berry says, through tears.

For some queer Black immigrants, choosing the United States over their home countries is a matter of safety and sheer survival—if at the cost of potentially facing a more racist country.

Gizelle, who asked to be identified only by her first name, is a queer Jamaican resident who lives in the Midwest and for whom home was out of the question. She originally came to the U.S. on a student visa, which she later parlayed into a green card after her maternal aunt filed a family-based green card petition for Gizelle’s mother.

The family-based immigration model is one that’s often used to reunite family members in the States—and one that is under threat by the current administration. Gizelle says she came within months of aging out of eligibility and facing the possibility of having to return to Jamaica.

“I got used to a certain freedom of expressing queerness . . . and that would not fly in Jamaica,” she says.

## THE “AFRICA BAN”

While blame for the failing immigration system can be spread across all political parties and administrations, no presidency has done more to harm immigrants—especially Black immigrants—than the administration of Donald Trump. At the dawn of his presidency, Trump delivered on one of his campaign’s most contentious promises—to ban Muslim immigrants from the U.S.

Legal challenges went up and new executive orders were handed down and by the time the dust had settled, 13 countries were facing severe restrictions for immigrant or travel visas to the U.S. Many, but not all, had Muslim-majority populations and six of them were African, including the continent’s largest, Nigeria. The “Africa ban” had arrived.

Trump’s handling of the migrant situation on the southern border is also among the most noteworthy of his immigration policies. Significant among the mandates that led to children being separated from their parents and put into cages is one that requires people seeking asylum in the U.S. to “remain in Mexico” and await a chance to make a claim before an immigration judge. Rarely highlighted in this discourse is the increase in Black immigrants traveling this south-to-north route, from hundreds a decade ago to thousands in the past few years.

While some are from the Caribbean and Central America, notably Haiti and Honduras, many are also coming from African countries.

Gyamfi, of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, visited southern Mexico in the summer of 2019, and what she found there underscores the anti-Blackness that Black migrants face in Mexico: teachers refusing to teach Black children, medical professionals turning away sick Black migrants, and families unable to acquire housing.

Some migrants themselves hold unrealistic views of what lies ahead. Gyamfi describes the conversation she had with an Angolan activist against femicide who was forced to flee that country with her husband and seven children. The nine flew to Ecuador and then traveled by foot, by car, even by horseback, crossing jungles, stepping over dead bodies to finally reach Mexico.

“And when that woman looked at me in the face and said, ‘I can’t wait to get to America where my children can be safe.’ . . . How do I explain to this woman that there’s a lot that you think is happening in the United States, or that you don’t know that’s happening, that is going to make your life complicated and difficult?”

## LOOKING AHEAD

So much of the Black immigrant experience in the U.S. is caught between the country’s immigrant narrative of hope, and the sometimes severe realities of living a Black experience, and surviving a tedious immigration system. The Somali-British poet Warsan Shire writes that, “no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.” The poem, which speaks to the refugee experience, seems also to be true of those with limited choices and capacity for a decent life, wherever they are coming from. Black immigrants, some searching for the American Dream, others simply

escaping the nightmare of their homes, may have left the mouth of a shark but are not immune to the sharp edges of American society.

But just as 100 years ago when movement patterns reshaped Black life in a way that fashioned an era in the Harlem Renaissance, movement patterns around the

world might do the same today. In spite of all their political challenges and obstacles, Black immigrants will likely do more than survive in this country—they will continue to contribute greatly to American life, says New York University’s Gomez.

“In spite of all their political challenges and obstacles, Black immigrants will likely do more than survive in this country—they will continue to contribute greatly to American life, says New York University’s Gomez.”



