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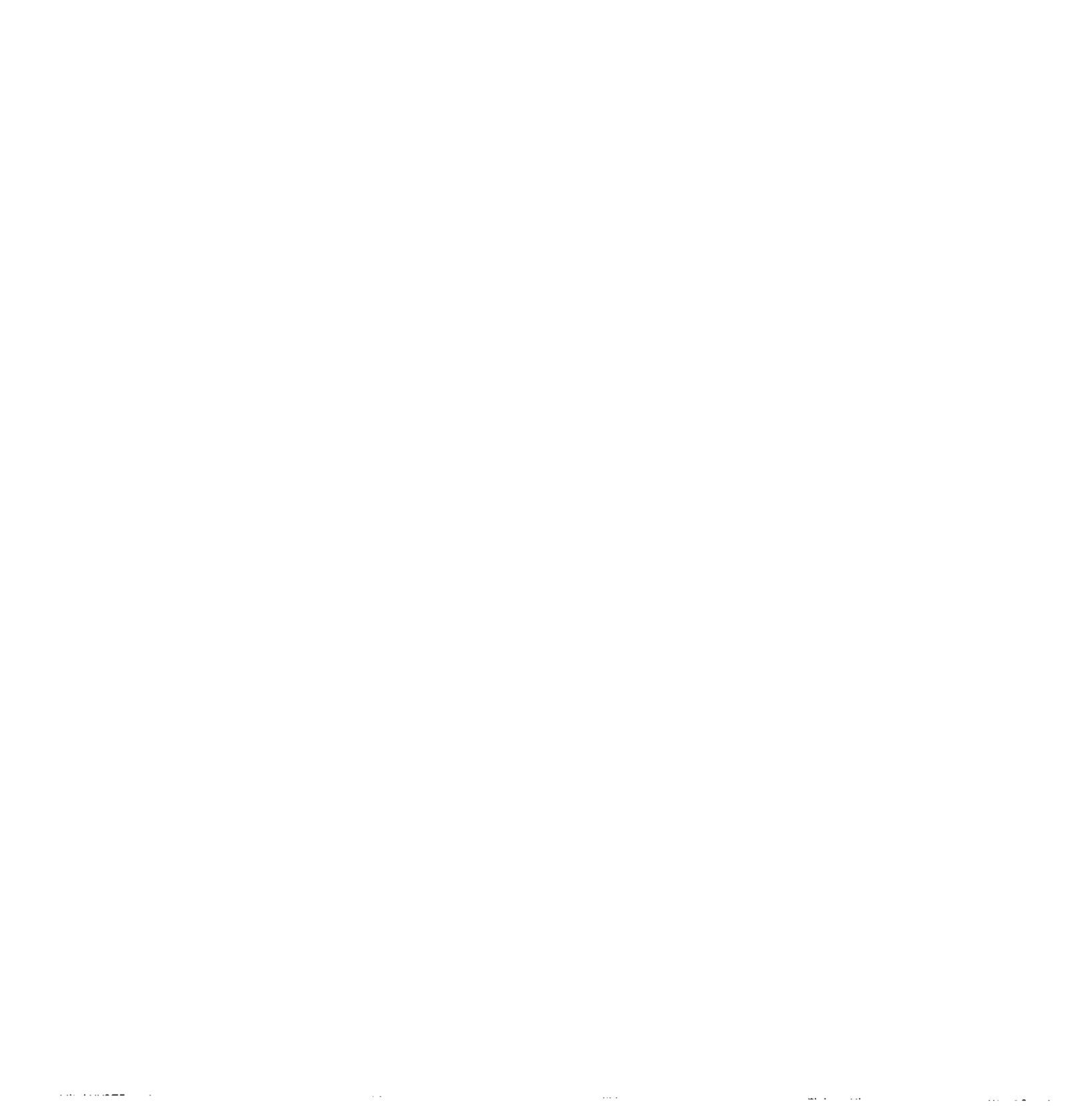
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The Institute for the Study of Social Change,
or the Regents of the University of California



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The Chicano/Latino Policy Project is an affiliated research program of the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of California at Berkeley. The Policy Project coordinates, develops and supports research on public policy issues related to Latinos in the United States and serves as a component unit of a multi-campus Latino policy studies program in the University of California system. The Policy Project's current priority research areas are immigration, education, healthcare, political participation and labor mobility with an emphasis on the impact of urban and working poverty.

The Institute for the Study of Social Change is an organized research unit at the University of California at Berkeley devoted to studying and understanding the mechanisms which lead to social change and to develop techniques and methods to assist the direction of social change for the improvement of social life. It has a particular mandate to conduct research and to provide research training on matters of social stratification and differentiation, including the condition of both economically and politically depressed minorities as well as the more privileged strata.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 40 years, the city of San Jose, in the Santa Clara Valley of northern California, has experienced explosive population and economic growth, fueled by the development of the high-technology industries. Along with the need for large numbers of engineering, technical, and managerial workers, the rapid industrialization of the Santa Clara Valley generated a huge demand for workers in unskilled, low-wage occupations, especially in the manufacturing assembly and maintenance service sectors. This vast supply of unskilled, low-wage jobs played a central role in attracting immigrant workers to the region, especially from Mexico and Central America. As Latino immigrant workers have settled in San Jose, there has been an expansion of low-income urban enclaves, especially in the Eastside where most of these workers live. In contrast to urban slums resulting from economic decline, these poor immigrant enclaves are the relatively new result of the successful, but highly unequal, economic development generated by the so-called Silicon Valley's high-technology industries. San Jose's immigrant enclaves are inhabited by Mexican workers, both legal and undocumented, who are the backbone of the labor force in several manufacturing and service industries that support the high-tech industrial complex in the region. These immigrants can be defined as the "working poor": those who, despite having full-time or part-time jobs, live in poverty because of low wages and the instability of their employment. Despite the growth of Latino immigrant barrios in San Jose and other large cities in California since the early 1980s, very little is known about these enclaves and the living conditions of the workers and families who have settled in them.

This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork; it seeks to describe and analyze the experiences of a group of Mexican immigrant workers and families who live in a low-income barrio in San Jose that we call Benfield. The study addresses several questions:

- What types of jobs do the Mexican immigrant residents of this barrio have?
- What are the living conditions of these workers and their families?
- How do these families—many with members who are undocumented immigrants—meet their basic needs in light of low wages, unstable employment, and limited access to government benefits?
- How do Mexican immigrants in Benfield respond to both the problems that affect their barrio and the government programs developed by San Jose to deal with some of these problems?

The study reveals that Mexican immigrant workers, both legal and undocumented, in Benfield are concentrated in precisely those labor-intensive, low-income jobs that since the early 1980s have proliferated at one of the highest growth rates in the region. We argue that the use of immigrants as a source of flexible, disposable labor in several light-manufacturing and service industries in Silicon Valley is the primary factor that keeps a large segment of immigrant families trapped in poverty, despite there being more than one full-time worker in the family. We show that the subsistence of immigrant workers and their families depends on several strategies for coping with poverty: extended households and dense social networks; informal income-generating activities supplementing the low wages in the formal sector; and material and economic assistance from charities and, when residents are eligible, government institutions.

We argue that in the absence of state and local government policies, today's Latino immigrant poor could become further impoverished and their communities evolve into areas of concentrated poverty. The challenge is to develop a comprehensive set of coherent, well-orchestrated state policies that address not only the complex consequences but also the root causes of the problems that afflict working poor immigrant families and the barrios where they live. Our policy recommendations have two goals: first—and this is the main front where the battle against the growth in the number of working-poor immigrants must be fought—to decrease the comparative advantage of exploiting undocumented immigrant labor; second, to develop specific state policies tailored to low-income Latino immigrant communities, policies that, in light of the economic and demographic changes that have been taking place in California over the past few decades, are long overdue.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Study

The East San Jose section of San Jose is the largest Latino neighborhood in the Santa Clara Valley of northern California. In the midst of East San Jose lies Benfield, a poor urban enclave mostly inhabited by Mexican immigrants. This barrio consists of nearly a hundred barrack-like apartment buildings distributed along five blocks that form a distinct self-contained unit within a larger area that contains a low-income family housing project and several modest single homes. At the heart of this immigrant enclave is Benfield Elementary School, the public school after which the neighborhood is generally known.

When I (Christian Zolniski, who did the field work) first visited Benfield, I was shocked by the highly deteriorated state of many of its apartment buildings: four of the barrio's main streets were lined with identical blighted two-story buildings, some of which had been sealed by housing authorities because of their crumbling state. Many of these buildings had broken windows, peeling walls and graying paint, damaged roofs covered with multiple patches, stairs with missing steps, wooden handrails rotten and broken from lack of maintenance, and decks that seemed as if they were soon to fall down. The apartments' front and back yards, clearly once planted with grass, were now bare, hardened soil. The pavement in the parking lots was full of potholes, trash and rotting garbage overflowed the containers behind the buildings, while abandoned refrigerators, mattresses, stoves, ripped-up furniture, and other assorted trash sat next to them.

Yet, what impressed me most in my first visits to Benfield was the lively human atmosphere and the rich mosaic of activities that were going on in the middle of such a blighted barrio: children, some barely old enough to walk, playing everywhere on the sidewalks; women selling food in the streets nearby or door to door; young and adult men wearing uniforms of landscaping, janitorial, construction, and fast food restaurant jobs coming home or leaving for work; street vendors peddling popsicles, tortillas, vegetables, fruit, cheese, clothes, and other products, some pushing carts and others driving vans or old, small trucks; and old men recycling cans and bottles from the garbage containers, either walking or riding bicycles. This excited atmosphere in the midst of a blighted barrio sharply contrasted with the quiet of suburban neighborhoods I had seen elsewhere in San Jose and other cities in the Silicon Valley.

After my initial visits, I thought Benfield probably was an anomaly, an isolated case of a poor urban barrio in a region otherwise characterized by quiet, affluent suburban communities. After all,

Silicon Valley had a reputation of being the international capital of the high-tech industry, and an exemplary model of the "post-industrial" economy. To my surprise, I discovered that Benfield was not unique: Scattered throughout the numerous Latino neighborhoods in San Jose, and usually hidden behind quiet areas of single homes, there were several enclaves of blighted apartment buildings inhabited by Mexican immigrants. Unlike ghettos in older cities of the country, San Jose's immigrant enclaves were pockets of poverty intermingled with multi-ethnic working and middle-class areas dispersed throughout different sectors of the city.

Several questions arose in my mind: Why were these apparently new immigrant urban barrios growing in the midst of a city well known for its economic success and the affluence of its residents? What was life like for the people who reside in these urban enclaves? What explained the busy life and rich set of economic and social activities I had observed in Benfield? Despite the growth of Latino immigrant barrios in large cities in California since the early 1980s (Moore and Pinderhughes 1993; The Challenge 1989; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), very little is known about these barrios and the living conditions of the workers and families who reside in them. This lack of information makes it difficult to develop public policies that can adequately address the problems that affect these communities and their residents. It is also responsible for some mistaken assumptions often made about immigrant workers, their families, and the communities where they live.

This study addresses this problem of inadequate information by describing and analyzing the experiences of ordinary Mexican immigrant workers who live in a low-income neighborhood in San Jose. The goal of the study is to document the lives of recent Mexican immigrants who work in the large variety of low-wage formal and informal jobs that have expanded in the Silicon Valley economy since the early 1980s, and to link such personal experiences to structural forces in the region. The study addresses four questions about the Mexican immigrant residents of Benfield:

1. What are the living conditions of these workers and their families?
2. What types of jobs do they hold?
3. How do immigrant workers' families—many with members who are undocumented immigrants manage to meet their basic needs in light of low wages, unstable employment, and limited access to government benefits?
4. How do Mexican immigrants in Benfield deal politically with the problems that affect their barrio? How do they respond to city government neighborhood-improvement programs that have been developed to address the problems of this and other low-income barrios in San Jose?

Research Methods

To best understand the ordinary lives of Mexican immigrants in San Jose, the study focuses on three principal domains: their work, the set of income-generating activities by which they make a living; their households, the living arrangements by which they try to meet their basic economic, social, and personal needs; and the barrio, the concrete space in which they live and the locus of social and political relationships between its inhabitants and outside actors and institutions, including government agencies.

The bulk of the data presented here was gathered through intensive fieldwork carried out between October 1991 and September 1993, followed by intermittent fieldwork until September 1995. The use of ethnographic methods has a long tradition in anthropological and sociological urban studies, especially those of minority, poor, and immigrant communities (e.g., Liebow 1967; Whyte 1943; Lewis 1966; Susser 1982; Stack 1974; Suttles 1968; Burawoy et al., 1991; Chavez 1992). In the context of migration-related research, the ethnographic approach is one of the few techniques that allows the collection of detailed information on the history, lives, and experiences of people about whom quantitative and qualitative data are sparse and often unreliable, as is the case of undocumented immigrants.

Benfield was selected as the research site for several reasons. First, Benfield was a good example of the numerous Mexican immigrant barrios that had grown in San Jose over the past 30 years, as the high-tech economy boomed in San Jose, and had been a major bridgehead for Mexican immigrant workers. Second, most of the Mexican immigrants in Benfield work in diverse service-related, low-wage jobs, the main source of employment for recent immigrants in California since the early 1980s. Third, unlike other neighborhoods of poor Mexican immigrants in San Jose, Benfield has relatively clear physical boundaries that made it more manageable for an in-depth ethnographic study.

I made my initial contacts with the people of Benfield through the local public elementary school and a city government program that had been operating in the area for the past few years. After meeting some residents and their families through these institutions, I got to know many of their neighbors, among whom were their relatives, friends, and acquaintances. In other words, I used the "snowball" technique to enter the community. The bulk of the data on the workers and families of Benfield was collected by participant observation rather than by questionnaires or structured interviews. I thus spent most of my time interacting, observing, and, sometimes, participating in the day-to-day routines of these families as a way to gain a first-hand, inside perspective of their experiences. I spent extended periods of time in their homes, accompanied them to their jobs whenever possible, and participated in almost all the

activities to which I was invited. My association with Benfield people started in the barrio but very often took me outside to such places as clinics, government offices, swap meets, nonprofit and charitable agencies, school district offices, lawyers' buffets, the offices of city officials and politicians, courtrooms, and even San Jose's city council. I also became deeply involved in the community's life, attending meetings that were held in the neighborhood, whether organized by the school, government agencies, nonprofit groups, or Benfield residents themselves. Finally, having been petitioned by a group of Benfield neighbors, I taught English as a Second Language (ESL) for adults in a public school close to the barrio. All these activities helped me to learn first-hand about the lives of common immigrant workers and families in San Jose.

My close and constant interaction with several Benfield workers and their families allowed me to collect most of the information—and the most valuable information—of my research.

While much of the information presented here is based on participant observation and conversations with dozens of people I met during fieldwork, I especially focused my attention on the particular cases of about 25 families. I carefully collected detailed data on these families' immigration history, the labor trajectories of their members, the changes in their household structure, their residential mobility patterns, their social networks within the barrio and extending outside it, and their participation in local community affairs. I tried to select those cases that most accurately reflect the full range of Benfield's Mexican immigrant families with respect to composition and structure, economic status, and social background.

Although I spent most of my time with Benfield residents, I tried to acquire a solid knowledge of the agencies and programs that had an important presence in the barrio or whose activities had a direct impact upon its residents. I particularly wanted to observe how some government programs were implemented in the barrio, and to gather the opinions and feelings of their clients. The diverse affairs in which many Benfield residents were involved also led me to interview some city officials, labor representatives, community workers, and other Latino community leaders who were participating in public issues that affected the fate of the whole Latino population in San Jose.

Research during the pilot phase of this study was funded by grants from the University of California Consortium on Mexico & the United States (UC Mexus), and the Center for Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The bulk of the fieldwork was funded by a grant from the California Policy Seminar, which supported me for more than a year in San Jose. The write-up phase was supported by a Visiting Researcher Grant in the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University

of California in San Diego, while the final revision of the manuscript was done at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Mexico.

Study Outline

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 provides a brief historical context; this account of the economic changes that have occurred in Santa Clara Valley since the 1950s helps explain the situation of contemporary Mexican immigrant workers' settlements in the region. The chapter also presents a general overview of Benfield: its history, demographic features, and housing and community characteristics. Chapter 3 describes the cases of two Mexican-immigrant residents of Benfield who work as janitors. The chapter links these case studies to the restructuring forces in Santa Clara County that, since the early 1980s, have made its building cleaning industry an employment magnet for recent, mostly undocumented, Mexican immigrants. Chapter 4 describes the subsistence strategies used by low-income immigrant workers and their families, and discusses the dynamics and problems within their households. Chapter 5 examines the responses of the San Jose city government to the problems of barrios like Benfield, the reception of these responses by the barrio's residents, and Benfield residents' community organizing campaigns to improve conditions in the barrio. Chapter 6 summarizes the major findings of the study, discusses their policy implications, and proposes a set of recommendations to address the problems associated with working-poor Latino immigrant neighborhoods like Benfield.

