

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Compadre was right, to an extent. His compelling statement captured some of what passersby might say about the men standing on the corner. Most of them were, in fact, Mexican; the majority were undocumented immigrants; and not all had families. And, yes, some engaged in criminal behavior. However, Compadre's description did not entirely capture the truth for reasons that were not so visible to the naked eye, as I discovered on the day I first stepped onto the corner—or, as the men called it, “la parada.”<sup>25</sup> One look—or even two or three—was not adequate to justly capture the intimate daily labors of the different men on the corner.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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