

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Desde la Raya: Fast Food and Immigration in Orange County, California

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9b8421gz>

Author

Martinez, Eudelio Peralez

Publication Date

2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Desde la Raya: Fast Food and Immigration in Orange County, California

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Anthropology

by

Eudelio P. Martinez

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor Leo R. Chavez, Chair
Assistant Professor Michael Montoya
Professor Emeritus Michael Burton

2015

DEDICATION

To

my parents and family

without whom nothing would have been possible

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| LIST OF FIGURES | iv |
| CURRICULUM VITAE | v |
| ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION | vi |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: The Setting | 46 |
| CHAPTER 2: Ni Moscas: Learning to Labor in Fast Food's Racialized Work Environment | 63 |
| CHAPTER 3: Jale de los Pobres: Pressure, Fatigue, and Fallout in the Fast Food Industry | 89 |
| CHAPTER 4: Asi Es, Eudelio: Immigrant Life and Migrant Fatalism | 114 |
| CHAPTER 5: Life According to Don Cheto: Pleasure and Defiance in the Fast Food Industry | 144 |
| REFERENCES (OR BIBLIOGRAPHY) | 162 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | | Page |
|------------|-------------------|------|
| Figure 1.1 | Restaurant Layout | 61 |
| Figure 1.2 | Grill Layout | 64 |
| Figure 1.3 | Taco Bar Layout | 65 |

CURRICULUM VITAE

EUDELIO P. MARTINEZ JR.

- 2005 B.A. in Anthropology
 Eastern Washington University
- 2006 M.A. in Anthropology
 University of California, Riverside
- 2008-
2014 Teaching Assistant, College of Social Sciences
 University of California, Irvine
- 2015 PhD in Anthropology
 University of California, Irvine

FIELD OF STUDY

Cultural Anthropology

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2008-
2009 UC Irvine Faculty Mentor Fellowship
- 2006-
2007 UC Irvine Diversity Recruitment Fellowship
- 2005-
2006 UC Riverside Eugene Cota-Robles Graduate Fellowship

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Desde la Raya: Fast Food and Immigration in Orange County, California

By

Eudelio P. Martinez

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Irvine, 2015

Associate Professor Leo R. Chavez, Chair

As most already know, the U.S. fast food industry is a multi-billion dollar affair, posting sales of over 195 billion in 2014 and employing nearly 4 million people nationwide. What some may not know, however, is that fast food enterprises subsist largely upon the labor of a small group of 10-15 core staff members. These individuals perform the majority of the most difficult and labor-intensive restaurant tasks, and in turn receive the bulk of restaurant labor hours. Many have children, some are married, a few are living and working in the U.S. without authorization, and literally all depend fundamentally on wages garnered through fast food to finance their lives.

Based on over 38 months of participant observation research in an Orange County fast food restaurant, my research attempts to explicate what it is like to work fast food, why it is that it is predominately Mexican immigrants and the children thereof that are found behind the counter of these restaurants in Orange County, and how it is that fast food workers may in fact deserve a raise to 15 dollars an hour. It does so principally through the voices, opinions, and lives of people I met while working fast food, but also with respect to the structural terms of the industry and the modern conception of work.

INTRODUCTION

Its lunchtime on a Friday afternoon in Orange County, the drive thru is nine cars deep and the dining room is virtually full. I wait in line patiently to place my order. When it is at last my turn, a mid-20s Latino named Sergio greets me with a “Hi, how are you?” I respond “Fine thanks,” and he then asks how he can help me. I ask for a number ten and he replies, “Would you like that medium or large-sized?” I respond, “Small please,” and he smiles just before lowering his head to punch in my order. Sergio ends his promo by asking if I would like any cookies or cake with my food. I respond, “No thank you,” but ask him to hold the tomatoes on my sandwich. He says sure and turns around and tells the mid-30s Latina who will be preparing my meal, “*sin jitomate, Doña*” (without tomato, madam). I receive my food four and a half minutes later, and sit at a booth near the counter to eat. Sarah McLachlan’s *In the Arms of the Angel* is streaming across the restaurant’s sound system, yet I can still hear the Spanish chatter emanating from behind the counter of the restaurant. I count nine employees in total, all of whom are distinguishably Latina/o, and given the demographics of Orange County, most likely Mexican.

This scenario is repeated over and over again across the overwhelming majority of the 2522 fast food restaurants in Orange County, and in many of those throughout Southern California and across the nation. In some instances Sergio is replaced by a White or Asian high school or college student, but the food preparation worker is almost always Latina/o. This occupational structure, and the seeming dependence of Orange County fast food restaurants on Latina/o labor, is what first attracted me to the industry more than six years ago. At the time, I had never worked fast food, and being relatively new to Southern California I was unaware of the dominance that Latina/os held over food preparation and service employment in this region. I

wondered about the circumstances responsible for this scenario. What was it about this industry that made it so attractive to Latina/os? At the same time, what about Latina/os made them so attractive to this industry?