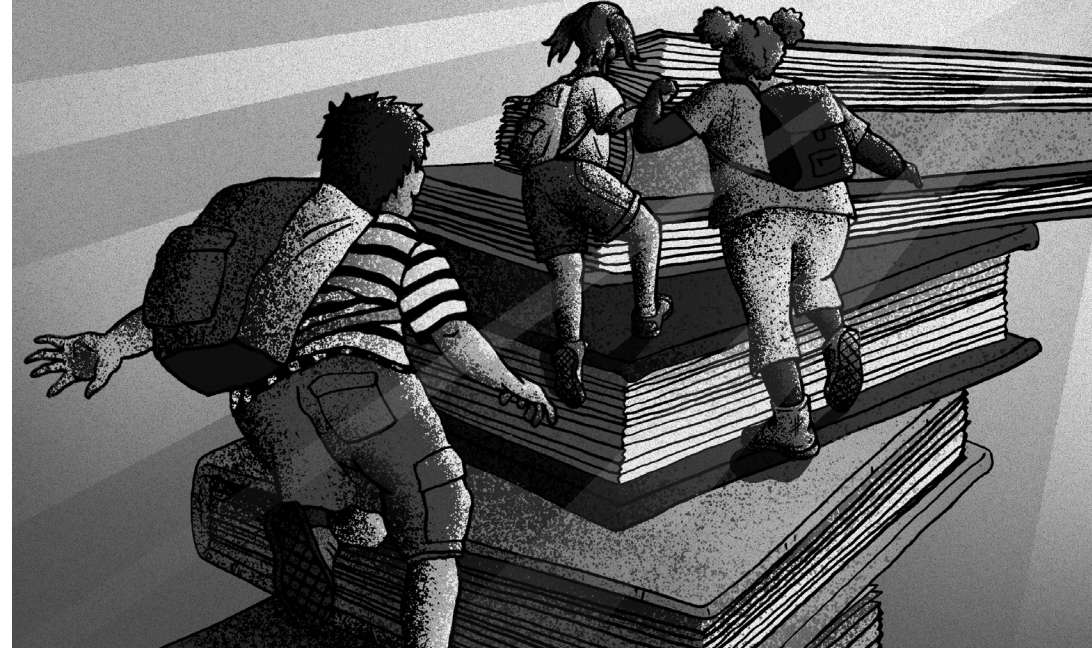
Photo by Mike Von on Unsplash.

“This is your future leadership,” he says, “and they are coming to the fore, and they are going to shape the politics and the sensibilities and the cultures of this place.” ■



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you feel the stories of Black immigrants are not as prominently told as immigrants from other communities?
2. From your understanding of the article, what are some experiences that are unique to Black immigrants?
3. How has the historical context of Black immigration impacted current discussions and policy around race and immigration in the United States?
4. What role do community organizations like the UndocuBlack Network and the Black Alliance for Just Immigration play in supporting Black immigrants? Are you aware of organizations in your community that offer support in multiple domains like the law, policy, and individual assistance? How do they support your communities?



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE SAME STRUGGLE

#### IMMIGRANT RIGHTS AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

José Calderón

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

“The Same Struggle: Immigrant Rights and Educational Justice” presents examples of immigrant parents and students in the immigrant rights movement becoming leaders in educational campaigns that address anti-immigrant attacks. Immigrant parents and students face the same inequities in the community as in the schools. These problems can include issues of language;

cooperation of local police and school personnel with immigration officials; municipal authorities and school systems' focus on enforcement rather than on quality of life solutions; and a blind eye to the economic, political, and social conditions of the communities in which parents and students reside. The article provides examples of alternative strategies, such as the development of multi-racial coalitions united to advance culturally relevant and engaging curricula and the creation of support systems—including health care and social services, restorative justice programs, and community engagement. At the same time, these coalitions have addressed traditional immigrant rights issues like an end to unjust checkpoints; driver's licenses for undocumented community members; and banning the use of public funds to aid federal agents in deportation actions and educational issues like accessibility of everyone to a quality education, leadership training for parents, safe schools for immigrant and non-traditional students, and building curricula that examine the systemic and structural aspects of inequity.

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My passion for building bridges between the struggles of our immigrant communities and educational justice lies in my own history as an immigrant. I came to the US at the age of seven with my parents, who worked in the fields as farmworkers all their lives. We lived in the barrio above a gas station in one room with a wood stove and no indoor plumbing. I started school with seven other students from Mexico who, like me, could not speak English. We all faced the dual problem of being poor and unable to speak English. Thanks to a teacher who stayed with me after school, I

was able to learn English and find some success that led to my graduation from high school, from college, and ultimately from a doctoral program. The other Mexican-origin students in my class were not as fortunate; all of them eventually dropped out of school.

When I graduated from the University of Colorado in 1971, I took a bus to Delano, California, in order to meet Cesar Chavez and join the farmworkers movement. When I arrived during a grape workers strike, I heard the words that changed the rest of my life. At an evening rally at Forty Acres, the central headquarters of the United Farm Workers Union, Cesar challenged the young students there. He told us that there is only one thing for sure, and that is death. Between now and when you die, the question is how we will use our lives. We can easily throw it away on drugs, selfishness, and material things, thinking these will bring us happiness. But he assured us that if we commit our lives in service to others, to empower others, when we grow old and look back on our lives, we will be able to say that they have truly been meaningful.