CHAPTER 2.
BENFIELD: THE FORMATION OF A POOR IMMIGRANT ENCLAVE

The Context

Over the past 40 years, San Jose has experienced explosive population and economic growth, fueled by the development of high-technology industries. Up to World War II, the Santa Clara Valley, the region where San Jose is located, was popularly known as the "Valley of Heart's Delight" because of its agricultural base, which also included a myriad of food-related industries such as canneries, packing houses, and food machinery manufacturers (Rosaldo et al., 1993). After World War II the region began to become industrialized when the federal government selected Santa Clara Valley as a central location for advanced military research and development. The emergence of the Cold War sustained the funding of such work in the region, and paved the way for the location of the first semiconductor companies in the valley during the 1940s and 1950s (Saxenian 1985: 103). Later, when the market for microelectronics matured and finally boomed in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Santa Clara Valley began a period of intense economic growth (Saxenian 1985: 83). The rapid industrialization of Santa Clara Valley also initiated explosive population growth. Between 1950 and 1980, the population of Santa Clara County increased by roughly a million and of San Jose by more than a half million; for several years in the 1970s San Jose was the fastest growing city in the United States; see Table 1. (Tables and figures are gathered in appendices at the end of the paper.)¹

The Santa Clara Valley's transition from an agricultural to a high-tech economy had a decisive impact on labor demand in the region. The high-tech economy imposed a strongly polarized occupational structure. The local labor market became increasingly bifurcated between highly skilled, professional jobs on the one hand, and unskilled, low-wage, dead-end jobs on the other (Saxenian 1985; Hossfeld 1988; Blakely and Sullivan 1989). Along with the demand for large number of engineering, technical, and managerial workers there was a vast demand for workers in unskilled, low-wage occupations (Hossfeld 1988; Martinez-Saldaña 1993). Most of the latter occupations are in high-tech industries and the service sector (Blakely and Sullivan 1989), and include electronics assembly work,

¹ The city's population increased from 204,196 in 1960 to 782,205 in 1990 (for the population growth of San Jose and Santa Clara County, see Table 1). Santa Clara county's population increased from 174,949 in 1940 to 658,700 in 1960, and 1,497,577 in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991). The population boom in the Santa Clara Valley has created a great demand for new housing since the late 1950s. San Jose's city government approved about 500 annexations between 1950 and 1960 and more than 900 between 1960 and 1970. The city's area expanded by over 130 square miles from 1950 to 1970 (Rosaldo et al., 1993: 6).

hotel and restaurant work, janitorial services, landscaping services, unskilled construction jobs, personal services (e.g., housekeeping), and other unskilled helping and laboring jobs.

The rapid industrialization and urbanization of Santa Clara Valley and its vast supply of unskilled, low-wage jobs played a central role in attracting immigrant workers to the region, especially from Mexico and Central America. Indeed, three recent stages of Mexican immigration can be distinguished, each related to a stage in the economic development of the Santa Clara Valley. The first wave of Mexican immigrants, from the 1930s to the 1960s, was attracted by the demand for labor in agriculture and the cannery industries. As cannery and nursery jobs proliferated, as did jobs in construction, many Mexican seasonal agricultural workers were able to settle and establish their residence in San Jose.² The second wave of Mexican immigrants, from the early 1960s through the mid-1970s, was attracted by the vast supply of jobs created by the burgeoning electronics industry. The boom in entry-level electronics production jobs, such as semiconductor processing and assembly, offered new job opportunities for immigrants with little or no experience in the electronics industry.³ A large proportion of immigrants who came in this period settled in various suburban neighborhoods in East San Jose, such as the Tropicana neighborhood, which rapidly expanded during the late 1960s and 1970s. Finally, the third wave of Mexican immigrants to San Jose, in the 1980s and 1990s, was attracted by the large supply of unskilled jobs in service-related industries such as hotels and restaurants, landscaping, building maintenance, and personal domestic services.⁴ Unlike their predecessors, few of these newcomers could afford to buy their own homes, for real state prices in the region had been skyrocketing since the late 1970s. The new immigrants usually settled either in inner-city neighborhoods made up of apartment buildings or in suburban Chicano neighborhoods in East San Jose where they rented houses or rooms.

In the early 1980s the nature of Mexican migration to the United States changed critically; the pool of immigrants who came to work in the region was increasingly composed of women—a significant contrast to the previous pattern established by the Bracero Program, under which most migrants were

² This was facilitated by the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964. Most of the immigrants of this first wave settled either in downtown San Jose, where a Mexican barrio already existed, or in new neighborhoods located in the eastern and southern parts of the city. For example, the Mayfair District located in East San Jose became one of the main receiving enclaves of Mexican immigrants who arrived after the 1930s and was principally inhabited by Mexican agricultural, food industry, and construction workers (Clark 1959).

³ At the same time during the 1970s, there was a rapid decline of the cannery and food-processing industries that used to employ Chicana and Mexican workers in Santa Clara Valley (Zavella 1987). Cannery firms that were located in San Jose moved to other areas in rural California and to Mexico in search of lower wages, operation and transportation costs (Zavella 1987: 162). Concurrently, the electronics industry became one of the largest employers of immigrant workers, especially women.

⁴ According to a study by Blakely and Sullivan, by 1985, Latinos held almost 80% of the clerical and operating jobs in the low-wage service sector, and many of these workers were Mexican immigrants (1989: 4).

young lone men. Moreover, fewer Mexican migrant workers, both men and women, were sojourners and more were settling permanently in San Jose, gravitating to the new Latino barrios that were rapidly growing as the Silicon Valley expanded. This trend toward a more settled Mexican migrant population reflected important changes that were affecting Mexican migration to the United States, especially to California, where the rapid growth of low-income, year-round manufacturing and service jobs has been a central factor behind the employment of women migrant workers and the settlement of numerous migrant workers and their families (Cornelius 1993; The Challenge 1989; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

The abundance of high-wage professional jobs and low-wage formal and informal jobs critically contributed to the expansion of affluent communities throughout the region and poor Latino neighborhoods in San Jose. Santa Clara County's most affluent professionals and executives reside in the western foothills, in residential communities that were settled during the 1950s by the influx of entrepreneurs and scientists who came to work in the emerging microelectronics industry in places like Los Altos, Saratoga, Palo Alto, and Los Gatos (Saxenian 1985: 86). Less-affluent, middle-class technical and professional workers in high-tech industries live mostly in the northern part of the county, in suburban communities in and around cities such as Cupertino, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, and Santa Clara. Finally, most craftsmen, machine operators, and unskilled service workers, including Latino immigrants, are settled in San Jose and other cities in the southern and eastern parts of the Valley such as Gilroy and Morgan Hill, where the socio-economic status of the population is considerably lower than in the rest of the region (see Table 2).⁵ Between 1980 and 1990, San Jose's Latino population grew by 48 percent and Latinos came to make up 27 percent of the city's residents (see Table 3). It is estimated that there are about 200,000 Latinos in San Jose, the great majority are of Mexican descent, and a large proportion of them are immigrants.

In sum, the rapid industrialization of Santa Clara county and its explosive demographic growth, set the historical and spatial contexts in which the formation of today's Latino working class neighborhoods in the city have taken place. While some traditional Latino neighborhoods in the east side expanded, other barrios were newly constructed to accommodate the waves of immigrants who came to work in the electronics and service industries beginning in the late 1960s. Mexican and other Latino immigrants in San Jose are mainly settled in the east side. East San Jose is not, however, a homogeneous area. It is a mixture of suburban neighborhoods of single-family homes, inhabited by working- and middle-class Chicanos, and apartment-building neighborhoods occupied mostly by poor

⁵ In the late 1980s, Latino immigrants also started to concentrate in small sections of Mountain View, Sunnyvale and Palo Alto, in poverty pockets that contrast with the affluent middle-class suburban communities that predominate (Rosaldo et al., 1993: 10).

Mexican immigrants and Cambodian refugees. These apartment-building barrios grew rapidly in the 1970s to house the large numbers of immigrants who came to take Santa Clara Valley's unskilled jobs. Today, they are the main receiving enclaves for Latino immigrants.⁶ They are heavily populated areas, and they are the most troubled neighborhoods in the city, with problems such as poverty, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, and crime. However, these enclaves can hardly be equated with traditional ghettos in older U.S. industrial cities. Whereas the latter are the result of rapid deindustrialization, San Jose's poor immigrant-worker barrios are a recent product of rapid but unequal economic development in the region.

Benfield: The Growth of a Working-Poor Mexican Immigrant Barrio

A General Overview

Benfield is one such low-income Mexican immigrant barrio that developed with the economic and population explosion fueled by Silicon Valley's high-tech industry. Located in the east side of San Jose, Benfield is composed of apartment buildings. Most of its 99 fourplex apartment buildings were built in the mid-1960s and early 1970s to house technical workers who came to work in the rapidly growing high-tech industry. After less than a decade, however, most of these upwardly mobile Anglo technical workers moved out to more-affluent suburbs in San Jose and other cities in the valley, where they rented or bought their own homes and apartments in what is generally called "white flight." As a result, by the mid-1970s the barrio's population had dramatically changed: What once was a typical white middle-class renter community became a low-income Latino neighborhood largely composed of Mexican immigrants.

Built quickly to substandard specifications at a time when San Jose was going through its fastest population growth, the apartment buildings suffered an additional blow when the original company responsible for their management and maintenance started selling them to external buyers. The latter, in turn, taking advantage of the speculative fever driven by skyrocketing real estate prices of the 1980s, sold them to others. As the new owners were unable or unwilling to maintain previous maintenance

⁶ An important factor in the development of these new barrios has been the urban renewal programs and downtown redevelopment projects that were initiated in San Jose in the mid-1970s under the direction of the local Redevelopment Agency. The goal was to make downtown San Jose the business center of Silicon Valley and attract financial and managerial service firms as well as retail trade services. Since 1980, for example, more than \$1.4 billion have been spent on downtown redevelopment projects (Rosaldo et al., 1993: 8). San Jose's huge urban renewal projects led to the partial, and in some cases total, destruction of some of its oldest Latino neighborhoods, such as the Sal Si Puedes barrio in the east side and a Mexican neighborhood in the center of downtown, thus displacing the population of traditional Chicano/Mexican enclaves that used to be major receiving areas for new immigrants. (Rosaldo et al., 1993).

standards, the housing stock rapidly deteriorated, and the apartment buildings became one of the main receiving enclaves in San Jose for new Mexican immigrants and poor Cambodian refugees.⁷ By the late 1980s, most buildings were already highly deteriorated, and the city's Housing Department had to condemn several of them.

Most of the apartments in Benfield have such problems as leaking roofs, broken pipes, walls with holes, broken floors, old carpets with holes, windows without frames, closets with missing doors, and stoves that barely work, as well as a constant infestation of roaches and rodents. Despite the dilapidation, rents are higher than for better-maintained apartment units elsewhere. In 1993 rents ranged from \$650 to \$750 per month for a two-bedroom apartment. These inflated rents are sustained by the high occupancy rate in the barrio and the mutual dependence of tenants and owners: Run-down apartment buildings are among the few places where low-income tenants can live in overcrowded conditions without being evicted by their landlords; in exchange, rents are high, owners' maintenance is nearly nil, and the properties continue to deteriorate. In the end, tenants are the most harmed by this situation, paying inflated rents and living in substandard conditions. Because of those conditions, many Benfield residents move out as soon as they can. The resulting high population turnover further contributes to the impoverishment of the barrio, according to city officials, impeding the success of city programs that presuppose a stable resident population.

Benfield, like other poor, overcrowded apartment-building areas in San Jose, has an enormous population density. The number of inhabitants in the census tract that includes this barrio is estimated at 4,300, the average size of a small U.S. town. About 2,300 of them live in Benfield's 99 apartment buildings; that is, there are about 23 persons per building or 5.80 persons per apartment (compared to 3.08 persons per household in the city of San Jose). Census statistics, however, generally underestimate the number of residents in neighborhoods that have a large immigrant population. For example, data from the 25 households studied show an average of 7.76 people per apartment.

⁷ When first built, both the buildings and the property, including the landscape, alleys, parking lots, laundry rooms, and other common areas, were the sole responsibility of a single company that kept them in good condition. By the mid-1980s, after the company had begun selling its buildings off, the number of property owners in the barrio dramatically increased, until, by 1990, there were some 60 owners managing the buildings. As a result of this large number of absentee landlords, the Homeowners Association—the entity legally responsible for maintaining the property's common areas—was dismantled, even though, before the law, it remained responsible for maintenance. This marked the starting point of a rapid deterioration of the barrio's apartment buildings and infrastructure. Most of Benfield's current property owners are absentee landlords who do not live in San Jose; many of them employ individual managers or professional companies to collect their rent. These owners include professionals and real estate agents who live in cities like Palo Alto, Los Gatos, or Saratoga; middle-class investors from a minority background such as Philippine, Chinese, and Chicanos; and a few working-class investors who live in the barrio. The large number of property owners and their different economic interests and cultural backgrounds made it extremely difficult to organize and effectively run a homeowners association.

No longer merely a "bedroom community" for single men who migrate to the region and periodically return to Mexico, Benfield is largely composed of men and women settlers, their children, and other relatives. This demographic composition reflects important changes in the Mexican migrant population in the United States. The broad availability of formal and informal year-round jobs for immigrant workers, men and women alike, has facilitated the settlement of entire families in California since the 1970s (Cornelius 1992). Also, although highly restrictionist in intent, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) fueled the migration and settlement of a large number of women and children in the United States, and especially in California.⁸ As a result, Mexican immigrant neighborhoods like Benfield—composed of families in addition to single men—have flourished in numerous California cities and rural towns (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Palerm 1991, 1995). The change is readily apparent in Benfield, where children and adolescent are the majority of the population. The average age of the barrio's inhabitants is 21.6 years (compared to 30.4 years in San Jose), while 42.6 percent of the barrio's residents are under 18 years old (which sharply contrasts with 26.7 percent in San Jose); see Table 4. In sum, Benfield is largely populated by young families with numerous children.

The Mexican population in Benfield is made up of immigrants from the central and northern Mexican states of Michoacan, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Sinaloa, and Chihuahua, mostly from rural communities. There are also some skilled technical and professional immigrants who left large cities such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterey during Mexico's economic crisis in the early 1980s. Finally, there is a small number of Central American immigrants; most are from El Salvador. Today, the barrio's population is 70 percent Latino and 29 percent Cambodian or Vietnamese. Ninety-one percent of the Latinos are Mexican. Most of the Cambodians come from impoverished rural areas and have gone through tremendous cultural and emotional shocks as result of their warfare experiences; their arrival has contributed to the increasing impoverishment of the barrio.

Basic community services such as food stores, laundries, shopping centers, and health clinics are far from Benfield, while negligible public transportation—only one bus line runs through the area—makes it difficult for the many residents who do not drive to attend their daily business. Because of the lack of stores to serve this highly populated area and the precarious economic situation of many of its families, street vendors who sell different kinds of merchandise, especially food products, have

⁸ IRCA, approved by Congress and signed into law by Reagan on November 6, 1986, was intended to curb Mexican undocumented immigration by imposing sanctions on employers who knowingly hire undocumented immigrant workers. IRCA also included provisions for an amnesty-legalization program for undocumented immigrants who could prove continuous residence in the U.S. since January 1, 1982, and for those who could prove they had worked in U.S. agriculture for ninety days during specific periods. About 2.3 million Mexican undocumented Mexican immigrants applied for legal status under one of IRCA's programs (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 26).

proliferated in Benfield. Finally, as in other low-income barrios in San Jose, drug-dealing activities are an important aspect of Benfield's life. Drug selling increased notably in the late 1980s, mirroring a similar trend in San Jose and other cities in California. Most of the drug sellers are small-scale dealers attracted to Benfield by its high transience rate, which makes it difficult for residents and the police to control them. It is not unusual, for example, to see outsiders come to Benfield to buy drugs, especially in the evenings. However, a small number of the barrio's households are involved in drug dealing, and such activities do not dominate the community's life. Yet, the frequent fights between rival factions and gangs make these activities an important concern for many Benfield residents, especially young working parents who fear for the safety of their children.

Life and Work in Benfield

Benfield is first and foremost a low-income working-class barrio of young Mexican immigrants and their families. The effervescent and vibrant nature of this immigrant enclave is illustrated by the rhythm and routine of daily life. Any summer day between 6:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. many workers leave the barrio to go to work, usually in old, second-hand cars and sharing rides with friends and co-workers. In the meantime, the barrio's first spontaneous recyclers, often elderly men, start collecting cans, bottles, radios, and other discarded appliances from the garbage cans and containers, getting a head start on outside competitors and other trash collectors. Later in the morning, when the local public schools open their doors, Benfield streets get busy with children hurrying to class, often accompanied by their mothers or other relatives. Once school begins, Benfield turns quiet, with little activity on its streets. At this time of day, women who do not work outside the home attend to household chores, and can be seen sweeping, dusting, doing laundry, and preparing lunch and food for relatives who have work shifts later in the day.

By noon, the barrio becomes more alive when street vendors arrive to peddle tortillas, vegetables, fruit, cheese, clothes, and other merchandise. Many residents go shopping at the nearest supermarket, located about a mile from the barrio in a modest food and clothing shopping center that caters to low-income Latinos. Early in the afternoon, women pick up their children from school and return home. Meanwhile, popsicle vendors come to the barrio with their push carts in a first round and hang around after school ends, targeting children as they leave for home. Later in the afternoon, the first groups of men and women workers begin returning home, many still wearing their work uniforms. Also late in the afternoon, residents who work evening shifts usually have an early dinner and get ready to leave for work.

In the early evenings, Benfield streets start to get crowded. Children go out to play on the sidewalks and in the alleys and parking lots, with older siblings watching over them. Groups of male teenagers gather outside the buildings and in the parking lots to socialize, often listening to music from a car radio; while others play volleyball or soccer in the apartment-building back yards. Later in the evenings, after returning from work and eating, adult men gather in front of their apartments to socialize. Women also gather outside to chat after a busy day, watching their children playing in the streets. Others prefer to stay indoors and watch the popular soap operas on local Spanish TV stations. Evenings are also the peak time for ambulant popsicle and ice-cream vendors who come attracted by the numerous children who play in the streets. As the sun goes down, residents return home for dinner and the barrio's streets and public areas slowly become calm again. By 10 p.m. many Benfield residents have gone to bed and the barrio's peace is interrupted only in the early-morning hours when night-shift workers return home.