As simple as these questions may seem, their answers touch on issues of economic development and globalization, capitalism and labor market segmentation, and the patterned forms of structural and symbolic violence sometimes credited for imposing inequality on society (Bourdieu 1998; Torres-Rivas 1998). To explore these questions and examine these issues, I worked in a corporate fast food restaurant serving Mexican and American-style food for over 38 months. Over the course of this time, I learned much about what it is like to work fast food, some about the people who do it, and most about the labor arrangements that make 49-cent tacos and 99-cent cheeseburgers economically profitable. I also learned a lot about myself, about the privileges I've enjoyed and taken for granted in my life, and about what some people in our society must do *por la necesidad* [out of necessity].

METHODS: GROWING UP, GAINING CONFIDENCE, AND LEARNING TO SPEAK (AND WORK) WITH PEOPLE

I was born and raised in a small town in Central Washington State. Like many Chicano youth of my day, however, my childhood winters were often spent in my father's native Mexican *rancho* (village). Twenty-two hundred miles in the dead of winter has left me undaunted to this day by most road trips, and yet what I remember most about these trans-country treks is not the scene of some snow-capped mountain pass nor the smell that accumulates in a car after 36 hours of travel, but the tears my grandfather would inevitably shed each year upon our departure.

From these tears, and from the silence that would pervade our vehicle as we made our way north to the border, I became cognizant of the personal costs involved in human migration.

When I entered graduate school in the spring of 2006, I arrived with my family's migration experience in mind. I was aware of the sense of loss that migration entailed and the longing that it sometimes produced, and I was interested in learning more about why people continued the process nonetheless. For this reason, I spent my first summer of graduate school traversing poultry farms in the central Mexican state of Jalisco, searching for the roots of Mexican migration in the voices and opinions of Mexican poultry farmers preparing for the liberalization of the Mexican agriculture sector. What I learned most from this experience—aside from the inordinate details and conspicuous smell of poultry production—was how difficult it was to establish rapport and make conversation with people I did not know and in a community I was not raised in.

You see, unlike other epistemological approaches ethnographers produce meaning and insight into the nature of human experience through human interaction, or what we call participant-observation, recording what we see, feel, hear, and experience, for the purpose of generating cultural interpretations. Good ethnography—in-depth and richly described narratives about a culture or part of a culture—is thus principally contingent upon what one's informants feel comfortable sharing as well as the abilities of the ethnographer to observe closely and describe richly the daily activities s/he participates in. As anyone of us can certainly attest, humans are not always candid with regards to their feelings, especially when it comes to sharing them with strangers. The establishment of rapport is thus a fundamental aspect of the ethnographic process, one that takes months and sometimes years to secure.

ARCTIC TACO¹

All in all, it was the shrimp tacos and not my thirst for knowledge about immigrant fast food workers that initially brought me back to Arctic Taco. They were fried—the shrimp that is—served with cabbage and lime on a flour tortilla with “secret sauce,” and I was hooked. Besides, the restaurant was close, quick, and relatively cheap, all of which made for convenient fare for a first-time dad with negligible cooking skills like me. I won’t, or would rather not say how many French fries my daughter ate in her first two years, but we spent enough time at Arctic Taco for me to soon discover that my favorite food item was seasonal, offered only from the months of January to April, which happened to coincide with the lent season. In spite of this revelation, my enthusiasm for Arctic Taco did not diminish. Instead, I began working my way through the rest of their menu, sampling burgers, burritos, tacos, and quesadillas, and often waiting for my food near the service counter, gazing with a mixture of fascination and shock at the maelstrom of equipment, beeps, flesh, and banter that is a fast food restaurant at rush hour. I could not make sense of all the movement, and I felt intrusive staring at the employees as they worked, but like a deer in headlights I was mesmerized, captivated by the pace and motion of the job and the Spanish dialogue emanating from the scene.

I can’t tell you what caused me to ask for a job application on that fateful day in early June, only that it all went very fast from there. I asked for and filled out an application over lunch on a Friday, and by 3 p.m. that same day Rene² had called me back and scheduled an interview for the following Monday. Four days later I was being trained by Don Cheto, a process that consisted of following him around for four hours whilst endeavoring unrealistically to see what he was doing while not to getting in his way in a space the size of your average

¹ Arctic Taco is a pseudonym for the restaurant I worked in.

² Rene is a pseudonym, as are all names found here, for the restaurant’s general manager.

bathroom. A week later I was working my own shift, crisply clothed, freshly shaven, donning new 35 dollar black non-slip soled shoes from *Payless*, and awkward as all get out.