Transformed by this experience, I returned to my hometown of Ault, Colorado, and created a school with eighteen young English language learners in an old garage in my parents' backyard. When the local school board told our students to go "back to Mexico" if we wanted bilingual education in the schools, thirty students and I organized a four-day, seventy-mile march to the state capitol. Hundreds of supporters met us along the way and cheered us

“ The article provides examples of alternative strategies such as the development of multi-racial coalitions united to advance culturally relevant and engaging curricula and the creation of support systems—including health care and social services, restorative justice programs, and community engagement.

on. When my students returned, they took the lead in organizing schools throughout the county, resulting in some of the best bilingual programs in the state.

Because most of the English language learners came from immigrant families, the issues of educational justice in the schools

“Because most of the English language learners came from immigrant families, the issues of educational justice in the schools became intertwined with the struggle for immigrant rights in our communities.”

became intertwined with the struggle for immigrant rights in our communities. Hence, some of the same parents who organized for bilingual education in the schools also organized to protect undocumented residents. They won a commitment from Sheriff Richard Martinez and the Weld County Sheriff's Department that they would not actively stop

and detain undocumented immigrants. These experiences led me to make a fourteen-year commitment to organizing in Northern Colorado for both immigrant rights and educational justice.

I left Colorado to pursue a PhD in sociology at UCLA, but it was through these community organizing experiences that I truly came to understand the connections between the inequities in our communities and the problems that underrepresented students face in the classroom. My struggles with learning English and growing up in a poor immigrant farmworker family laid the foundation for the connections that I ultimately came to make, as a graduate student and professor, between immigrant and education rights issues and led me to become an activist scholar. As an activist, I have been part of efforts to build coalitions between parents, teachers, students, and community-based organizations to organize for both immigrant rights and educational justice. As a scholar, I conduct

community-based research in support of these organizing efforts. As an activist scholar, I combine research and organizing to create change within the schools and in the neighborhoods where parents and students reside.

## FIGHTING ENGLISH-ONLY IN MONTEREY PARK

An early example of connecting the movements for immigrant rights and educational justice occurred in the city of Monterey Park, where I resided with my family while completing my sociology doctoral degree. Monterey Park, located just east of Los Angeles, is a city with over sixty-two thousand residents. It has gone from being 85 percent white in 1960, to being a majority-minority city today. According to the US Census, in 2015 about 65 percent of the population was Asian Pacific, 30 percent was Latino, and just 4 percent of the population was white. Many members of the Asian Pacific community and almost all the Latinos are immigrants.

I worked with other organizers in Monterey Park to build trust between community partners and researchers as a basis for making social change. Too often, researchers have gone into a community simply to gather their research and then leave when it is completed. Trust building takes longer. It requires that community partners see researchers contribute to community efforts, then embrace the research as a tool to advance their goals. In my case, I combined the roles of researcher and organizer and built trust by making a long-term commitment to the Monterey Park community.

In 1986 Monterey Park's all-white city council passed a resolution requiring English-only in city literature and public signs. I was part of the Coalition for Harmony in Monterey Park (CHAMP), a multiethnic group of residents that brought together immigrant parents from the Latino and Asian Pacific communities to defeat

the ordinance and eventually vote out of office its main proponents. Later, in response to right-wing politicians and individuals who blamed the Chinese community for street congestion and overbuilding in Monterey Park, our coalition elected candidates who called for planned development without casting the issue of growth in anti-immigrant terms.

This coalition created a level of trust that also helped solve conflicts in the city's schools. When racial tensions erupted between Latino and Asian Pacific students in the Alhambra School District, immigrant parents worked together to create a district-wide Multi-Ethnic Task Force comprising parents, students, PTA members,

the teachers union, staff, and administrative personnel. To counter the claims of some school officials who denied the existence of racial tensions in the schools—blaming tensions on “machismo” or the natural “hormones” of teenagers—I worked with the task

force to carry out a survey of fifteen hundred students, including three hundred limited-English-speaking students. We found that 86 percent of the students perceived racial tensions as a very serious problem in the schools. We used the research to get the school board to adopt a policy for dealing with hate-motivated behavior, to institutionalize classes in conflict resolution, and to create the option of mediation as an alternative to student expulsions.