Most Mexican immigrants in Benfield have low-wage service-related and light-manufacturing jobs. Among the 25 households studied in detail there were 21 janitors, 10 assemblers, eight gardeners, five carpenters, four food packers, four restaurant workers, three construction workers, two house cleaners, two butchers, two car washers, two teacher aids, one sheet-metal worker, one popsicle vendor; one home health-care worker, one bank teller, one garbage recycler, one store helper, one baby-sitter, and one mechanic, in addition to five people who worked as home and street vendors (see Tables 5 and 6). There is a clear gender pattern in the occupational histories of Benfield residents. Men usually work as janitors, gardeners, cooks and dishwashers, construction laborers, and unskilled or semiskilled manufacturing workers. Women usually work in electronics assembly, canneries, house-cleaning, baby-sitting, home-care for the elderly, and home and street vending. Both men and women obtain their jobs much more often through kinship networks than through formal job applications. Employers and contractors in industries that rely on immigrant labor tap into these networks as an inexpensive and reliable means of recruiting and regulating the size of their workforce.

Finally, low wages predominate in most of the occupations of Benfield workers. The average wage range for most of the workers interviewed is \$4.50 to \$6.25 an hour. Earnings in informal occupations are also relatively low and comparable to many of the low-wage jobs in the service sector. Moreover, only a few of the 60 Benfield workers who hold jobs in the formal sector have health insurance; other fringe benefits such as sick leave and paid vacations are practically unheard of, and only nine of those 60 workers are unionized. In turn, most households in Benfield have one or more members working in a full- or part-time job (the average number of workers per household among the families studied is 3.24). Despite living in households with several wage-earners, a considerable segment of

Benfield families live in poverty. Figures for the census tract that includes Benfield, for example, show that 33 percent of the families live below the poverty line, compared with 6.5 percent in San Jose as a whole. Moreover, per capita income in this census tract is \$6,474, compared with \$16,904 in San Jose and \$20,423 in Santa Clara County; while per capita income among the households studied was only \$4,696 (see Table 6). In sum, they are working-poor families in which most members experience low wages, employment instability, and lack of employee benefits. Using the case-study of Silicon Valley's service janitorial industry, the next chapter examines the structural changes that have trapped many Mexican immigrant workers in such low-wage, dead-end jobs with no prospects for upward mobility.

CHAPTER 3.
WORKING IN THE SERVICE SECTOR: THE CASE OF TWO MEXICAN WORKERS IN
SILICON VALLEY'S JANITORIAL INDUSTRY

Luis and Carmen are two residents of Benfield who, like many other Mexican immigrants in San Jose, work as janitors cleaning the large number of offices, buildings, and commercial centers in the Santa Clara Valley. Twenty-three of the 81 workers from the 25 households studied work as janitors. That janitorial service is one of the most common occupations for Mexican immigrants in the region is not surprising: As the high-tech economy of Silicon Valley expanded, the building-cleaning service industry is a low-wage employment sector that experienced one of the highest growth rates. Moreover, during the 1980s, this industry underwent a major restructuring that has made it increasingly dependent on cheap, renewable Mexican immigrant labor. In this chapter, this restructuring is first described, and its impact on the particular working conditions of Luis and Carmen is then described in detail.

The Restructuring of the Janitorial Industry and the Influx of Mexican Labor

In the late 1960s the janitorial industry, as well as other service maintenance industries in Silicon Valley, experienced rapid growth. Electronics manufacturing plants, research and development facilities, and banking, insurance, and law firms proliferated, as did the commercial infrastructure that supports the high-tech complex. This proliferation generated a demand for janitorial and other unskilled services to clean and maintain the new office space. In the past 25 years the demand for janitors has grown fivefold in the region (Mines and Avina 1992: 441). Today, Santa Clara County has one of the largest janitorial industries in California, especially in cities like Palo Alto, Santa Clara, Mountain View, Cupertino, and San Jose. It is estimated that there are around 11,500 janitors in Santa Clara County alone. This number falls short of the truth because it includes public-sector, direct-employee, and private-contractor janitors (EDD: Projections of Employment for Santa Clara County, 1991) but does not include the large number of janitors employed by independent, self-employed contractors in the informal sector. Approximately 300 janitorial contractors operate in the region, ranging from companies employing more than 600 workers to small contracting firms that employ fewer than 10 workers. Eighty to 90 percent of the janitors working for these companies are immigrants, most of them from Mexico and Central America (Alvarado et. al 1991).⁹

⁹ For example, in a survey conducted by Mines and Avina in five janitorial firms in the valley, 80 percent of the workers were from Mexico (Mines and Avina 1992: 442).

The almost exclusive dependence of Silicon Valley's janitorial industry on recent Mexican immigrants today is the result of a major restructuring of the industry over the past 15 years. Before the 1980's, most of the janitorial workers were Mexican-origin, African-American, Filipino, and Portuguese. During the 1970s, the working conditions for these janitors improved as the demand for their services increased—this was a general trend in California (Mines and Avina, 1992). By the late 1970s, the janitorial workforce was composed of two groups: the so-called in-house janitors, workers directly employed by the firms where they cleaned; and contract janitors, who worked for private janitorial firms and contractors. In-house janitors usually had the same benefits as other employees in their companies (e.g., health insurance), and they usually earned between \$7 and \$10 an hour, more than contract janitors earned. Moreover, big firms often offered in-house janitors the opportunity to upgrade their skills and move up to better paid semiskilled occupations within the company, so cleaning represented an entry-level job for many minority and immigrant workers. The working conditions of contract janitors were not as good as those of in-house janitors, but because the industry was highly unionized, they were still comparable to other unskilled or semiskilled occupations in the region. Unionized janitors thus received ample fringe benefits, including health care, sick leave, and paid holidays, as well as wages ranging between \$5.12 and \$7.96 an hour.

In the late 1970s, working conditions for both types of janitors worsened as the industry began to restructure. Faced with increasing national and international competitive pressure, large corporations in the Silicon Valley sought to reduce labor and operating costs in areas that were considered nonessential to their productive process. They began contracting out maintenance operations; janitorial services were among the first to be contracted out. Many in-house janitors were given early retirement packages, others were moved to other positions, and still others were just laid off. Contracting was visible not only in private firms but also in public the sector—several Santa Clara County office buildings in San Jose subcontracted their cleaning to private janitorial companies. As janitorial services were increasingly contracted out, janitors' working conditions declined considerably. Hourly wages fell from a range of \$5.12 to \$7.96 to a range of \$4.25 to \$6.50, and fringe benefits such as health care, sick leave, and paid vacations eroded significantly. Unlike many high-tech companies that once had their own cleaning workforce and the large, unionized janitorial companies, most of the subcontracted nonunion janitorial firms did not provide medical insurance or any other benefits. Many of these mid-sized firms were set

up and run by the ex-managerial staff of large unionized firms, often at the request and with the support of the administrative staff of their client companies (Mines and Avina 1992).¹⁰

As the nonunion janitorial companies gained prominence in the region's industry, the Contractors Association of Building Maintenance of Santa Clara County (the association of union contractors that had a joint contract with the union, Local 77) pushed to introduce a new labor contract in 1981. This was a two-tier master contract in which new employees were subject to a four-year apprenticeship period, during which time they were paid only a percentage of journeymen wages (70 percent the first year, 80 percent the second year, and so on) (Mines and Avina 1992: 442).¹¹ The effects of the new labor contract were dramatic, as Mines and Avina explain:

The agreement is tantamount to the two-tier system, which has allowed unionized firms to lower their labor costs. The flexibility of the "advancement program" has allowed several foremen at unionized firms to tap into networks of recently arrived Mexican immigrants and institute high turnover in an effort to keep an ever-changing work force from achieving journeymen's wages (1992: 442).

As a consequence of this restructuring, Santa Clara Valley's janitorial industry became dependent on a large, easily replenishable pool of recent Mexican immigrant workers. Working conditions were downgraded, and janitorial work devolved from being stable and paying enough to support a family to being unstable and not paying a family wage. Only immigrant workers were able and willing to accept such jobs.

Immigrants Fight Back: The "Justice for Janitors" Campaign

Despite the displacement of more-experienced workers by recent immigrants in Santa Clara County's janitorial industry, Local 77 membership did not decline as much as that of other janitorial unions in California (e.g., SEIU Local 399 in Los Angeles). This difference resulted from the increasing involvement of the new immigrant workers in the janitorial local union since the late 1980s. In the mid-1980s, in light of the rapid gains made by nonunion firms in the market, Local 77's strategy was to try to

¹⁰ Indeed, some of the janitors who lost their jobs in the restructuring eventually were hired by nonunion companies as supervisors of the work crews of new immigrant workers. Others became self-employed independent janitorial contractors; while the less fortunate were unable to find other jobs.

¹¹ Local 77 signed the new contract to prevent further inroads by nonunion contractors that, since the early 1980s, nonunion contractors had been making into the formerly union-dominated market by underbidding the union firms. As a result, since the late 1970s, janitorial workers, many of them Mexican immigrants who had settled in San Jose in the 1960s and 1970s, had suffered not only wage depression but also displacement as nonunion firms offered a cheaper substitute for their labor—recent Mexican immigrants (Mines and Avina 1992: 443). In 1985, for example, nonunion contractors were paying between minimum wage and \$5 an hour while the union contracts mandated wages of \$5.12 to \$7.96 with ample fringe benefits (Mines and Avina 1992: 442).

keep those firms from winning large cleaning contracts (Mines and Avina 1992: 444). In the late 1980s the union launched the "Justice for Janitors" campaign to organize immigrants working for nonunion firms that had managed to win cleaning contracts with large high-tech companies in the valley. The leadership of Local 1877 (as the union was renamed after merging with Local 18, another South San Francisco Bay Area SEIU affiliate) believed that large high-tech companies in the Silicon Valley were particularly sensitive and vulnerable to hostile news stories, picketing, and rallies that could damage their public image.

Local 1877 achieved its first major organizational victory in 1991–1992 when it launched a well-orchestrated publicity campaign to force Apple Computers, the multinational company headquartered in Santa Clara County, to replace its nonunion contractors with a union firm. This campaign had the support of the janitors who cleaned Apple's facilities. The great majority of them were Latino immigrants who, despite the pressure of their janitorial employer and the fear to losing their jobs, decided to break their silence and strive to join the union. Equally important for the success of this campaign was the support given by the Cleaning Up Silicon Valley Coalition, an independent group founded in 1991; it was made up of nonprofit organizations, religious and labor representatives, local politicians, and community leaders who organized to denounce the poor working conditions of immigrants in the valley. The climax of this campaign was a public hearing organized by the Coalition in 1991. Before city, county, state, and federal officials, members denounced the low wages, health and safety violations in the workplace, cases of sexual harassment, and poor working conditions in general experienced by janitors in Santa Clara County, especially those employed by nonunion contractors. This hearing was decisive in winning the support of the public opinion for the union's cause.¹²

After the landmark victory in the Apple campaign, hundreds of other immigrant workers, many of them undocumented, joined Local 1877. The union successfully targeted several nonunion janitorial firms contracted by large South Bay corporations such as Hewlett-Packard, Unisys, and Applied Materials, all of which had been employing nonunion cleaning contractors. The success of the union's campaign significantly contributed to improving the wages and working conditions of many janitors in the region, who now had access to health insurance and other benefits such as paid vacations, sick leave, and a pension plan, as well as representation and mediation in case of labor disputes with their employers. The success of Local 1877's campaign also proved that it is not impossible to organize immigrant workers and indeed that immigrants could help to revitalize the unions' efforts in difficult

¹² For a detailed history of Local 1877 organizational strategies and the role of the Cleaning Up Silicon Valley Coalition, see Martínez-Saldaña's Doctoral Dissertation (1993: Chapter 3).

times for labor organizing throughout the nation. Despite these victories, the union was not able to restore the favorable working conditions for unionized janitors that prevailed before restructuring. In fact, high turnover, unfair labor practices, abuses in the workplace, and substandard working conditions are still extremely common in the building cleaning industry, in unionized firms as well, all of which depend heavily on immigrant labor.

Today, the janitorial workforce is made up of three major groups. The first and most privileged group consists of janitors who work for large unionized cleaning companies, where wages range between \$5.70 to \$8.81 an hour with health insurance and some other fringe benefits. Most janitors earn between \$5.70 to \$7 because employers aim for high turnover, firing janitors before they can reach journeyman-level wages, or because workers themselves find better-paid jobs. Large unionized janitorial companies tend to specialize in high-tech facilities and big buildings, especially targeting large corporations that have several buildings. The second group is made up of janitors employed by medium and small cleaning contractors, most of which are nonunion. This group normally earn wages below \$5.50 an hour and receives no medical insurance or other fringe benefits. Medium and small firms compete for cleaning contracts of electronics plants, restaurants, food stores, shops, and other commercial centers, although they often have contracts with big client firms that still employ nonunion contractors. The third group is made up of self-employed contractors who in turn often informally employ a small crew of workers to carry out their contracts. These contractors, the so-called small mom-and-pop operations, usually clean small business offices and independent restaurants, laundries, and the like. Unlike the firms of the former two groups, they often employ middle-aged immigrant women who cannot find better jobs and have fewer chances of being hired by larger janitorial firms, which prefer young immigrant workers. Small contractors usually pay their workers in cash, on the basis of work done rather than an hourly wage. In general, janitors in this group are the most exploited in the industry, wages usually remain at or below minimum wage levels, and working conditions tend to violate established health and safety regulations.

The Case of Two Immigrant Janitorial Workers in Benfield

1. Corporate Restructuring as a Door for New Immigrant Workers: Luis' Story

Luis is a 25-year-old immigrant who came to San Jose from Michoacan, Mexico in 1988. In 1989 he started working for Atlantis Maintenance, a large unionized janitorial firm servicing Medex, a

giant international pharmaceutical company.¹³ When Luis started working for this company, Medex was restructuring its cleaning operations and replacing in-house janitors with workers from outside subcontractors. Nevertheless, there were still nine in-house Medex janitors who were earning an average of \$10 an hour, while he and the other Atlantis Maintenance janitors were making only \$5.50. In 1990, Atlantis Maintenance increased the working area assigned to each janitor, a strategy commonly used by many companies in the janitorial industry to save labor costs and underbid their competitors. In response, Atlantis Maintenance workers, feeling their workload had become too heavy, complained to the company and, assisted by union representatives, held a rally in front of Atlantis Maintenance headquarters. A week later, the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) investigated the company's employee files, presumably called upon by Medex as a response to the union's rally, and thirty Atlantis Maintenance janitors, including Luis, were fired because they lacked valid work permits.

After being fired, Luis found another janitorial job in Bay-Clean, the main janitorial service company used by Sonix, one of the largest high-tech corporations in Silicon Valley. Like Medex, Sonix had decided to reduce its own janitorial workforce and subcontract the cleaning of its numerous buildings to independent janitorial contractors. In 1989, according to Sonix representatives, the company gave their in-house janitors the option of receiving either training for other semi-skilled positions (e.g., shipping and receiving, and maintenance) or a compensation package with an early-retirement plan. This change was part of a larger Sonix plan to reduce operating costs by contracting out secondary manufacturing and service operations to independent firms. When Luis started cleaning at Sonix he was paid \$5.50 an hour without health insurance or other fringe benefits, while the only in-house janitor left in the building to which he was assigned was making \$10 an hour plus insurance and fringes.

In 1992, in the middle of the "Justice for Janitors" campaign, Local 1877 and The Cleaning Up Silicon Valley Coalition decided to target Sonix to press this company to suspend its cleaning contracts with non-union firms and contract a unionized janitorial company. After a few months of union organizing at its facilities, Sonix, like Apple, fearing negative publicity, agreed to terminate its contract with Bay-Clean and other nonunion mid-sized companies and replace them with CLS, a multinational cleaning and maintenance firm and one of the largest unionized janitorial companies in the region. Luis, like the rest of the Bay-Clean janitors, was transferred to CLS and continued cleaning Sonix buildings under a new contract, this time one signed by the union.

¹³ These and all company names used hereafter are pseudonyms.

The change brought mixed results for Luis. On the one hand, as a janitor specialized in waxing floors, his hourly wages went up \$1.31 to \$6.81 (about \$1,090 a month). Also, after three months, Luis started receiving medical insurance, and like his work mates, he was now protected by the union from unfair labor practices by their employers. On the other hand, Luis' workload increased considerably as CLS reduced the number of janitors assigned to the Sonix building by eight (from 23 to 15).

In the spring of 1993, after fifteen months of working for CLS, Luis had an accident on the job: He fell while waxing a floor in a Sonix building. He then began a long period of recovery that included occupational therapy, numerous visits to a chiropractor's office, and periodic checkups by several doctors. From the time of the accident to October 1993, Luis was paid temporary disability benefits of \$165 a week by Workers' Compensation—two-thirds of his average weekly wage at CLS. By September 1995, Luis was still disabled and was diagnosed as having a permanent back injury that prevents him from working again as a janitor. Following the advice of his lawyer, he rejected an offer by CLS's insurance company to settle the case for \$10,000, deciding instead to await the verdict of a state judge on his case.

In the meantime, in the fall of 1995, about three years after Luis and his former workmates began working for CLS, the INS conducted an audit of the company and found that most of its rank-and-file workers did not have valid work-authorization forms. More than 400 workers lost their jobs, most of them Mexican immigrants. This was a serious blow for many of these workers, who lost not only their jobs but also all the benefits they had struggled so hard to win, as well as the years of seniority in their positions on which wage increases were based.¹⁴

Luis shares a two-bedroom apartment in Benfield with five other young Mexican immigrant men, including his brother (see Figure 1). Four of them also worked as janitors for CLS until the fall of 1995, while the fifth is a carpenter in a small furniture factory. As in many households in the barrio, Luis and his roommates pool their incomes to pay the rent and buy food and other necessities. This type of large, non-family household is common among immigrants like Luis who do not have relatives in San Jose; it allows single men to save money and send it back to their families in Mexico, and helps them deal with episodes of unemployment and underemployment.

Luis considers himself a temporary immigrant who will soon return to Mexico. Yet, like many Mexican immigrants who come to the United States with the idea of saving some money and going back

¹⁴ Today, according to information from former and current CLS employees, those workers who lost their jobs have been replaced by a new cadre of young Mexican immigrants. These will probably lose their jobs after the next INS audit of the company. According to Mines and Avina, in California the INS conducts audits every few years, especially targeting big janitorial companies that employ large numbers of workers (1992: 446-448).

home. Luis is likely to stay much longer than he expected. His family in Mexico will develop a dependence on his and his brother's remittances that is likely to make it increasingly difficult for him to return home, at least permanently. Like thousands before him, Luis might either return seasonally or settle for a long time in the United States, an economic strategy quite common among "binational" Mexican migrant households. After all, Luis knows that as a worker he is highly appreciated in the United States, although as a person he experiences an increasingly hostile environment that he finds difficult to understand and accept, but about which he feels there is little he can do.

2. At the Bottom of the Job Market: Carmen's Story

Carmen, a 52-year-old Mexican from Jalisco, represents a typical case of a janitor working for an independent self-employed contractor. Carmen came to San Jose in 1988 to join her husband, Roberto, who had been living and working there since 1984 and had obtained legal U.S. residency. Since she was an undocumented immigrant, Carmen was afraid to leave home for the first several months, fearing that she would be detained at any time by the "migra" (as the INS is popularly known among Latino immigrants) and deported. She ventured out only on Sundays to go to church and, after a few months, at night to help Roberto in his job cleaning an office building; she helped him in exchange for an allowance for household expenses.

Carmen's relationship with her husband had been difficult ever since she joined him in San Jose. They had been living in "union libre" (common law marriage) in Mexico since 1966 and had four children together. Soon after arriving in San Jose, Carmen discovered that Roberto was involved with a woman he had met in the city while she was in Mexico. Roberto spent several days a week away from home, and he gradually reduced the allowance he gave her for household expenses, which they shared with relatives. Not being able to pay her share of rent, Carmen—and her children, by then in their teens—tried to persuade Roberto to marry her so that she could at least obtain a legal residence to work in the United States. For several years, Roberto refused, instead using his power to keep Carmen under his control.

Because Roberto would not pay the promised money, Carmen became increasingly anguished. In 1989, after meeting an African-American employer in church who was looking for workers, she overcame her fears, stopped working with Roberto, and start working part-time for this contractor, who also employed three other Mexican women her age. Her employer had several cleaning contracts in small buildings, private offices, stores, day-care centers, and other small businesses, so Carmen was often moved from one place to another as he won some cleaning contracts and lost others. For several

years, Carmen's most stable assignment was cleaning the large two-story office building of a major nonprofit organization in San Jose and a chiropractor's office across the street. However, given the fierce competition among small janitorial contractors like hers, there were weeks when she worked as many as 36 hours and others when she worked only nine hours. Moreover, Carmen's schedule was highly variable: she might work from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m., from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., or from 2 a.m. to 8 a.m., and there were days when she had no work at all.

Given her erratic employment, Carmen's earnings fluctuated constantly, usually between \$275 and \$440 a month. Her employer paid her in cash, and she was never paid for all the hours she worked. When she began the job, Carmen assumed her employer would keep an accurate record of the hours she worked. After realizing he did not, she began doing so. To her dismay, her employer invariably cheated her by paying for fewer hours than what she had worked. In addition, Carmen never knew when she would be paid; their verbal arrangement stipulated that she would be paid once a month, but many months she was paid two, three, and even four weeks late.

In view of the irregularities of her job and her urgent need to earn enough every month to pay her expenses, Carmen desperately tried to find a more stable and reliable job. She submitted numerous applications to hotels, electronics plants, and grocery stores; twice she was offered a cleaning job in a motel and work in an electronics plant, but could not take them for lack of work authorization. (Unlike many undocumented immigrants, Carmen refused to use a fake authorization card for fear of jeopardizing her chances of obtaining a valid card in the future, in case, for example, she married Roberto and legalized her immigrant status, or in case a new legalization program was approved, as she often liked to dream.)

In 1992, unable to find a full-time job, Carmen looked for part-time work in the mornings to supplement the meager earnings from her night-shift janitorial job. For more than two years, she worked in the mornings at different jobs, including baby-sitting, cleaning houses, and caring for elderly people in their homes. For example, for two years starting in the spring of 1992, Carmen worked from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. taking care of an elderly woman. At first, her duties were to take care of the woman and cook, but after a few months her responsibilities extended to house cleaning, doing laundry, watering and taking care of the garden, and cooking for other family members—all for \$4.25 an hour.

In addition to her two jobs, Carmen spent several hours a day working at home, cooking for her children, doing shopping and laundry, and cleaning the house with the other women of the household. Carmen's double work shift, her work at home, and her irregular sleeping schedule have undermined her

health. She suffers from frequent headaches, and is prostrated in bed every few months with severe back pain. Because of all these circumstances, she looks 10 years older than her age.

Finally, in 1993, yielding to Carmen's and her children's relentless insistence, Roberto married Carmen and filled out the paperwork to initiate legalization of her status. Despite Roberto's antagonism, Carmen has little choice but to live with him in the same household which is composed of two single children, three married children and their spouses, six grandchildren, and a sister of one of her daughters-in-law—a total of 18 persons. There are seven working adults. Five, like Carmen, are janitors; the sixth is a construction painter (see Figure 2). Carmen has the most difficult position in this extended household because of the antagonism with her husband. To date, her main hope continues to be to obtain a valid work authorization and find a stable, better-paid full-time job that will enable her to improve her health, get out of her financial straits, and leave her husband and find living quarters for herself and her children. However, as of the winter of 1996, more than three years after her application was submitted, she is still anxiously waiting for a response from the INS.

Conclusion

The two individual profiles just presented illustrate some of the working conditions prevalent in the building-cleaning industry in the Silicon Valley today. Luis typifies the young Mexican men who came to Silicon Valley in the 1980s, and who constitute the backbone of the restructured janitorial workforce since then. They clean manufacturing plants, research and development facilities, and the other large buildings that proliferated with the growth of the high-tech economy in the region. Luis and other young and "renewable" immigrant workers have largely replaced the older, veteran janitors in most of the industry's large companies. They live in poor Latino immigrant enclaves like Benfield and, unlike their predecessors for whom cleaning was often an entry-level occupation, they have few opportunities to move up in this industry. Ironically, they are the bulk of the union membership that supports the Justice for Janitors campaign, the labor movement that has impeded further deterioration of working conditions since restructuring.

In turn, Carmen's case exemplifies the fierce competition that characterizes the labor niche of self-employed janitors. Immigrants who work for these contractors are often the most exploited of the Silicon Valley janitorial workforce, and, unlike workers like Luis, have no union support. Not surprisingly, a significant number of them are middle-aged Mexican women whose job opportunities are restricted to such informal and unstable occupations as domestic service, house-cleaning, and baby-sitting. Their age and undocumented status make them extremely vulnerable and easily exploitable by

unscrupulous contractors. Although they represent a minority within the janitorial workforce, their wages and employment conditions are by far the worst in the industry.

Finally, both Luis and Carmen live in extended households in which members pool their incomes and share rent and other living expenses, a central strategy used by many immigrant workers in the face of the instability, low-wages and limited benefits of their jobs. Extended households are thus crucial in facilitating the flexible employment that characterizes many highly competitive and labor-intensive industries that rely on immigrant labor. In other words, the restructuring of Silicon Valley's building-cleaning industry to reduce labor costs—largely achieved by the employment of new, cheap immigrant labor—cannot be fully understood unless we consider the household economy that enables these immigrant workers to subsist on their low wages, thus subsidizing their labor. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of subsistence strategies practiced in the immigrant households of Benfield and some of the principal problems these households face.

CHAPTER 4.
EXTENDED HOUSEHOLDS, FLUID BOUNDARIES: PATTERNS OF FAMILY
ORGANIZATION AMONG MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS

The large variety of living arrangements among the Mexican immigrants in Benfield encompasses extended families, nuclear families, single-parent families, and compound households—those formed by a group of individuals, usually men, unrelated by kinship who live together. Despite this variety, the single most common type in Benfield is the extended family household (defined as any domestic group composed of a single-parent or two-parent family living together with other relatives who are either single or married).¹⁵ Yet, there is not just one but several types of extended household. Indeed, the large diversity of extended households and the crowded conditions within most of them are the defining features of living arrangements in Benfield. Households composed of two or more families, nuclear families sharing the apartment with relatives and friends, and other types of extended households in which eight or more persons live together in small two-bedroom apartments are quite common in the barrio. This chapter analyzes the main characteristics of these extended households, the subsistence strategies used by their members, and some of the basic problems they face. In showing how low-income Mexican workers deal with economic problems in their lives, the chapter reveals that some of the assumptions behind conventional wisdom and public policy about Mexican immigrant families are mistaken.

Types of Extended Households

Sixteen of the 25 households studied in Benfield are extended domestic groups, while only five households consist only of nuclear families (see Table 5). Most extended households in Benfield fit one of four types:

1. A nuclear family living with single relative(s), such as a spouse's sibling, cousin, or uncle. Aurora, for example, a 40-year-old who works as a home and street vendor, is married to a janitor with whom she has five children. They share their two-bedroom apartment with two of her young nephews, one of whom works as a janitor and the other as a construction laborer. The total is nine persons (see Figure 3).

¹⁵ The basic criteria underlying this operational definition is coresidence in which there is certain degree of economic cooperation. There is a large body of literature on the concept of household, but for a more specific critical analysis with reference to contemporary Mexican immigrant families in the United States, see Chavez (1990).

2. A single-mother family living with single relative(s). Josefina, a 30-year-old single mother with four children, combines several informal economic activities such as house cleaning, home vending, and child care. She lives with a nephew, who is a janitor, and a friend of her nephew, who is a carpenter. The total is seven persons (see Figure 4).
3. A nuclear family living with one or several of the parents' married or single-parent children. An example is Carmen, whose case was described in Chapter 3: She and Roberto live with two single children, three married children and their spouses, six grandchildren, and a sister of one of her daughters-in-law. The total is 18 persons (see Figure 2).
4. Relatives who are either married or single parents and who live together with their children. Arturo, a 28-year-old immigrant from Puebla who works as a popsicle street vendor, is unmarried and has two children. The four share a two-bedroom apartment with his uncle's nuclear family as well as Arturo's cousin, who is a single mother, and her three children. The total is 12 persons (see Figure 5).

Sharing housing expenses is a principal reason why people live with relatives and friends in Benfield. Although such sharing is an important factor behind the popularity of extended households among low-income Mexican immigrant workers throughout the United States, it is especially important for Mexicans in San Jose, where rents are among the highest in California. The case of Juan Zamora illustrates this point. Juan, a 35-year-old immigrant from Guanajuato, first came to the United States in 1979 and worked in a nursery with his wife until 1984, when their employer closed the business. He then worked as a gardener for a San Jose landscaping firm until 1989, when the company shut down. He was hired a few months later by another local landscaping firm for which he worked until 1993.

In 1988, finding himself in financial difficulties, Juan moved with his wife and three children to an apartment and shared it with his brother, who is also married and has two children (see Figure 6). Juan saw this move as a temporary arrangement until he improved his financial situation. To his dismay, after five years, his living arrangements were unchanged. His wages had not risen at the rate he had expected. The \$4.50 an hour Juan earned in 1989 had increased to only \$6.75 in 1993. Today, Juan earns around \$1,200 a month including overtime. The rent for the two-bedroom apartment in Benfield is \$790—66 percent of his earnings. Sharing the apartment with his brother, he pays \$400 a month, which frees the rest of his income for family expenses. Yet, as Juan's and his brother's children grow older, having only one bedroom for each family in this small apartment has become increasingly problematic. However, given their precarious economic situation and the high housing costs in San Jose, neither family can afford to rent their own apartment.

Single mothers are especially pressed by financial need to live with relatives and/or friends in extended households. Single mothers who are undocumented and thus not entitled to public benefits feel a still greater need. For example, of the nine single-mother families of the 25 households studied, only two were living by themselves; the rest lived in extended households. Most of these single mothers had been abandoned by their husbands or partners, while others had come to the United States to escape from abusive husbands. Few single mothers in Benfield receive child support from the father of their children; they depend almost entirely on themselves and their relatives for their subsistence. Their child-care responsibilities put single mothers at a disadvantage for finding employment, an additional reason why they live in extended households. Although single-mother families are by far the poorest sector of Benfield's population, their situation in extended households is often masked in aggregate census statistics and, therefore, is invisible to policy makers. In sum, in Benfield it is economic necessity, not cultural preference, that causes many Mexican immigrants to live in overcrowded extended household arrangements.

Economic Instability, Flux, and Flexibility among Mexican Extended Households

The types of extended households presented above are not to be taken as rigid categories. In other words, extended households in Benfield are not fixed but rather extremely flexible living arrangements wherein their size, composition, and structure often undergo important transformations as members' needs change. In fact, the most important feature of extended households in Benfield is their constant flux. It is quite common in the barrio for nuclear-family households to evolve into extended family households from one month to the next, and likewise for people to join and split off from extended families. For example, twelve of the 25 households studied went through diverse changes in composition during the period of study. In some cases, new individuals temporarily joined a domestic group; in others, household members moved out to form new living arrangements or join existing ones, while in still other cases, the living arrangement of extended families underwent periodic readjustments. These changes—and especially those involving recent immigrants—defy any attempt to classify immigrant households in the simple, standard forms often used by demographers, sociologists, and public policy officials.

Most of the transformations experienced by Mexican immigrant households are the direct result of the working members' unstable employment conditions rather than changes associated with their domestic life cycle. The case of Margarita Leon's family illustrates this point. Margarita, Alfredo, and their two children immigrated to San Jose in 1986 from a small rural town in Michoacan. By 1992, they

were living with their five children (they had three more after settling in San Jose), Margarita's parents, and four of her single siblings in a two-bedroom apartment in Benfield (see Figure 7). Margarita and Alfredo worked as janitors for one of the largest local building-cleaning companies in the region, where they were paid \$5 an hour. Margarita's father (who was 60 years old) was helping one of his married sons who runs a small landscape business in San Jose, while one of Margarita's brothers who was living in the household also worked as a janitor. In total, there were four workers in a 13-member household.

In the spring of 1992, Alfredo was laid off when his employer lost the contract for the building where he worked. Their monthly income decreased from \$1,200 to about \$900, the sum of between Margarita's wages and Alfredo's unemployment compensation. A few months later, Margarita was fired from her job after 15 months because she had missed work twice to attend to a sick child. For about two months both were jobless. They lived on Alfredo's unemployment checks, financial help from Margarita's brothers who lived in the household, and sporadic help from charitable organizations that donate food to the poor.

Their situation improved substantially later in 1992 when Alfredo was rehired at \$5 an hour by his former janitorial employer to clean a building whose contract it had recently won. In turn, Margarita was hired, also at \$5 an hour, as an assembly worker in a company that assembles CDs for a larger contractor. With a monthly income of about \$1,600, they decided that, after many years, they were finally financially stable and it was time for them to live alone. Margarita's parents and siblings moved out to live with another of her siblings. However, Margarita and Alfredo soon realized that their monthly income barely covered their living expenses; they took a boarder to help pay the rent. Being legal U.S. residents, both also applied for welfare aid, hoping to get either cash assistance or food stamps. To their consternation, the welfare office told them that although they were a family of seven with a monthly income of less than \$2,185 (they were making \$1,600)—that is, a qualifying family—they could only be considered a family of four because their Mexican-born children were not U.S. residents. (Margarita and Alfredo had initiated the paperwork for their children but, not having the money to pay the INS fees, were waiting for better economic times to complete the application.)

At the beginning of 1993, their economic situation worsened when their boarder moved out. A few weeks later, Margarita was laid off when the CD company for which she worked entered its slow season. Soon after, Alfredo was again laid off when the cleaning contract for the building where he worked was not renewed. Financially desperate, they had no alternative but to give up their apartment and move in with Margarita's parents and siblings, this time in a different neighborhood in a bigger, rented house with more room for the 13 people who were now in the household. Their luck improved in

the spring of 1993 when Margarita was hired as a janitor in a large company and soon after Alfredo too was hired as a janitor, for \$5 an hour, by a company he had worked for in 1991. Later, in October 1993, Margarita was rehired by the CD firm at \$1 more per hour than her janitorial job paid (she quit the latter job). They were starting to recover from the several debts they accumulated during their months of unemployment when, in the summer of 1993, Alfredo was caught using drugs and sent to jail for eleven months. While he was in jail, Margarita was again laid off again from her assembly job and went back to work as a janitor. She then applied for welfare aid; this time she was awarded both cash and food stamps for several months, the amount of such aid changing according to whether she was working or not.

Between Alfredo's release from jail in the summer of 1994 and the summer of 1995, he and Margarita were in and out of several low-income jobs as their employers' business ups and downs dictated. Consequently, they have continued to live with her relatives, they apply for welfare when both are unemployed, and, in times of great need, they ask for help from local churches and charities that give away food. Their constant employment instability has given Margarita and Alfredo a permanent sense of economic precariousness that leaves no room for planning ahead for their family. Margarita is always concerned about dealing with her day-to-day problems and is worried that her husband might use drugs again, and when deep, unexpected financial crises strike the family, she is often on the verge of a nervous breakdown, as happened several times during the course of this study.

Ever-changing household arrangements are indeed quite common among Mexican immigrants in Benfield. Families adjust and readjust their living arrangements to deal with the changes and uncertainties of their lives. Family households regularly expand and contract to adjust to their members' changing economic circumstances.¹⁶ These frequent changes are a "trial and error" system by which either families as units or their members as individuals seek to best solve their everyday problems, which are usually associated with employment uncertainties. In this sense, the continuous changes in the size and composition of Mexican workers' households are largely the result of the flexible employment practices commonly used by employers who rely on their labor.