We knew that conflicts in the schools and the community are linked. As a large influx of Asian Pacific immigrants, primarily Chinese, had settled in Monterey Park, the unity with Latino parents and students was brought about by finding common ground

“ In 1986 Monterey Park’s all-white city council passed a resolution requiring English-only in city literature and public signs.

rooted in their histories as immigrants. By advancing a strategy of coalition building, the two groups were able to collectively use research as a tool to advance a multicultural curriculum and conflict resolution programs that benefited both groups.

The experience in Monterey Park helped to solve a dilemma that I faced in connecting my position in the academic world with community-based participatory research, teaching, and learning. Rather than perpetuating the traditional idea that researchers should not participate in the organizations they study, this participatory research and action experience allowed for my involvement as both an organizer and researcher in the community. When I accepted a faculty position at Pitzer College and moved to the Pomona Valley in Los Angeles County, I took the lessons learned in Monterey Park and began organizing in the city of Pomona. Here again, I combined research and organizing to help parents and students build connections between the immigrant rights and educational justice movements.



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## ENDING POLICE CHECKPOINTS IN POMONA

My students and I first joined parents and community leaders in organizing a broad-based coalition to build a local social justice movement that exposed the unjust use of police checkpoints to target immigrants. Over the past twenty-five years, the city of Pomona has experienced the demographic changes taking place throughout Southern California. According to the US Census, it is now a majority-minority city that in 2015 was about 71 percent Latino, 6 percent Black, 9 percent Asian Pacific, and 11 percent non-Hispanic white. When the police in the city of Pomona began to locate checkpoints in front of schools and businesses and in neighborhoods that primarily served Latino families and immigrant workers, immigrant parents and supporters formed a coalition called Pomona Habla (Pomona Speaks). Through this coalition, we launched a research project that spurred organized actions against traffic checkpoints in the city of Pomona. Our research uncovered

data that showed that fewer than .001 percent of the drivers being stopped at checkpoints were driving under the influence of alcohol. The statistics also showed that the majority being stopped were undocumented immigrants who did not have a driver's license and could not afford to pay the exorbitant ticket, towing, and impoundment fees.

The Pomona Habla coalition launched a series of demonstrations and actions in which community people and students held

“Over the past twenty-five years, the city of Pomona has experienced the demographic changes taking place throughout Southern California. According to the US Census, it is now a majority-minority city that in 2015 was about 71 percent Latino, 6 percent Black, 9 percent Asian Pacific, and 11 percent non-Hispanic white.

signs alerting drivers to the checkpoints on the streets. Tensions in the city peaked when the police held a four-way checkpoint (covering four street corners) involving police from forty cities, resulting in the stopping of 4,027 vehicles, the impoundment of 152 of them, and the issuing of 172 tickets. In response, Pomona Habla led a demonstration of more than a thousand people and stationed students and community members at every checkpoint. The research and actions resulted in the city council's agreeing to stop four-way checkpoints, to allow checkpoints only in residential areas, and to develop an ad hoc committee to review citizen complaints and recommendations.

The community-based research and organizing of this coalition became a model for the passage of ordinances in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Baldwin Park that permit an unlicensed driver to allow another licensed driver to take custody of the vehicle rather than having it impounded. These statewide efforts led to the introduction of a bill by California assemblyman Gil Cedillo, which was signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown in 2011, that restricts local police from impounding cars at a traffic checkpoint simply because a driver is unlicensed. This ultimately led to the passage of a bill allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. Pomona Habla, which included community-based organizations as well as students from local schools and colleges (including students from my classes at Pitzer College), gathered more than ten thousand signatures in the region in support of this bill.

## ORGANIZING AND RESEARCH IN VOTING RIGHTS

In reaction to these victories, the Pomona Police Association, together with other conservative forces in the city, targeted one of the leaders of this coalition, city councilwoman Cristina Carrizosa.