The Hardships of Living in Extended Households

¹⁶ Extended households not only allow Mexican immigrants to share housing and living costs by pooling their incomes and provide useful living arrangements for coping with employment insecurities, they also help deal with child-care (especially problematic for working parents who cannot afford a child-care center or baby-sitter), make it easier to pool funds for emergency needs (as, for example, when someone in the household gets sick or needs to travel to Mexico to attend a funeral of a close relative), and help to mitigate the negative economic impact of a working member's temporary illness or disability

Although extended households are strategic living arrangements by which low-income workers and their families adapt to their changing economic and social circumstances, it would be a mistake to romanticize them. Members of these households confront several problems. Overcrowding is one that affects most extended households in Benfield; the consequent lack of privacy can create great difficulties, triggering psychological stress and family tensions. The case of Maria Lopez's family illustrates this point. Maria lives in a household of eight : her husband, their two daughters, her married brother and his wife, and two sisters (Luisa and Rosa, the house-cleaners described in Chapter 2) (see Figure 8). Maria's husband works as a butcher in a local supermarket where he earns \$1,200 a month, while she can work only sporadically as a baby-sitter since she takes care of their two young daughters. Although they first lived independently as a nuclear family, Maria and her husband took in Maria's relatives to help pay the rent on their apartment and other living expenses and also allow her to work occasionally by leaving her children in the care of her sisters. This arrangement was also convenient for Maria's sisters, who could not afford to live on their own, as well as for Maria's brother, who worked in the same supermarket as her husband but earned only \$1,050 a month.

While living together provided financial relief, tensions began to build up within this domestic group soon after Maria's relatives moved in. Maria and her sisters argue frequently about the distribution of household chores, exchanging mutual accusations of failure to clean, cook, and supervise the children as agreed. Moreover, Maria resents not having an apartment for her own family that she could organize in her own manner and where she could educate her children without the interference of relatives. She finds it particularly difficult to have no privacy in which to discuss her marital problems with her husband, and is even more distressed to have only one small room for herself, her husband, and their two children. In turn, Maria's sisters feel frustrated about what they believe is an unequal distribution of household chores, arguing that Maria's children are the ones who dirty the apartment most and who require constant adult supervision. Maria and her relatives' interdependence and the realization that they must bond together if they are to survive economically in San Jose add a further element of despair to all the family members.

In addition to family tensions produced by overcrowding, there is a considerable degree of economic stratification within many Benfield extended households. This stratification is sometimes the result of unequal access to material and public resources among members of the same household. An immigrant's legal status not only significantly affects employment opportunities but also determines access to government social benefits and assistance such as Medi-Cal and welfare. Contrary to popular belief, there are few "pure" Mexican immigrant families—that is, families composed exclusively of

either legal or undocumented immigrants; many families combine individuals with different status (from U.S. citizens and legal U.S. residents to people who are adjusting their legal status and undocumented immigrants). It is not surprising that living standards often differ significantly among household members. Moreover, several extended households in Benfield practice only limited income pooling to cover basic living expenses (e.g., rent and utilities), while keeping separate budgets for expenses such as food, clothing, medical care, and leisure. Extended households are thus not tantamount to generalized reciprocity, income pooling, and egalitarian economic status. There are in fact significant differences in living standards among members of many "binational" domestic groups (those composed of legal U.S. residents or citizens and undocumented immigrants), yet such differences are ignored by public policies intended to help poor families but defining such families as homogeneous domestic units.

In sum, extended immigrant households in cities like San Jose are complex and delicate living arrangements that provide important economic, social, and emotional benefits to their members. But many are also muddled by conflicts, inequalities, and contradictions that often lead to their dissolution and re-composition into different domestic groups, further contributing to their instability.

Coping with Poverty: Mexican Families' Subsistence Strategies

Working in the Informal Economy

To supplement the meager income from their jobs, many workers and their family members in Benfield are active in the informal economy.¹⁷ Indeed, one of the most visible features in Benfield and other low-income Mexican immigrant neighborhoods in San Jose is the large number of people who engage into a variety of informal economic activities. The most common activities are street and home vending, which include the sale of home-made food (e.g., tamales and elotes), sodas, candy, vegetables, clothes, cosmetics, jewelry, household appliances and decorative objects, etc. Most activities demand large investments of time and provide only small returns, yet their economic rationality resides in the role that such earnings play in helping balance the budget of working-poor immigrant families.

For example, Laura Camacho, a 27-year-old from the Mexican state of Guerrero, has been a street vendor since she and her husband, Antonio, and their infant daughter arrived in San Jose in 1991. In Mexico, Antonio, an independent accountant for several businesses, was the sole provider for the family. When they immigrated to San Jose, they decided that only he would work and she would take care of their daughter. They thought that by living in an extended family household (with Laura's sister-

¹⁷ In a general sense, the concept of the informal economy refers to those activities that either go fiscally unreported or in which workers are hired under irregular conditions unlike their counterparts in the formal sector (Castells and Portes 1989).

in-law, her husband and their child, as well as Antonio's uncle and his family), they would have enough income from his wages to sustain their own nuclear family (see Figure 9). However, Antonio was able to find only a few temporary, low-paid jobs as a gardener, in a carpentry shop, and as a construction helper. Since he was underemployed most of the time, Laura decided to work as a street vendor to make up for his insufficient and irregular wages. Laura's aunt-in-law, an experienced street vendor, introduced her to the business of selling popular food items among Mexican buyers, showing her the best and more affordable places to buy the supplies and showing her how to prepare and sell them. Laura timidly started selling a small variety of simple items like tortillas, sodas, and elotes in Benfield, but after seeing the success of her business, she gradually introduced new products to meet the specific demands of her clients (e.g., home-made tamales). Working four hours in the afternoons, seven days a week, Laura walked her push cart throughout Benfield, where she had developed a large network of clients. On average, she earned about \$20 a day, although during the summer, her most profitable season, she could make as much as \$45. Although small, such income was a critical contribution to her family budget, and was used to pay basic expenses, including their share of rent and utilities, when Antonio was short of money. In fact, Laura's earnings were more regular and predictable than her husband's, the main reason they value her job highly.

Informal economic activities are indeed quite common among families in Benfield: out of the 25 families studied, 14 were engaged in such activity. Most do so to supplement family income generated in low-paid jobs in the formal sector; a few do so as an alternative to working in such jobs.¹⁸ Again, the poor wages and working conditions of most immigrant workers, rather than cultural habits that immigrants bring with them, are what fuel the proliferation of small-scale, informal, subsistence activities in barrios like Benfield.¹⁹

Charity and Government Assistance

Social networks are also crucial to the subsistence of low-income Mexican immigrant workers and their families in Benfield. They are especially important for undocumented immigrant workers, who do not have access to the government's social "safety net" available to other low-income workers.²⁰

¹⁸ For a description and analysis of other informal economic activities in Benfield, see Zlotniski (1994).

¹⁹ For an illuminating analysis of the factors behind the growth of the informal economy in the United States and the use of immigrant workers in the restructured economy, see Portes, Castells, and Benton (1989); Sassen (1988, Chapter 5)

²⁰ Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), food stamps, Social Security, supplemental security income, or unemployment compensation. The only public services they can receive are emergency medical care, prenatal care, and K-12 education. Immigrants who legalized their status under the 1986 amnesty program cannot obtain AFDC or Medi-Cal for five years after obtaining permanent residency.

Extended households and their dense social networks give their members access to material, social, and emotional support beyond the household sphere and connect them to relatives, friends, fellow Mexican immigrants, and acquaintances throughout the city and the region. Circulating continuously throughout such networks are information about and assistance with housing, employment opportunities, medical treatment, education (e.g., ESL classes), charitable organizations, legal help, special deals on food and clothing, local religious and social activities, support groups for women, and much more. This set of networks, which extend well beyond the boundaries of their households and Benfield, constitutes the real community for most Mexican immigrants.

Immigrants' social networks also function as effective instruments for connecting people to public and private organizations that help the poor by supplying important resources for their subsistence. Contrary to popular belief, Mexican immigrants, especially the undocumented, tend to rely more on the aid of charitable and nonprofit agencies than on government assistance programs. Nonprofit organizations, charities, and churches provide a vast array of resources and services that are especially valued by low-income Mexican and Latino immigrants: food, clothes, job training programs, ESL courses, housing and job referrals, shelter, medical services, legal advice on labor and immigration, family counseling, child-education programs, special programs for teenagers "at risk," and the like. Social networks help link immigrants to these charitable groups. For example, Elena is a big, affable 39 year-old woman who has been living in Benfield since the early 1980s (see Appendices, Figure 10). She is one of the main community leaders in the neighborhood and is an important figure in the larger local Latino community. She has good relationships with influential politicians, local government officials, social workers, and heads of local nonprofit organizations who work on behalf of Latinos in San Jose. As a community broker, Elena is always well informed about events and issues that are important to the Latino community, as well as about specific programs and special opportunities for low-income Latino families like her own (e.g., free health checks to children in the school district and job training programs for teenagers). Each Christmas season, when many charitable groups conduct special campaigns, Elena visits several of these groups to collect food and toys for her family and for friends and families in the barrio who have little money to spend on their children. Gathering and redistributing food, clothes, and other forms of help from charitable organizations by Elena and other people in Benfield is indeed a common practice.

In times of need, a number of Mexican immigrants in Benfield also use government aid. In most cases, government assistance in Benfield offers temporary relief for immigrant families when qualified members are unemployed or need a supplement to the income from their jobs. In other words,

immigrant families tend to see government assistance as a temporary rather than long-term solution to their economic problems.²¹ Yet, since many legal immigrant workers have low-paid, unstable jobs from which they are often laid off, it is common for them to apply for government assistance as the ups and downs of their jobs dictate.

Ironically, immigrants in Benfield have a negative attitude toward aid from government welfare. Some believe that if they use welfare they might lose their U.S. legal residence status or be deported, others simply are not aware that they qualify for it, while still others prefer to get help through other means, usually their kin and friends. Coming from a country that does not have an unemployment compensation and welfare system, and given the social stigma attached to people who use welfare aid in the U.S., many Mexican immigrants are reluctant to use government aid, and those who do use it often feel ashamed. Having migrated to the United States to work and earn money in order to improve their lives and help their families back in Mexico, they experience a sense of failure when they have to use government aid.²²

Conclusion

Extended households in Benfield are basic mechanisms by which Mexican immigrants cope with employment insecurities, confront the high housing and living costs that prevail in San Jose, and, more generally, compensate for the low wages and limited access they—especially the undocumented—have to government services. In other words, it is not old “family traditions” brought from Mexico, but, rather, low-wages, employment instability, and economic uncertainty that motivate the formation of extended households among Mexican immigrant workers.

The situation of immigrant workers' families in barrios like Benfield is thus intimately linked to the structural conditions in which their labor is employed. Much of the dynamics of Mexican

²¹ For example, at the time this study was conducted, 11 out of 41 nuclear or single-parent families being studied had received government assistance at some point or were still receiving it. Four of them were single-mother families and seven were nuclear families. Two of the single-mother families had come to San Jose in the 1970s and were legal U.S. residents who had received public assistance for several years; the other three single mothers were undocumented immigrants who had come to the United States in the mid-1980s after being abandoned by their husbands and who were receiving welfare assistance on the basis of their children born in the United States (all these single mothers were working in informal jobs and combining their wages with this aid). In 1993, out of these seven nuclear families that had or were receiving public assistance, four were receiving food stamps and/or WIC (Women, Infants, and Children, a supplemental food program); two had received or were receiving temporary welfare and food stamps while they were unemployed; and one was receiving welfare aid more permanently.

²² The attitude of Mexican immigrants toward government assistance is well summarized by anthropologist Leo Chavez: “In sum, undocumented immigrants bring with them values similar to the Protestant work ethic. They tend to rely on their own resources, or on the assistance of friends and family. They are not accustomed to governmental assistance and view dependency on government very negatively. Ironically, it is through the ambiguous process of acculturation, that is, the acquisition of American cultural values, that such values may become challenged and possibly eroded” (Leo Chavez 1992: 151).

immigrants' households, including continuous changes in their size and composition mirror the flexible employment practices that characterize the use of migrant labor in today's economy. Unstable living arrangements and the limited capacity to plan for the future are but two of the many disruptive effects on immigrant workers' lives. In such an unstable and uncertain economic context, the subsistence of low-paid immigrant workers and their families depends to a large extent on a number of economic and social strategies, including living in extended households, engaging in informal economic activities, and, when possible, using aid from social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, charities, and, when eligible, federal and state agencies.

The multiple roles played by women within Mexican immigrant households—working in formal and informal jobs, seeking assistance from public sources and private charities, and cultivating dense community networks—are a key element in giving these households their stability (however partial it may be). They thus contribute critically to the subsistence and supply (through reproduction) of cheap immigrant labor. In light of their roles, it is ironic, to say the least, that current anti-immigration policies such as California's Proposition 187 and the like are especially targeted at women and children when, in fact, women's productive and reproductive activities in the household help greatly in keeping down the cost of immigrant labor upon which many of the industries and services that serve the rest of the population depend.²³

²³ Leo Chavez has clearly identify this issue, arguing that policies like those promoted by Proposition 187 seek to take advantage of productive labor provided by undocumented immigrants but without paying the costs associated with the resupply (through reproduction) of that labor.

CHAPTER 5.

LOCAL POLITICS AMONG MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS IN BENFIELD

A description of the experience of Mexican immigrants and their families in Benfield would be incomplete without a discussion of the ways in which they are affected by, and respond to, problems they face as residents of this barrio. Beyond the household sphere, urban communities like Benfield constitute the central realm in which immigrants' daily lives take place as well as being the main locus for their political activities and struggles. They are "contested domains" in which large social and political forces, many of which come from federal, state, and local government policies, crystallize and are accepted, negotiated, confronted, or openly contested by their residents. This chapter describes how Benfield residents organize to address some of their most pressing needs, as well as how they respond to local government policies and programs implemented in the barrio.

Local Government Programs and Community Organizing

Since the mid-1980s the poor and unsafe conditions of Benfield apartment buildings, their inflated rents, deteriorated public areas, and the proliferation of small-scale drug dealing activities led the city government of San Jose to design and implement plans to alleviate these problems. Benfield was not alone; deteriorated housing and infrastructure in several minority, especially Latino neighborhoods in San Jose had been acknowledged by the city government since at least the mid-1970s (City of San Jose 1977) but nothing was done until blight in these communities reached a critical point that demanded immediate government action. In the late 1980s city officials launched several housing and neighborhood rehabilitation, community organizing, and anti-drug programs in these neighborhoods. One such program was Project Crackdown, an ambitious community project launched in 1989 that targeted some of the most deteriorated Latino neighborhoods in East San Jose, including Benfield. The program involved the coordination of several government departments including the police, the Department of Housing, the Recreation Parks and Community Services, and the City Managers Office. It had two principal goals, namely to eradicate drug dealing from these barrios and to bring their housing up to code and safety standards (Anderson 1991). A service team was assigned for every two of the sites in which the project was implemented; each team was composed of a community coordinator, four off-duty police officers, three community activity workers, and one code enforcement inspector. By summer

1993, Project Crackdown had been implemented in 10 San Jose neighborhoods with an estimated combined population of about 25,000 at a cost of about \$6 million.

A fundamental piece of the government program was the formation of a strong neighborhood group that would help police and housing officials implement their plans and involve residents in preserving the neighborhood and promoting its further improvement once the program professionals have left the area. In Benfield, the first stage of Crackdown was a cleanup campaign that consisted in hauling off abandoned cars and other junk from the streets, parking lots, and alleys; cleaning graffiti; repainting the walls of the most damaged buildings; setting traffic signs, and installing street lights. After this, city community workers began vigorously promoting community organizing among its residents. These workers organized monthly community meetings that involved Crackdown officers, Benfield residents, and representatives from the different city departments involved in the barrio. The meetings had several goals, including the presentation of the city plans for Benfield to its residents, promoting rapport between the latter and government community workers, introducing police officers assigned to work in the barrio, identifying community leaders to cooperate with the program, and gathering residents' opinions about their community problems. Crackdown's community workers also created a Benfield's Neighbors Committee composed of Benfield neighbors that they had identified as community leaders. These people were to be a bridge between the city government and the community at large. Finally, city officials set up a Neighborhood Center at the heart of Benfield to house police, code enforcement officials, and other city and community workers with the idea of bringing services to residents in the neighborhood and promoting a sense of "community action and pride."

Residents' Responses to Government Programs

San Jose's city programs in Benfield produced mixed reactions among its residents. Many were happy that the government had finally stepped in to address their most serious community problems. They also felt safer because police patrols in the barrio were having a deterrent effect on drug dealers, a change that people with children especially appreciate. Residents also valued the city government's objective of dealing with the problem of poor housing, high rents, and abusive landlords. The early community meetings organized by city workers were crowded with Benfield residents eager to learn about the government programs for the barrio and to cooperate with them.

After this warm reception, however, some police activities in the neighborhood began to cause increasing discomfort among people in Benfield.²⁴ Many felt that innocent residents, especially young men, were being harassed by the police. Young men usually hang out evenings in the streets, parking lots, and alleys to socialize. Since these are also the favorite places of many drug dealers in Benfield, teenagers who had nothing to do with drugs were often harassed by the police who viewed any teenage group hanging out in the streets with suspicion.

Adults were also victims of police harassment. At one time, for example, two police officers came to the apartment of Marina Gutierrez after midnight in search of drugs, saying they had received confidential information that her family was selling drugs. They interrogated Marina and her son Jose, who had just returned home from his evening shift janitorial job. After waking the entire family, thoroughly searching the apartment and Jose's car, and having found no drugs, the police left. Marina, a single mother well liked in the barrio for her quiet manners and generosity, was deeply shocked and disappointed by this incident since neither she nor her children had ever been involved with drugs. She could not understand how the police could have mistaken her for a drug dealer when she was an early member of the Neighbors Committee that worked closely with police officers in the neighborhood. Frightened by the incident and fearing retaliation by the police, Marina decided not to do anything about it. A few days later, however, encouraged by her friends, she reported the incident to the social worker who had asked her to join Project Crackdown. The social worker was highly surprised and embarrassed by the incident since he had known Marina for several years and considered her one of the more supportive members of the neighborhood group. Yet he asked Marina not to file any charges against the police, and, instead, he and a police officer expressed their apologies in private on behalf of Project Crackdown. Marina accepted their apologies and dropped the case, but she became convinced that the city community workers were more interested in protecting the image of the police than those of the residents whom they claimed to represent. The growing number of incidents of police harassment in Benfield after Project Crackdown began prompted several residents to join a public citizens' group being formed in San Jose to protest against cases of police abuse, especially in Latino neighborhoods, thus diminishing the credibility of Project Crackdown in the eyes of many residents.

City officials' efforts to improve the housing conditions in Benfield also received mixed reactions from Benfield residents. Residents were the strongest supporters of the local government when

²⁴ Since Crackdown was launched, its principal and most durable component was strong law enforcement seeking to eradicate drug dealers from the streets. Accordingly, the program was assigned a special team from the San Jose Police Department that was responsible for identifying, arresting, and prosecuting the main drug dealers. Intense police patrolling, especially in the evenings and nights, became the most visible component of Crackdown for Benfield residents, and led to the detention of numerous individuals accused of drug-related activities in the barrio.

it first announced its housing rehabilitation plans. They thought the plans would alleviate the highly deteriorated conditions of their apartments and defend them from abuses by their landlords. After several years in which city housing workers had been in the Neighborhood Center, however, many people in Benfield started complaining about their inefficiency, arguing that they were of little help in solving their concrete grievances with their landlords. Residents' perceptions of the ineffectiveness of housing officials indeed reflect the stormy history of the city's plans to address the housing problems in Benfield. In 1984, an intensive rehabilitation loan program was first instituted by the city to give local landlords incentive to fix the most deteriorated buildings in the barrio. In 1989, the program not having worked as expected and buildings having rapidly deteriorated further, the San Jose Department of Housing launched yet another, more aggressive rehabilitation loan program. But once more the program did not last long since city officials were divided about whether government money should be used to subsidize unscrupulous private landlords who were abusing their tenants. Moreover, few owners applied for the loan.²⁵ An article in the San Jose Mercury News explained the reasons behind the failure of the program:

The real incentives for a slum landlord work the other way. Apartment improvement loans come with federal and state strings, such as rent limits and basic maintenance requirements. They pale compared with property depreciation tax benefits, higher rents generated by allowing families to double up, and the knowledge that fearful tenants won't complain and that prosecution is a joke. (San Jose Mercury News 1991b).²⁶

In 1991, city policy shifted toward a "tough-on-slumlords" code enforcement approach to prosecute landlords whose properties were in clear violation of housing health and safety regulations. Although more effective, this approach did not produce the rapid results expected either because home repairs took much longer than originally planned, or they were never undertaken because of the lengthy process by which city authorities had to obtain court approval after suing recalcitrant slumlords. In the

²⁵ Of nearly 60 owners who showed initial interest, only seven received partially city-financed loans totaling \$361,062. Under the program, funded with federal and city dollars, landlords could borrow up to \$60,000 interest-free to fix their blighted apartments, which should ensure uncrowded, affordable housing for low-income tenants.

²⁶ Other problems further complicated the city plans. For example, owners who obtained the loans usually raised their rents once repairs in their buildings were made since rent control in San Jose does not apply to fourplex buildings. Similar increases occurred in those buildings that were subject to rent control because, as an attorney working for a non-profit organization in Santa Clara County explained, "although theoretically San Jose's rent-control law is supposed to give tenants protection against unreasonable rent hikes . . . when the code is violated, the burden is on tenants to prosecute landlords and many are too poor or frightened to do that" (San Jose Mercury News 1985). Finally, as part of the program, tenants who live in a unit improved with loan money are eligible to receive a subsidy from the federal government (a Section 8 rental subsidy) to protect them from rent increases; but they are also allowed to take their subsidies and move to other neighborhoods, and many did. Newcomers to the barrio do not receive subsidies, so they double up in order to afford the higher rents — the very situation the federal program was supposed to prevent (San Jose Mercury News 1991a).

meantime, Benfield residents were caught in the middle of the battle between government officials and landlords. Many of them were clearly frustrated when their landlords did not fix their apartments even after housing authorities asked them to do so. Skepticism about the government project spread among Benfield residents, many of whom lost interest in the services provided by the Housing Department at the Neighborhood Center.

City government efforts to form a solid Neighbors Committee that would cooperate with Crackdown also fell short of the expectations of Benfield residents. When Crackdown community workers first started organizing monthly meetings, many Benfield neighbors were strongly supportive as they saw in them an excellent opportunity to publicly discuss some of their most urgent needs that had been neglected for many years. During the first months, Benfield community meetings were packed with residents, especially women who were eager to learn about the city plans for the barrio and discuss their needs with city officials. After such a promising start, attendance at these community meetings began to decline. According to the original design of Project Crackdown, residents themselves were supposed to select the issues to be discussed in the meetings. Yet, from the beginning, government community workers set the meetings' agenda and selected the guest speakers, most of them from the Police Department. To the dismay of Benfield residents, most of the meetings revolved around a few issues, especially drugs, gangs, and crime. Their reduced autonomy and decision-making power led many residents to conclude that city officials were more interested in pursuing their own goals than in listening to residents' concerns. After many community meetings dealing with the same issues over and over again, residents became increasingly tired, bored, and disappointed, gradually withdrawing from them.²⁷

After several years of operating in the barrio, Crackdown had an uneven acceptance among Benfield residents. To be sure, the barrio's appearance improved considerably thanks to regular street cleaning, the installation of street signs and street lights, an aggressive campaign against the worst slumlords, and an intensive effort to reduce drug-related activities in the area. All of these were well received by the people of this barrio. Also, Project Crackdown was one of the first programs to coordinate the work of several city departments in the same neighborhood. Many residents benefited from this approach. Moreover, the Neighborhood Center gave them access to diverse social services, including children's recreation activities, health information courses, free food and clothing delivery, and legal counseling offered by nonprofit groups associated with the program. Despite these

²⁷ The lack of trained bi-cultural community workers to assist residents and conduct these meetings did not help to alleviate their feelings of alienation. It seemed that, from the government's perspective, having bilingual personnel was sufficient to guarantee proper communication between city workers and residents. Having little knowledge of the barrio and its people, some government workers had difficulty identifying community leaders, and consequently often selected candidates with limited credibility among residents and limited capacity to mobilize them.

accomplishments, the government program failed to reach its housing rehabilitation goals and could not withdraw from Benfield as originally planned. The program also failed to organize a stable, solid community group; social workers had a conflict of interests because of their double role: they were government representatives on the one hand and community organizers on the other. Their credibility with Benfield's residents was thus compromised. An excessive focus on a few topics such as drugs and gangs further alienated residents. Indeed, government officials were sending a contradictory message: On the one hand, they wanted residents to be actively involved in restoring their neighborhood and community pride. On the other hand, city workers conveyed a negative, stereotyped portrayal of the barrio as a site of crime, drugs, and gangs where people, especially the young, needed to be closely watched by their parents and neighbors.

Grass-Roots Community Organizing: The Struggle for Educational Equity

Disappointed with the results of city government programs in the barrio and believing that some of their most urgent needs would never be addressed by such programs, many Benfield residents sought their own alternatives. In October 1992, a group of concerned residents organized a series of independent community meetings to identify their needs as they rather than government officials defined them. Led by Elena—one of the central and most visible community leaders in Benfield (she was introduced in Chapter 4)—a group of about 20 people, most of them working women, identified the following concerns: (1) the high rents and deteriorated apartments, including plagues of roaches and mice, and the long time taken by government officials to order landlords to fix them; (2) the need for affordable child-care facilities in the barrio so that mothers could take jobs; (3) the deficient education children were receiving in the local public school; (4) the lack of English as a Second Language classes for adults in the barrio; (5) the absence of recreational centers for youths; (6) the need for legal assistance for adults on issues such as housing, work, and immigration.

This group of neighbors decided to first address the problem of education. The quality of education in the local elementary school had been a major concern for many parents in Benfield for several years, and they were eager to invest their time seeking a solution to this problem. Parents felt their children were not making enough progress, and were especially concerned that many of them did not speak and read English even after several years in school. Test scores from Benfield elementary school and the school district confirmed their concern: In 1993, the barrio's school had one of the lowest scores in reading, written expression, and mathematics within the school district, which in turn had some

of the lowest scores among the school districts in the South Bay (Hebert 1993).²⁸ Latino immigrant parents in Benfield asked "What are our children being taught?" and "How can the school let our children pass without reading and/or writing English?"

Benfield elementary school, like many other schools in California, had great difficulties in responding to the challenges posed by the rapid increase of the Latino student population, especially those with limited English skills.²⁹ For several years since the late 1980s, as young Mexican and Cambodian families settled in the barrio, the district added portable units every school year to accommodate a rapidly growing student population. In the early 1980s, Benfield and other schools in the district had developed bilingual educational programs for Latino children who were not proficient in English. These programs were implemented for several years. However, an important shift in district policy took place in 1987, when California's mandate to provide bilingual education expired, and when a new district Board of Education was elected.³⁰ The new superintendent and most of the board members were openly opposed to bilingual educational programs. The number of bilingual teachers and programs in the district diminished notably just as the number of LEP students was rapidly growing. Between 1984 and 1993, the number of bilingual teachers in the district decreased from 55 to 24 and at Benfield elementary school from 17 to only two (one for Vietnamese students and the other for Spanish-speaking students). The final step of this policy shift occurred in 1992 when the principal of Benfield elementary school, against the stated desires of the majority of Latino parents, terminated the position of Project Specialist—the coordinator of special programs for LEP students—and replaced it with a Physical Education position .

²⁸ The educational deficiencies of the school and the district affected not only children of immigrant families, but also those born in the United States of Latino background. This situation is similar for other Latinos who reside in Santa Clara County. (Latino Issues Forum of Santa Clara County 1989: 6).

²⁹ Built in the early 1960s, Benfield elementary school first had mostly Anglo students. By the late 1970s, after most whites had left and young Latino and Mexican immigrant families had moved in, most students were Latino. In 1984, for example, the 276 Latino children made up 40 percent of the school population; by 1992 the 438 Latino children made up 61 percent of the student population. Moreover, during the 1980s, the ethnic diversity of Benfield's elementary school increased notably with the arrival of hundreds of Asian children from refugee families. As a result of these demographic changes, the growth of Limited English Proficient (LEP) children in Benfield's elementary school was impressive: between 1976 and 1992, they increased from 54 to 559 (about tenfold), (during the same period, they increased from 244 to 4,051 students in the school district (nearly twenty fold)).

³⁰ In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that LEP students are entitled to special assistance to allow them to participate in school programs (*Lau v. Nichols*). In 1980, the California Legislature passed the Bilingual Education Improvement and Reform Act, which mandated specific programs for LEP students. This bilingual program expired in 1986 and the state Legislature was unable to override a gubernatorial veto to re-authorize it. As a result, since 1987, school districts in California are free to interpret the federal mandate for educating LEP students. Today, state funding for LEP students is contained in a broader compensatory education program with only the intent of the former legislation but not its specific requirements in place (McDonnell and Hill 1994).

Fighting for Bilingual Education: The Case of the School Site Council

Many Benfield parents were upset by the shift in the bilingual education policy of the district and the local school. They saw it as a direct cause of their children's serious problems with the most basic language skills in either Spanish or English.³¹ A group of Mexican parents who had met to discuss community problems decided to organize and confront the school principal in order to demand more bilingual teachers for their children. They concluded that their best avenue for channeling their demand was the School Site Council, a legal institution created to serve as a liaison between the school and the community in which they were officially represented.³² At this time Rafael, Elena's husband, was the Council chair. Encouraged by numerous residents, he was determined to use the Council meetings to express Mexican parents' dissatisfaction with school policy. The principal, who until then had managed to control the situation, was not happy with the more demanding and confrontational style of Mexican parents. In a series of monthly Council meetings, Rafael and the principal battled each other to impose the agenda of issues that were to be discussed at each meeting. To Rafael's frustration, the principal, who had a better knowledge of the technicalities of the Council proceedings, always imposed his agenda and blocked discussion of the issue of bilingual teachers.

The turning point in this confrontation took place in 1993, when Council elections were conducted. Mexican residents saw the upcoming elections as an opportunity to strengthen their clout and impose their agenda. For several weeks, Rafael and Elena coordinated the many friends and neighbors who supported their candidacies to ensure that one of them would be elected Council chair. A week after all ballots had been sent to the school, the Council met to present the election results. The session was packed with Mexican parents eager to see the fruits of their organizing efforts. Their hopes were dashed: Although elected to hold two of the five parent-representative seats, neither Rafael nor Elena was elected chair, which was taken by a known loyal supporter of the principal. The explanation for this outcome lay in the manner in which the elections were conducted—which, according to district officers familiar with the Council rules, violated the bylaws.

³¹ Several of the educational specialists interviewed during the fieldwork pointed out that students have suffered with the dismantling of bilingual programs in the district. They indicate that other school districts in the county with an equivalent proportion of Latino students of families of similar socio-economic background but whose boards of education are more supportive of bilingual education rank higher in their CAP scores than the district to which Benfield elementary school belongs.

³² The School Site Council was originally designed to advise the school on such issues as planning, developing, and evaluating educational programs; reviewing the school's improvement plans and budget annually; and proposing changes and additions to the school's education programs. The School Site Council at Benfield elementary school is composed of 10 persons, including the principal, four school personnel—mainly classroom teachers—and five parents representing the community.

In effect, instead of an open ballot with a full slate of nominated candidates from which the five receiving the most vote would win, the principal sent Benfield parents a ballot on which the nominated candidates were arranged in four groups: five Cambodians, six Spanish-speaking, two Vietnamese, and two labeled "Other." The stated rationale was "to represent the various languages spoken" in the school. Parents were instructed to choose three candidates of the Cambodian group, three from the Spanish-speaking group, two from the Vietnamese group, and two from "Other." The five Council members would be those with the most votes within the four groups: two from the Spanish-speaking group and one from each of the others. While three of these groups represented the preponderant ethnic backgrounds among students, the candidates labeled "Other" were strong backers of the school's principal who had openly shown their opposition to Mexican parents in Council meetings. Requiring all parents to vote for the two candidates in this group ensured that both would get as many votes as the those with the most votes in any of the other groups, and that one of them would be on the Council.

When the votes had been counted and the Cambodian, Vietnamese, Spanish, and "Other" parent representatives were announced, the principal asked them and the four new members representing the school staff to nominate their candidates for Council chair from among the newly elected members. Rafael and Elena, the two Latino representatives, nominated themselves, while the school staff representatives, all known to be loyal to the principal, nominated the representative elected from the "Other" group. With the support of the school staff representatives on the Council, this person was elected the new chair and Rafael was relegated to being a Council member.

Mexican parents—the great majority of the people in the community who both participated in the Council election campaign and attended this Council meeting—were visibly disturbed. They could not believe that after all their efforts and the support received by Rafael and Elena—who had received the most votes by far among all the parent candidates regardless of ethnic background—had lost the Council chair. They were especially angered that Rafael had been replaced by a close ally of the principal who was disliked by most Latino parents in the barrio. Disenchanted, they stopped attending meetings and abandoned the Council as a potential institutional avenue for channeling their concerns.³³

³³ For several days after the council meeting, Mexican parents debated what to do; they finally decided that Rafael should consult with two independent persons who worked in the district and who were familiar with council rules. Both officials told Rafael that the election had violated the rules and that he could appeal to the California Department of Education in Sacramento to review the case and invalidate the results. Rafael did not do so. Illiterate in English, he felt overwhelmed by the prospect of presenting a formal bureaucratic claim and following it.

Reaching Out for Support: The Campaign for the Homework Center

Following a short period of inactivity after their disappointment with the School Site Council, the same group of concerned Mexican parents decided to try alternative avenues for addressing the problem of their children's education. In one of their own community meetings, Benfield residents had invited a representative of "People Acting in Community Together" (PACT), a local grass-roots organization that Elena had known for a few months, with the hope that this organization could help them to envision and implement practical solutions to their problems. PACT had been active in community organizing in middle- and working-class Anglo, Latino, and Asian neighborhoods in San Jose for many years, and had achieved significant political clout in the city. The organization was eager to help Benfield residents since it provided an excellent opportunity to expand its own community organizing efforts in Mexican neighborhoods, one of PACT's central goals. An experienced PACT community worker of Latino background was assigned full-time to work with Benfield residents to help them organize. After a discussion of their list of community needs, they decided to deal first with the issue of education.

PACT first made several fruitless attempts to meet with the principal of Benfield elementary school to discuss the concerns of Latino parents. PACT representatives next proposed that barrio residents take a different approach—developing a Homework Center as a first-step, short-term answer to their worries about their children's poor education. The purpose of the proposed Homework Center (modeled after a similar PACT case) was to provide space and assistance for students doing homework; offer them the assistance of qualified bilingual tutors, especially for those with limited English skills; and offer ESL classes for adults in the community. Having lost hope that they could have any influence on the educational policy of the local school, the group of Mexican parents embraced the proposal and decided to support it.