They tried to oust her from office by placing a bill, Measure T, on the ballot in November 2012 to replace the election of city council members by district with at-large elections. The measure sought to turn back the will of the people in Pomona who, following lawsuits by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Southwest Voter Registration Project, voted in 1990 to scrap citywide elections in favor of single-member districts to bolster minority representation. Working with the coalition, my students and I carried out research that revealed a voting rights history of how the district elections came about and who was behind Measure T. Our research exposed how the police association had given over fifty thousand dollars to back this bill and uncovered their sponsorship of a leaflet depicting a white hand extended upward over brown hands reaching from below. A multiracial coalition of community members and organizations held a press conference, walked door-to-door, and on Election Day defeated Measure T, meanwhile helping elect two additional council members who were supportive of immigrant rights.

## COALITION BUILDING ON STREET VIOLENCE

After the defeat of Measure T, the issue of “gangs” and street violence emerged in the city. In response to a growing homicide rate, the police carried out a raid of alleged gang members that resulted in the arrests of 165 people. Our coalition believed that the most successful strategies for dealing with growing violence among youth needed to focus on prevention rather than criminalization and enforcement. My students and I, along with members of a progressive coalition led by the Latino and Latina Roundtable and the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1428, carried out research for a series of community meetings. We argued that gang violence would not exist if gangs did not satisfy the desperate

needs of young people for family, education, mentoring, housing, employment, health care, and spiritual and social support. As we expanded the coalition to include parents, students, teachers, and community-based organizations, we championed a strategy of countering “gangs” with an economic justice plan and capacity-building strategies for quality jobs, housing, health, education, and preschool/after-school programs, particularly in low-income sectors of the community.

“ We argued that gang violence would not exist if gangs did not satisfy the desperate needs of young people for family, education, mentoring, housing, employment, health care, and spiritual and social support.

In this process, we studied successful gang-prevention models, including one developed by Father Gregory Boyle in Los Angeles. This model addresses young people’s needs by developing an alternative elementary school, after-school and daycare programs, community organizing, and an extensive Homeboy Industries economic development project, including Homeboy Bakery, Homeboy Silkscreen, and Homeboy/Homegirl Merchandise. We convened a community summit conference based on this model to advance the idea of addressing the structural problems affecting young people and their families in Pomona.

## ADVANCING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND A BROADER MOVEMENT

This new direction in addressing youth issues led to the development of a partnership between the community-based Latino and Latina Roundtable organization, of which I am president, the Pomona Valley Chapter of the NAACP, and the Pomona Unified



Photo by Manny Becerra on Unsplash.

School District. As part of this partnership, a community development committee has held monthly meetings to implement various community building and educational transformation projects. This coalition has included parent leaders from the community-based initiatives on checkpoints and gangs. It pursued the proposals first identified at the summit meetings to shift away from law enforcement and toward strategies focused on youth and community development.

The coalition has started to implement the community schools concept, where schools provide education and health and social services to children, parents, and community members. After the Latino and Latina Roundtable and the NAACP spoke in favor of a resolution to implement the concept of community schools, the Pomona Unified School Board unanimously voted its support. Pomona Unified advanced strategic plans that include (1) culturally relevant and engaging curricula; (2) an emphasis on high-quality teaching, not high-stakes testing; (3) support systems that include

health care and social/emotional services; (4) positive discipline practices, such as restorative justice; (5) parent and community engagement; and (6) inclusive school leadership committed to making the transformational community school strategy integral to the school's mandate and functioning.

Following Cesar Chavez's principle of using one's life in service to others, I helped get the school district to join a coalition that has organized an annual Cesar Chavez Pilgrimage march and festival focusing on social justice themes. These themes, including solidarity with Black Lives Matter and with Mexican students gone missing in 2014 and supporting ethnic studies and sanctuary for all, offer examples of the broad-based understanding we have developed about the connections across the issues of educational justice and immigrant rights.

With this intersectional understanding, the partnership has implemented workshops for hundreds of students and parents in how to qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, how to obtain a Matricula Consular card (an official identification document issued by the Mexican government), and how to obtain a California driver's license. More recently, as part of a College for All statewide coalition, this partnership has expanded to endorse and actively implement California State Senate Bill 1050 (whose passage was led by one

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of my former students, Senate president pro tempore Kevin de Leon) to create a kindergarten-to-college pipeline of educational opportunity and success for students from low-income, English language learner, and foster youth backgrounds. The partnership on these pipeline issues has led to a series of extraordinary developments, including educational workshops for hundreds of parents, many of whom then lobby with us at the state capitol for bills to provide safe schools for immigrant children and to ban the use of public funds to aid federal agents in deportation actions, as well as other legislation to protect vulnerable students and advance educational equity.