Over a period of several months PACT and Benfield residents held a series of lengthy community meetings in order to carefully design the Center and develop a strategy to find funds for it. Using PACT's political connections and the social networks of some Benfield residents who personally knew a few school district officers sympathetic to their concerns, the working team presented the project to key local Latino politicians and officers who could help to transform it into reality. After several months of lengthy negotiations, the Center working team, with the support of a large number of committed Latino parents who attended every negotiation, managed to obtain an agreement from the city government and the school district to fund the project. The team also negotiated with the sympathetic principal of a nearby public school to house the Center in the school's facilities in the evenings after

regular school hours. Critical to gaining the support of such key players as several school district officials, a San Jose city council member, and other local politicians was a public hearing before city officials organized by PACT and Benfield residents. At this hearing, Latino parents and their children gave personal testimonies that reflected their anxiety about the children's education and their lack of support from Benfield's elementary school; children sadly complained of not being able to read either Spanish or English after several years in school.

In the winter of 1993 the Center was inaugurated. With a budget of \$68,630 for its first year (of which the city of San Jose contributed \$25,000), it was staffed with four part-time specialized personnel and six volunteer tutors.³⁴ The Center's Board was composed by a group of Benfield residents, PACT members, representatives from the City Council district, and one official from the school district. Despite its limited budget, the Center has been one of the most successful community projects ever initiated in Benfield. Its funding has been renewed ever since. Today, the Center has a capacity for about 60 people and serves students and parents not only from Benfield but also from three other schools in the area.

Especially important to the success of the Center project was the fact that PACT was able to identify the more respected community leaders in Benfield and involve them in the project. The democratic election of the residents who were to officially represent the community in the Center was essential for ensuring the support of a large number of people in Benfield. Feeling finally empowered after so many bitter experiences in community organizing campaigns, a group of Benfield residents decided to keep working together with PACT representatives to address some of their other collective needs they had identified in the seminal community meetings that took place in 1992.

Conclusion

Contrary to a common stereotype, Mexican immigrants, including the undocumented, are not apolitical beings. As this study shows, in addition to labor unionization campaigns, they get involved in local grass-roots organizing activities to address their most pressing needs as community residents. It is, then, a mistake, as a few scholars have correctly indicated (Martinez-Saldaña 1993; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Takash 1990), to reduce Mexican immigrants' politics to electoral politics. As Hardy-Fanta argues, a number of activities that are usually called community organizing, 'community politics, and grass-roots politics are as political as traditional electoral politics and are the main channels for Latino immigrants'

³⁴ Indeed, the Center contributed to mobilizing dozens of Latino high-school students who donate their time as tutors for the project.

collective demands (1993). For Mexican immigrants living in Benfield, these activities are embedded in their daily lives; they represent the most common form of political expression, and they are aimed at improving their living conditions in a context often characterized by open and subtle forms of racial and class discrimination.

At the same time, the two cases of community organizing described here—the School Site Council campaign and the Homework Center project—illustrate well the importance that political factors other than immigrants' own organizing efforts have in determining outcomes. In the case of the School Site Council, the parents' desire to get involved in solving the problems that affected their children was aborted when public officials prevented them from exercising their legitimate rights as community residents. When left at the mercy of hostile political forces and powerful community actors, low-income Mexican immigrants, including legal residents, are easy prey for racial and political discrimination, even at the hands of public officials. Such episodes not only fuel their despair, increase their distrust of government initiatives, and intensify a sense of isolation, but they also deepen the problems that affect working-poor communities like Benfield. By contrast, when community organizing efforts, in addition to those of government officials, are supported by grass-roots organizations and community leaders, they contribute to empowering the people who participate in them and enhance the chances of their success. Neighborhood-oriented government programs can learn from this experience: To exclude or to give only a limited voice to the peoples who live in these communities can only contribute to alienating them from the city government and to hinder the success of such programs.

Women are the key players in most of the community organizing campaigns within barrios like Benfield; without their support none of these campaigns would have been begun. Just as Mexican women are the central actors in coordinating their household's survival strategies (see Chapter 4), they are also the foundation on which all community efforts that seek to improve the living conditions of these families rest. Most of the initiatives, proposals, community meetings, support campaigns, and efforts to reach out for help to local political leaders and grass-roots organizations that took place in Benfield were invariably organized by women, usually mothers strongly committed to improve the living conditions and safety of their neighborhoods on behalf of their children. Women with dense social networks and the ability to mobilize a large number of residents are usually the leaders of informal neighborhood community groups. It is within these groups that the residents of low-income barrios—otherwise shy in community meetings organized by government workers—feel comfortable discussing their problems and expressing opinions and committing themselves to work together in search for solutions. Unfortunately, because of their informal nature, the great potential that these groups have for

collective actions that seek to improve the material and living conditions in these barrios goes untapped by government-funded programs that operate under rigid, bureaucratic, top-down designed models for community organizing.

CHAPTER 6.
CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Major Findings

As the supply of unskilled, low-wage jobs in Santa Clara County expanded over the past 30 years, several neighborhoods inhabited mostly by Mexican immigrant workers have developed in San Jose, the county's largest city. These neighborhoods typically have high poverty rates, inadequate sanitation and health services, deteriorated housing and infrastructure, and other slum-like conditions. Immigrant workers, both legal and undocumented, who live in these barrios are the backbone of the labor force in several industries that support the complex of high-tech industries in the region. This segment of the workforce can be defined as the working poor: those workers who, despite having full-time or part-time jobs, chronically live on the edge of poverty because of low wages and the instability of their employment.

The surge and development of immigrant worker communities in California cities like San Jose are directly linked to the transformation of the state's economy. In the Santa Clara Valley, the rapid growth of unskilled low-paid occupations that resulted from its high-tech industrialization increased the demand for cheap immigrant labor and long-term employment, thus stimulating the inflow and settlement of immigrants in the region. In addition, corporate restructuring in the Silicon Valley, which extends to the growing practice of subcontracting unskilled occupations to independent companies, has further contributed to the demand for immigrant workers. Thus, the high-tech, capital intensive industrialization of the region did not preclude but intensified the demand for workers in labor-intensive, low-paid jobs, which helps to explain the apparent paradox of the growth of working-poor communities like Benfield in the midst of an otherwise affluent region.

Low-income immigrant workers who live in barrios like Benfield depend heavily on their own families and the Mexican immigrant community at large for subsistence. Extended households and dense social networks help immigrant workers cope with the unstable and downgraded conditions of their employment. Informal income-generating activities represent an important adaptive strategy by which they supplement their wages from jobs in the formal sector. And material and economic aid from charitable institutions, nonprofit organizations, social service agencies and, when eligible, federal and state agencies often helps immigrant workers and their dependent families deal with the economic stress produced by the flexible employment practices used by their employers. Neither of these subsistence strategies, however, necessarily guarantees these families a safe, long-term way out of poverty. Indeed,

because of the job insecurity of their working members, many Mexican immigrant households have a highly unstable structure, which is but one of the disruptions by which such flexible employment practices are reflected in the lives of immigrant workers.

A central finding of our research is that women play a key role in ensuring the economic viability of Mexican immigrants' households. As women have settled in increasing numbers in immigrant communities in the United States, their earnings from formal and informal jobs, their central role in seeking assistance from public sources and private charities, and their dense community ties have been crucial for the consolidation of such communities and the families that live in them (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). They thus critically contribute to the maintenance of a pool of cheap immigrant labor employed in regions like the Silicon Valley.

We argue that all the subsistence strategies used by immigrant workers' families, including the use of government assistance (e.g., food stamps) are necessitated chiefly by the sub-poverty wages paid by immigrants' employers. In other words, the strategies help to subsidize those employers who do not pay the basic maintenance costs of their workers. When immigrant workers use government assistance because of low wages and lack of employees' benefits (e.g., health care), the economic costs paid by the taxpayer can then be seen as a transfer of basic labor costs from the private to the public sector. Corporate restructuring that replaces union workers in stable jobs with nonunion migrant workers in unstable, low-paying jobs without fringe benefits has precisely the effect of shifting to the public sphere labor costs previously paid by employers.

Low-income immigrant workers also face serious problems in the barrios where they live, especially deficient housing and infrastructure and lack of services. The situation of working-poor barrios like Benfield forces government agencies to intervene. In Benfield, several of these city government actions (e.g., street-cleaning, campaigns against unscrupulous landlords) have notably contributed to improve its material conditions. They have also shown that the services of different city departments and nonprofit agencies can be brought to troubled neighborhoods without big budgets. Yet, the relentless focus of some government programs on issues such as drugs, gangs, and crime—the symptoms rather than the roots of the problems that affect these low-income Latino neighborhoods—as well as their failure to sufficiently empower their residents seriously hinders their success. By contrast, when community organizing efforts in Benfield have truly incorporated the input of its residents, often under the auspices of grass-roots organizations that help neighbors articulate and defend their common interests, they have produced positive and rapid results and contributed to involving the residents in the design and implementation of solutions to their needs as defined by themselves. Again, just as women

are the central actors in coordinating the households' subsistence strategies of immigrant workers, they are also the central agents in grass-roots community organizing activities that seek to improve the material base and living conditions in their neighborhoods to make them stable and safe places in which to raise their families.

Policy Challenges and Recommendations

Unlike previous generations of Mexican immigrant workers, for whom low-skilled production and entry-level service occupations were channels for economic mobility, more recent immigrants face a very different labor market. Many of the former entry-level jobs have been downgraded to low-wage jobs with no prospects for advancement—often because corporate restructuring strategies have fueled a reliance on both documented and undocumented immigrant workers to reduce labor costs. The result has been the consolidation of dead-end labor niches for immigrant workers in many industries, as well as expansion of the Latino-immigrant communities of the working poor. To insist on interpreting the presence of undocumented workers in California as purely an immigration issue that can then be solved by “surgical” federal or state immigration policies is then misleading. The issues of undocumented immigrant workers in California, and the problems that affect the communities where they live are first and foremost the result of labor-market dynamics in a restructured economy that have fueled the use of immigrants by an increasing number of industries as a source of cheap and flexible labor. In the meantime, state policies have not kept pace with such economic and demographic changes, which helps to explain the difficult situation in which these burgeoning Latino working-poor communities find themselves today.

We recommend that policy makers both adopt new initiatives and enforce existing labor laws in order to address the widespread changes in economic status that restructuring has brought for the working poor. Many families are trapped at the low end of a labor market defined by low wages, poor working conditions, and job instability; they are forced to engage in supplemental informal economic activity and occasionally rely on private or public assistance. Although policy makers and the public may be tempted to do so, it would be short-sighted to think of immigrants only in terms of the savings that would result from barring their access to public benefits. Rather, it is in the common interest to adopt policies that will promote their economic and social integration: young Latinos and Latinas, including immigrants, will be an important segment of the workforce in the near future, particularly as the baby-boom generation reaches retirement. Their integration will entail providing increased

opportunity in education and the labor market. Neglect will only consolidate their presence in low-wage jobs and poverty-ridden, permanently blighted communities.

We also urge policy makers to search for ways to induce employers of low-income workers to take more responsibility for the social costs associated with maintaining a large pool of the working poor. Today these costs are subsidized by the immigrants themselves, charities, and the public sector. We believe that state and local governments must make the ultimate beneficiaries of low-cost immigrant labor accountable for the conditions of all their workers, including those hired via subcontracting arrangements, especially in light of the economic success of the industries that employ them (e.g., Silicon Valley's high-tech industry complex).

With this in mind, and in light of the evidence from our study, we offer several specific policy recommendations in the following critical areas:

Employment

1. *Current wage and labor standards should be more effectively enforced in industries and firms that rely on immigrants as a major source of flexible, inexpensive, and easily replaceable labor.*

This should be done in labor-intensive manufacturing and service industries, paying special attention to the growth of subcontracting practices in certain industries (e.g., construction, landscaping, building cleaning, garment work) that seek to employ inexpensive and flexible immigrant labor. Subcontracting is one of the main forces behind the proliferation of firms that circumvent, and in some cases violate, federal and state labor, health, and safety laws. It is also one of the main causes of the growth of the working poor in California. The state through the Office of the Labor Commissioner, Division of Labor-Standards and Enforcement (DLSE), should regulate the conditions under which such subcontracting arrangements take place in order to prevent the deterioration of working conditions in these industries and the further spread of this trend to other industries that can bring down wages and other working conditions. Joint liability laws that hold subcontracted firms and their client companies responsible for labor law violations, like those proposed by attorney Lora Jo Foo in "The Vulnerable and Exploitable Immigrant Workforce and Need for Strengthening Worker Protective Legislation in the 1990's" (Jo Foo 1994), can be a step in the right direction.

2. *Compliance with current health and safety laws should be enforced by the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal-OSHA).*

Firms in labor-intensive industries that rely on immigrant labor have a high rate of work injuries, do not provide the required safety training, and often do not comply with Cal-OSHA regulations. Public money often pays for the consequences of these violations. By enforcing compliance with federal and state regulations, the state would ensure that firms that violate these laws do not gain an advantage when competing with legitimate businesses. In addition, the state legislature should strengthen laws against discriminatory hiring and working conditions and other unfair labor practices, stiffening the penalties for firms that violate them. Doing so will decrease the profitability for companies that rely on "flexible" immigrant workers to violate the labor laws.

3. Expand the Targeted Industries Partnership Program.

The Targeted Industries Partnership Program is a joint federal and California state program that was originally developed for overseeing the compliance of wage, safety, and other labor standards in the garment and agriculture industries. We recommend that it be expanded to the service sector, including the janitorial industry. This expansion would help limit the violations of federal and state labor standards in labor-intensive service industries that until now have been largely ignored by state officials.

4. Raising the minimum wage and strengthening employee benefits.

Raising the minimum wage and the level of benefits provided through the workplace can significantly reduce the social and human costs to the working poor, which fall heavily on workers' families, charities, and the public sector.

5. Assist informal neighborhood businesses rather than prosecuting them.

Small-scale informal businesses are common in low-income neighborhoods and one of the several subsistence strategies used by their residents. They are also a source of affordable goods and services for the working poor. To prosecute them (e.g., street vendors) will only harm those families and contribute to the further impoverishment of their barrios. Providing licenses to street vendors to legitimize their businesses, for example, can be a more useful approach.

Households

1. Social welfare programs for low-income families should be flexible to adapt to their varied structure.

Low-income Latino households, and especially extended households, often have an elastic structure. Therefore family welfare programs that are focused narrowly on nuclear families should adopt

more flexible guidelines and qualifications regarding household organization. Programs based on rigid assumptions about stable household composition, or about shared resources (such as income) among members of the same household, are not warranted.

2. Special programs should be designed for single mothers and their children.

A large number of single mothers and their children live in extended households; hence they remain invisible for government agencies. It is essential to target this segment of the population to prevent a further feminization of poverty in the Latino community as well as the further expansion of poverty among Latino children. These programs should include job training, child care, and business training for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

3. Promote child-care facilities in low-income Latino neighborhoods.

The lack of child care centers in Latino neighborhoods represents one of the main obstacles to the economic improvement of many families, including the families of legal immigrants. The promotion of public and private low-cost child-care facilities should be a priority for government programs in low-income barrios. These centers could be housed in nontraditional settings such as schools and subsidized housing units at low cost, and run by nonprofit organizations in coordination with different city government departments.

Housing and Communities

1. State and local government officials should identify neighborhoods in decay, assess public community services and facilities, and determine the most pressing needs of their population.

Impoverished minority barrios in large cities like San Jose have grown markedly in number and size during the 1980s, and many of them lack basic public services. This lack contributes to the steady decay of these barrios and their infrastructures, a deterioration in their quality of life, and a surge in social problems. City housing authorities should develop a plan for identifying and categorizing the basic problems affecting low-income neighborhoods, and address these problems before the neighborhoods become permanently dilapidated. Special attention should be given to apartment-building barrios, which usually have the highest degree of blight, overcrowding, and poverty as well as deteriorated or incomplete infrastructure. The State Department of Housing and Community Development should enforce the law that holds homeowners associations legally responsible for the maintenance of minimal infrastructure and housing standards in a given community. This enforcement

can help prevent the rapid decay of the housing stock and physical infrastructure, especially in neighborhoods that were built to substandard specifications.

2. *Low-income housing and home improvement programs as well as subsidized low-interest loans should be expanded to address the severe housing problem that affects low-income Latino families.*

Overcrowding and homelessness are endemic to Latinos living in large California cities like San Jose. The rapid growth in the number of working poor Latinos in the 1980s, the settlement of new immigrants during that decade, and the radical cuts of federal subsidized low-income housing programs in the past 15 years have led to a severe shortage of housing and to overcrowded living conditions among Latino workers.³⁵ Multiple-family occupation of single-family dwellings, families crowded into small apartments, and individuals without access to adequate shelter are a common reality among Latino workers. Low-income housing and home improvement programs should be expanded to address the severe housing problem that afflicts working-poor Latino families. Also, HUD should increase the number of Section 8 vouchers for individuals and families who qualify for this type of housing assistance. Strict rent- and quality-control mechanisms should be implemented in government-subsidized housing improvement programs. In light of inadequate federal support for low-income housing, the Department of Housing and Community Development might consider requiring that a larger share of state redevelopment agencies' funds be employed to increase the supply of affordable housing for low-income families.³⁶

3. *Code enforcement should be strongly applied to fight unscrupulous landlords in order to maintain minimal housing standards.*

Code enforcement can be used as a short-term solution to avoid further deterioration of the housing stock in impoverished neighborhoods. In particular, building and safety codes should be strongly enforced in order to maintain housing standards and avoid further expansion and consolidation

³⁵ San Jose has a severe shortage of housing for low- and moderate-income households, so it takes several years for first-time applicants to get a house. The severity of the problem has prompted the San Jose City Housing Department to develop a plan to address the urgent need for affordable housing (San Jose 1993).