## CONCLUSION: EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE AT THE HEART OF IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

My own life experience and trajectory show how the pursuit of education is fundamental to the immigrant struggle. I am an organizer, an educator, and a member of the community. I use community-based research and organizing to build bridges across immigrant communities and between the immigrant rights and educational justice movements. This type of engagement and research shows the

intimate connection between the two. It emphasizes the systemic and structural aspects of inequality and involves activist scholars in working alongside excluded communities on common projects to tackle the root causes of racism, exclusion, scapegoating, and inequality in our educational system and in our communities.

**“** Scholar activists build a foundation of trust with communities by making a long-term commitment to working in genuine partnership to find and implement solutions to the problems communities are facing.

Scholar activists build a foundation of trust with communities by making a long-term commitment to working in genuine partnership to find and implement solutions to the problems communities are facing. This type of action and research moves away from charity or service and toward creating new models of democratic participation and coalition building for social change. This intersectional model appreciates the structural foundations of inequities experienced by immigrant communities in the classroom and community and builds strategies that connect the struggles for educational justice and immigrant rights. ■

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the author's lived experience as an immigrant and student impact his interests in immigration, racial, and education justice? Do you see a connection between the author's experiences and your own?
2. What are some ingredients that are needed to build trust between researchers and community partners to serve underrepresented communities? What examples did the article highlight?
3. What are some experiences from your life and work that connect multiple social justice and racial equity issues? What forms of multi-issue organizing might be required to address them?





## CHAPTER SIX

# THE FUTURE OF WORK

## ORGANIZE THE IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Kent Wong

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

This article draws out the labor movement's early opposition to organizing immigrant workers. Despite this opposition, immigrants were and are key leaders in the American labor movement. In the contemporary period, immigrant workers led the largest International Workers' Day demonstration on March 25, 2006, when over

a million people marched in Los Angeles against H. R. 4437, which would have made it a felony to reside in the United States as an undocumented individual. As a result of the massive protests, the bill died in the U.S. Senate and one year later, on May 1, 2007, a coalition of thousands of immigrants and their supporters marched in support of legalization of the undocumented and against the federal government's increase in immigration raids at workplaces and in targeted communities.

Since that time, immigrant workers have been catalysts for a model of unity that has brought together the labor and immigrant rights movements in advancing economic justice organizing and pro-labor, pro-immigrant legislation initiated by worker centers and unions. This new labor movement model, demanding "legalization" for the 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, has shown how a united, proactive response can be effective in exposing the scapegoating of immigrants, mobilizing support for pro-immigrant pro-labor legislative policies, and building broad, community-based coalitions to defend the civil and human rights of all workers and immigrants.

*SOURCE: Wong, Kent, "The Future of Work: Organize the Immigrant Workers," Pacific Standard (August 19, 2015; updated June 14, 2017), <https://psmag.com/economics/the-future-of-work-organize-the-immigrant-workers>. Reprinted with permission from Grist.*

The 232 million migrant workers throughout the world, to use the International Labor Organization's estimate, would amount to the world's fifth most populous nation. They face universally poor conditions—low wages, harsh working environments, discrimination, and poverty.

The United States is home to 11 million undocumented immigrants. A national campaign for legalization and a path to citizenship



This new labor movement model, demanding “legalization” for the 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, has shown how a united, proactive response can be effective in exposing the scapegoating of immigrants, mobilizing support for pro-immigrant pro-labor legislative policies, and building broad, community-based coalitions to defend the civil and human rights of all workers and immigrants.

has repeatedly been blocked in Congress. But immigrant workers are actively forming and joining unions. Their emergence as a powerful force bodes well for the future of the U.S. labor movement and is an inspiration to other workers struggling for justice and dignity in the U.S. and throughout the world.

The world’s first May Day, which took place in Chicago in 1886 during the fight for the eight-hour day, was led in large part by immigrant workers from Ireland, Italy, Poland, Russia, England, and Germany.

One hundred twenty years later, May Day in the U.S. was also led by immigrant workers, but they were from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, China, the Philippines, Korea, and the Caribbean.

The largest International Workers Day in U.S. history took place on May 1, 2006, and reflected the incredible energy and power of the immigrant worker movement. In New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Dallas, Seattle, and Atlanta, millions took to the streets. The largest demonstration took place in Los Angeles, with two marches, each attended by half a million people.

The massive May Day mobilizations came in response to draconian legislation in Congress to criminalize immigrants and those who support them. Although HR 4437 was ultimately defeated, the debate on immigration policy continues without resolution.

Ironically, the largest International Workers Day demonstration in U.S. history was not led by the U.S. labor movement but by immigrant workers themselves. Indeed, many unions were missing in action on that May Day, a sign that their leaders had still not embraced the call to organize immigrant workers.

Los Angeles has emerged as a focal point for the new American labor movement, and a crucial part of this change has been the dynamic campaigns involving and often led by immigrant workers. From janitors and hotel workers to home care workers, hundreds of thousands of new immigrants have joined the labor movement in California. In the last few years, one campaign led by the AFL-CIO and United Steelworkers of America has successfully organized workers in more than 30 car washes in Southern California.

The immigrant worker movement extends beyond traditional union structures to include new worker centers. These centers engage many who are explicitly denied coverage under the National Labor

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, George Grantham Bain Collection, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2014701530>.





“ The immigrant worker movement extends beyond traditional union structures to include new worker centers.

Relations Act, including domestic, agricultural, and informal-sector workers and those wrongfully classified as independent contractors. When Congress enacted the NLRA, certain groups of workers were deliberately excluded,

especially workers of color and women such as African-American agricultural workers from the South, Latino farmworkers from the Southwest, and domestic workers throughout the country.

The worker center movement grew out of the need for workers to join together to fight for fair wages and working conditions, for immigrant rights, and for mutual aid and support. These centers in many ways mirror the origins of the American labor movement, where workers came together for mutual benefit within certain trades and crafts and in specific communities.

National debate on immigration policy first erupted at the AFL-CIO convention in Los Angeles in 1999. When a group of day laborers organized a contingent to join the convention, they were thrown out by union members who opposed immigrant workers. It was not uncommon at that time for union leaders to call immigration authorities to demand deportation of day laborers seeking work on street corners.

In the following months, however, and for the first time in history, the AFL-CIO reversed its position to embrace a stand in favor of immigrant rights. Fourteen years later, in 2013, the AFL-CIO convention returned to Los Angeles, and the remarkable change in immigration policy was evident. The AFL-CIO gave a human rights award to the International Domestic Workers Alliance. Domestic workers from the U.S. were joined by women representatives from

the developing world and together they marched onto the convention floor singing. Day laborers, including some who had been ejected 14 years earlier, were featured on the stage. Tefere Gebre was elected first vice president of the AFL-CIO, the first immigrant and first African-American man to hold a top officer position. Bhairavi Desai, the executive director of the National Taxi Workers Alliance, was elected to the AFL-CIO executive council, the first South Asian and first worker center representative.

The change in the AFL-CIO convention from 1999 to 2013 was extraordinary. The leaders of the American labor movement now embrace labor-community alliances, partnerships between unions



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“ The leaders of the American labor movement now embrace labor-community alliances, partnerships between unions and worker centers, the fight for immigrant rights and a path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants, and an end to deportations.

and worker centers, the fight for immigrant rights and a path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants, and an end to deportations.

The American labor movement will be well served if it continues to advance an aggressive campaign to organize immigrant workers and to build a new labor movement for the new working class. ■

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some reasons why historically and in the present day, mainstream labor organizing movements in the United States have tried to exclude immigrant workers?
2. What tactics did organizers use to forge unity between the immigrant rights and labor movements?
3. How and why did worker centers exclude workers of color and women, especially African American agricultural workers from the South, Latino farmworkers from the Southwest, and domestic workers?
4. What conditions and events convinced the AFL-CIO and other unions to reverse their positions on immigrant rights? What is the best strategy today to continue to build connections between different demographics in the labor movement?

## ENDNOTES

1. See Joshua Bloom, “Ally to Win: Black Community Leaders and SEIU’s L.A. Security Unionization Campaign,” in *Working for Justice: The L.A. Model of Organizing and Advocacy*, ed. Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom, and Victor Narro (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 167–90.
2. Juliana Morgan-Trostle, Kexin Zheng, and Carl Lipscombe, *The State of Black Immigrants* (Black Alliance for Just Immigration and NYU School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic, 2016), [www.stateofblackimmigrants.com/assets/sobi-fullreport-jan22.pdf](http://www.stateofblackimmigrants.com/assets/sobi-fullreport-jan22.pdf).



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