³⁶ Since 1977, a state law requires redevelopment agencies to set aside a special low and moderate income housing fund. This fund must be used to increase, improve, or preserve the community's supply of affordable housing and make it available to low- and moderate-income households. Yet, the Department of Housing and Community Development found that "the trend of redevelopment agencies accumulating more housing funds annually than are expended was continued in Fiscal Year 1990-91" (Redevelopment Agencies in California 1993). The state should demand that redevelopment agencies effectively spend their low and moderate income housing funds. A share of redevelopment funds could be specifically used to combat blight and substandard housing conditions in deteriorated low-income urban neighborhoods and to improve their infrastructure (e.g., water and sewer lines, streets, street lights, curbs, gutters, parks, recreation areas and playgrounds).

of neighborhoods composed exclusively of crumbling apartment complexes. Yet, in order to be effective, enforcement should speed up the traditionally prolonged bureaucratic processes that delay its full execution. Creative solutions could include San Jose's plan to create a citizens' board to decide penalties against uncooperative landlords whose properties violate standard safety regulations.

4. *Empower residents of minority neighborhoods through community organizing.*

Government agencies that fund redevelopment or community organizing plans in barrios like Benfield must seek and incorporate participation from local grassroots community groups in all phases of the process—design, implementation, and evaluation. There are three aspects that any government-funded community organizing project must have. First, community workers must have a good knowledge of the culture of the people they want to organize. The ability to speak their language is not enough. It is essential, then, that government social workers in these programs have a solid bi-cultural training that enables them to understand the cultures of minority residents, as well as a good knowledge of the local government system. Second, informal groups and networks in the community and their natural leaders should be the locus for the discussion, modification, and implementation of government projects in these neighborhoods. Third, community empowerment should be a central goal of these organizing projects.

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APPENDIX I
TABLES 1-6

Table 1. Population in Santa Clara County and City of San Jose, 1900-1990.

Year	Santa Clara County	San Jose
1900	50,216	21,500
1910	83,539	28,946
1920	100,676	39,642
1930	145,118	57,651
1940	174,949	68,457
1950	290,547	95,280
1960	658,700	204,196
1970	1,064,714	445,779
1980	1,265,200	625,763
1990	1,497,577	782,205

Sources: Martinez Saldana 1993; Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics, California, Table 3.

Table 2. Santa Clara County Population, Hispanic Population, and Per Capita Income by Place, 1990.

Place	Total Population	Hispanic	Percent Hispanic	Per Capita Income
Santa Clara	1,497,577	314,564	21	\$20,423
Campbell	36,048	3,839	10.6	\$20,759
Cupertino	40,263	1,986	4.9	\$29,118
East Foothill	14,898	6,224	41.8	\$17,800
Gilroy	31,487	14,885	47.3	\$14,241
Los Altos	26,303	795	3	\$37,776
Los Gatos	27,357	1,367	5	\$33,714
Milpitas	50,686	9,434	18.6	\$17,520
Morgan Hill	23,928	5,594	23.4	\$19,560
Mountain Vi	67,460	10,821	16	\$22,436
Palo Alto	55,900	2,792	5	\$32,488
San Jose	782,248	208,388	26.6	\$16,905
Santa Clara	93,613	14,260	15.2	\$19,676
Saratoga	28,061	940	3.3	\$40,660
Stanford	18,097	1,436	7.9	\$14,177
Sunnyvale	117,229	15,444	13.2	\$22,309

Source: 1990 Census of Population & Housing, Population and Housing, Characteristics for Census Tracts, San Jose, CA, Section 1, Tables 1, 6, & 19.

Table 3. Hispanic Population in Santa Clara County and City of San Jose, 1960-1990.

Santa Clara County	Year	Total	Hispanic	%
	1960	642,315	77,755	12.1
	1970	1,064,714	186,525	17.5
	1980	1,295,071	226,611	17.5
	1990	1,497,577	314,564	21.0
San Jose	Year	Total	Hispanic	%
	1960	204,196	28,596	14.0
	1970	445,779	97,367	21.8
	1980	629,442	140,529	22.3
	1990	782,205	208,381	26.6

Source: Bureau of the Census, 1960-1990 Census of Population. General Population Characteristics, California

Table 4. Comparative Socio-Economic Profile: Santa Clara County, City of San Jose, and Tract X, 1990.

	Santa Clara C.	San Jose	Tract X
Demography			
Percent Hispanic	21	26.6	55.3
Median Age	31.9	30.4	21.6
Percent of population under 18 years	24	26.7	42.6
Household			
Persons per household	2.8	3.1	5
Family households with 7 or more persons	4.7	6.6	33.1
Percent of female headed households	14.9	16.2	29.2
Income			
Median family income	\$53,670	\$50,279	\$24,932
Per capita income	\$20,423	\$16,904	\$6,474
Poverty			
Percent families below poverty	5	6.5	33.3
Percent persons below poverty	7.5	9.3	27.5
Percent female householder families below poverty	16	19.5	36.8
Percent children under 5 years below poverty	10.3	12.7	43
Education			
Percent persons with high school	82	77.2	38.7
Percent persons with less than 9th grade	8	10.8	43
Employment			
Percent in labor force	72.5	72.8	56.4
Percent unemployed	4.7	5.5	9.5

Source: Compiled from 1990 Census of Population 1990. Social and Economic Characteristics, California, Section 1.

Table 5. Families Data Base

Case No	Age	Sex	Occupation (1)	Birth Place	Legal Status (2)	Months Worked (3)	Household Type	Household Members	Household Workers	Children under 16
1	40	M	Gardener	Jalisco	GA	4	Nuclear	9	4	6
2	52	F	Janitor (I)/ Home health care	Jalisco	Und	12	Extended	18	6	6
3	48	F	Janitor (I)/ Baby-sitter (I)	Guanajuato	Und	9	Extended	10	4	4
4	27	F	Assembler	Michoacan	GA	9	Extended	13	4	7
5	42	F	Teacher aid	Michoacan	C	10	Single	5	2	3
6	40	M	Janitor	Sinaloa	Und	12	Nuclear	6	2	4
7	37	M	Sheet metal worker	Michoacan	PR	9	Single	2	1	1
8	30	F	Home vending (I)/ Child care (I)/House Cleaner (I)	Michoacan	Und	10	Extended	7	3	4
9	35	M	Gardener	Guanajuato	GA	12	Extended	9	2	5
10	25	M	Janitor	Michoacan	Und	12	Compound	6	6	0
11	26	F	Food packing	Sinaloa	Und	6	Extended	8	6	2
12	59	M	Recycling (I)	Michoacan	Und	12	Extended	7	3	3
13	59	F	Street vending (I)	Michoacan	PR	10	Single	4	2	1
14	35	M	Construction	Michoacan	GA	11	Nuclear	5	2	3
15	83	M	Retired	Michoacan	Und		Extended	9	4	3
16	26	F	Street vending (I)	Guerrero	Und	12	Extended	10	5	4
17	45	F	Teacher aid	Nuevo Leon	PR	10	Nuclear	2	2	0
18	25	F	Home vending (I)	Jalisco	Und	12	Extended	5	2	2
19	33	F	Home vending (I)/ Baby-sitter (I)/ Home cook (I)	Michoacan	Und	12	Extended	7	2	4
20	30	F	Janitor	Baja California	Und	3	Extended	9	3	5
21	27	F	Restaurant worker	Zacatecas	GA	12	Nuclear	5	2	3
22	35	M	Furniture worker	El Salvador	PR	12	Extended	8	4	4
23	40	F	Home vending (I), Street vending (I)	Jalisco	Und	10	Extended	9	4	5
24	27	M	Ice cream vendor (I), Street vending (I)	Puebla	Und	12	Extended	12	4	5
25	25	M	Gardener	Michoacan	Und	12	Extended	9	2	4
Averag	38.04					10		7.76	3.24	3.52

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(1) The symbol "(I)" means it is an informal occupation.

(2) Legal Status: PR= Permanent resident, Und= Undocumented, GA= General Amnesty, C= Citizen

(3) In 1992

Table 6. Families Data Base

Case No.	Household Other Member's Occupation	Household Income	Per Capita Income	Individual Income	Recipient Welfare	Recipient Private Charit
1	P/T store helper, P/T School Aid, Street vending (1)	\$14,576	\$1,620	\$7,776	No	Yes
2	4 Janitors, Painter (1)	\$47,940	\$2,663	\$7,320	No	Yes
3	3 Janitors, Recycling (1)	\$23,500	\$2,350	\$2,700	No	Yes
4	Janitor, Gardener, Gardener helper (1)	\$23,886	\$1,837	\$9,186	Yes	Yes
5	P/T restaurant helper	\$11,300	\$2,260	\$9,500	No	No
6	Janitor	\$26,468	\$4,411	\$14,276	No	Yes
7	None	\$17,112	\$8,556	\$17,112	No	No
8	Janitor, Carpentry helper	\$35,530	\$5,076	\$17,770	No	Yes
9	Electronic assembler	\$30,720	\$3,413	\$16,320	No	Yes
10	4 Janitors, Furniture store helper, Day laborer (1)	\$60,896	\$10,149	\$13,116	No	No
11	2 Butchers, Cannery worker, 2 House cleaners (1)	\$46,176	\$5,772	\$5,760	No	Yes
12	2 Electronic assemblers	\$29,760	\$4,251	\$2,880	No	Yes
13	Bank teller	\$23,359	\$5,840	\$7,999	Yes	Yes
14	P/T Cannery worker	\$27,000	\$5,400	\$26,160	No	Yes
15	4 Electronic workers	\$59,520	\$6,613	-	No	Yes
16	2 Electronic assemblers, Restaurant worker, P/T carpenter	\$44,280	\$4,428	\$7,920	No	Yes
17	Cannery worker	\$19,100	\$9,550	\$9,500	No	No
18	Gardener	\$17,200	\$3,440	\$8,400	Yes	Yes
19	Gardener	\$22,780	\$3,254	\$10,300	Yes	Yes
20	Janitor, P/T Mechanic (1)	\$31,440	\$3,493	\$10,080	Yes	Yes
21	Janitor	\$35,520	\$7,104	\$10,560	No	No
22	Restaurant worker, Home health care, Furniture helper	\$44,568	\$5,571	\$18,360	No	No
23	2 Janitors, Construction worker	\$43,012	\$4,779	\$7,500	No	Yes
24	2 Car washers (1), Baby-sitter (1)	\$36,000	\$3,000	\$9,600	No	Yes
25	Gardener, Recycling (1)	\$23,136	\$2,571	\$10,656	No	Yes
Average		\$31,791	\$4,696	\$10,865		

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(1) The symbol "(1)" means it is an informal occupation
 (2) Legal Status: PR - Permanent resident, Unk - Undocumented, CA - General Amnesty, C - Citizen
 (3) In 1992

APPENDIX II
FIGURES

Figures

Figure # 1 Luis



Figure # 2 Carmen

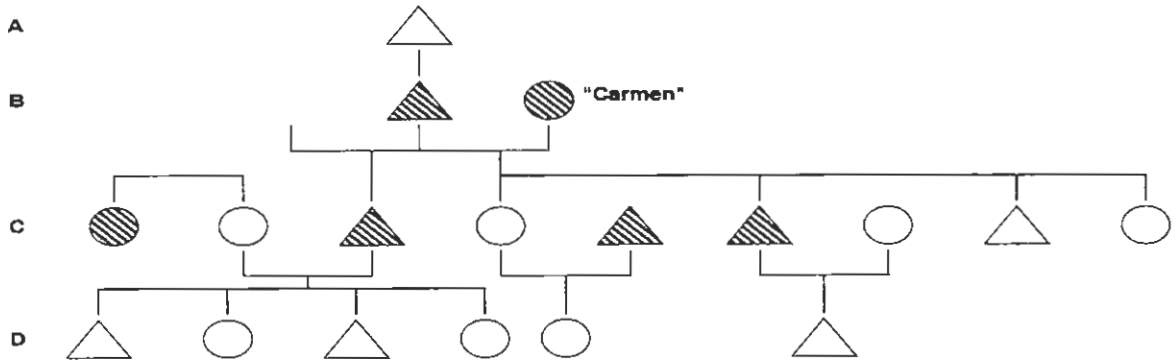


Figure # 3 Aurora

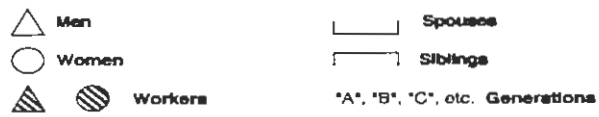
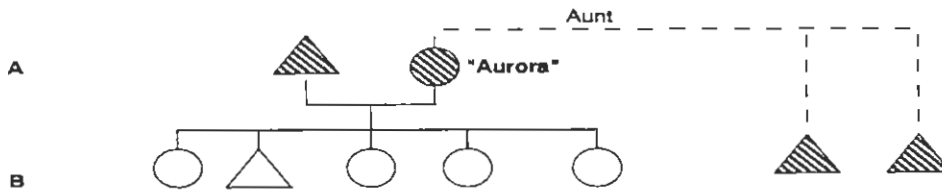


Figure # 4 Josefina

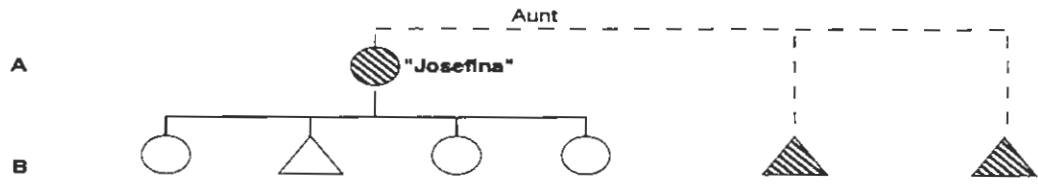


Figure # 5 Arturo

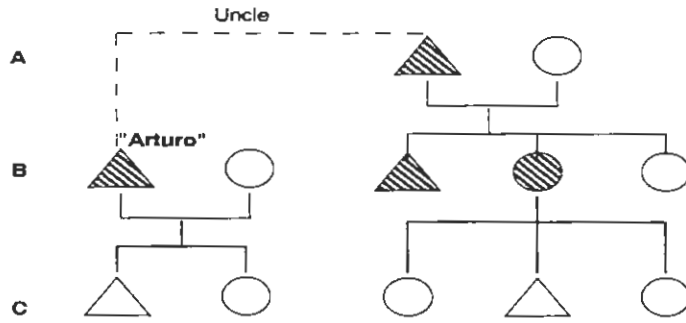


Figure # 6 Juan

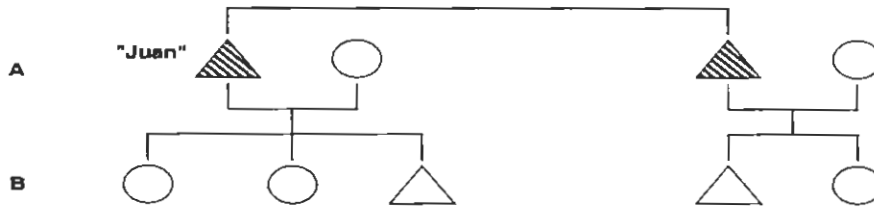


Figure # 7 Margarita

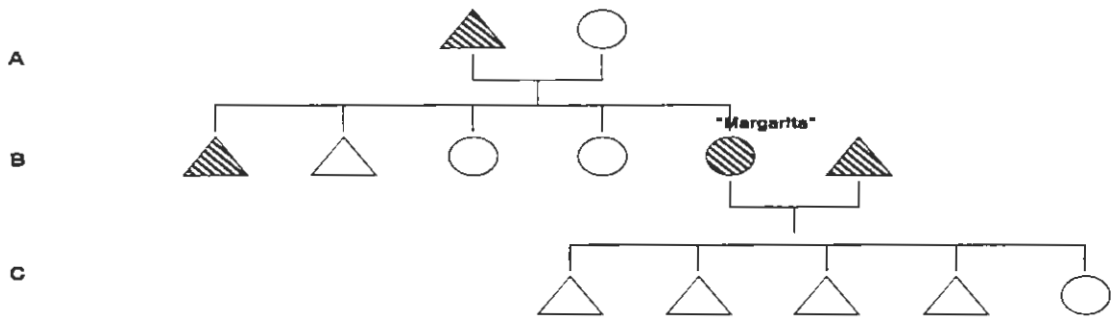


Figure # 8 Maria

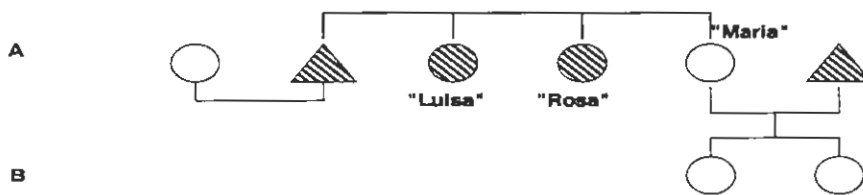


Figure # 9 Laura

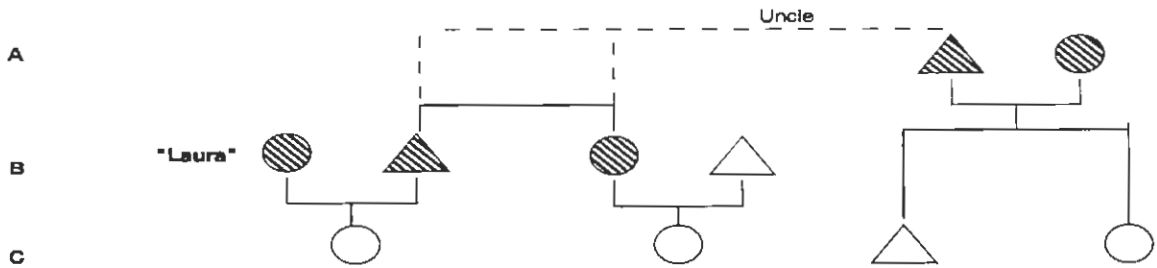


Figure # 10 Elena