Altogether, it took all of about twenty minutes of working fast food for me to realize why my coworkers were overwhelmingly Mexican immigrants, and not U.S. citizens like me. The work was hard, hectic, and hazardous, and in the beginning I struggled to imagine how I would ever keep up with the orders, not to mention the other tasks assigned to my position. When I shared these concerns with Don Cheto, however, he assured me I would be fine. I spoke English and was thus advantaged by my ability to read the teleprompter, and the secret was merely to erase the orders as I completed them, “*borrar, borrar, borrar,*” [erase, erase, erase] were his imparting words.

Despite Don Cheto’s well-founded suggestions, I soon found out that it takes a whole lot more than erasing items correctly to effectively work fast food. For you also have to make the food that the restaurant serves, and not just at any pace. In-house orders, those taken by customers inside the restaurant, were not timed. They were expected to be prepared with haste, but at least there was no clock staring at you in the face, an illuminated cue in red and blue of where you stood in the daily battle against “*el tiempo*” (the time). Such was not the case for drive-thru orders. They were invariably timed, with a clock displaying that day’s average drive-thru order time, as well as that of the most recent order, mounted just above the drive-thru window for all to see. Anything at or below four minutes—the company’s designated maximum time for drive through orders—appeared in blue, while times above four minutes appeared in red and began to flash for individual orders after crossing the four-minute threshold. *El tiempo* (the time) was consequently a perpetual concern, one mentioned repeatedly in managerial meetings as well as inter-employee conversations. Shift managers could thus often be heard yelling “*mi*

tiempo, mi tiempo” (my time, my time) in an effort to speed up production and reduce order times. Some were nicer than others, but when I began working fast food I found it to be a hectic, caustic, unforgiving, and lonely workplace, especially in the beginning.

All told, I worked fast food for about a year before I finally realized that I had found the site to conduct my dissertation research. Making this decision, alas, was by far the easiest part. Once I began fieldwork in earnest, I continually questioned what I was doing and whether my research was really going anywhere. My workdays were replete with awkward moments, as I fumbled over words, and found myself lost in translation. Unable to understand or perceive what was really being said as others engaged in slang-laden rapid-fire conversations in Spanish that I could barely comprehend, nonetheless participate in. Moreover, the working conditions were such that simply performing the tasks that would allow me to go home at a reasonable hour—I often worked the night shift—often dominated my mind. At any rate, little by little I began to make friends. I worked harder, complained less, and slowly learned to *hacer platica* (converse), sharing my own experiences and the things that I was personally struggling through, in the hope that others would share their stories and struggles with me, and eventually many did.

Although I had grown up in and around Mexican immigrant families, my friends had always been Anglos and U.S.-born Chicanos like me. Never had I spent so many hours amid Mexican immigrants who were not family. Yet as my hours increased and my work schedule stabilized, I gradually began to establish a genuine camaraderie with the crew I worked with. For a person as socially inept as myself and in a culture as sensitive to information-sharing as that of the Mexican immigrant community, where the fear of being “outed” as undocumented can regulate everyday life (Willen 2011), this admission to their local circle of trust was a

godsend; an act that I will carry with me for the rest of my days, and one without which this dissertation would not have been possible.

Still, it would be inaccurate for me to imply that I was immediately embraced by my immigrant and non-immigrant coworkers alike, for the fact of the matter is that this was nowhere near the case. In the beginning, I knew nothing of what it took to work fast food. I lacked the experience, I lacked the skill, and most importantly I lacked the *necesidad* (necessity). I became sullen during incessant rushes and indignant when I was not given proper breaks or allowed to leave at my designated time. For these reasons, among others, I quarreled with several of my coworkers in the first few months of my employment. They complained about my work ethic and the tasks I failed to accomplish—and that they in turn were left to complete—because my shift was over and I wanted to go home. I, in turn, objected to their speaking about me behind my back. As shameful as these experiences are in retrospect, I nevertheless know that their occurrence was essential to my understanding of the nature and conditions of fast food employment, the negotiation of norms of hard work in the fast food industry, and the presence and prominence of Mexican immigrants and their children within this burgeoning economic sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WORK, FOOD, IMMIGRANTS, AND THE U.S. SERVICE-BASED ECONOMY

At its basis, my research attempts to reveal what it is like to work fast food, why it is that Mexican immigrants are so often found behind the counter of these establishments in Orange County, and how it is that they manage the part-time, temporary, and flexible nature of their

employment. In so doing, however, it links pressing questions in the anthropology of work, with those in the study of immigrant labor and post-industrialization.

Work is a basic human activity—one that is essential to our survival as a species, and emblematic of what we esteem, disdain, commend, and disregard. Like the spine, work structures the way we live, how we make contact with material and social reality, and how we achieve status and self-esteem (Applebaum 1992). As such, it is by no means surprising that the subject has long been included within the scope of anthropological analyses. In fact, work was a primary focus in the research of Bronislaw Malinowski, Audrey Richards, and Raymond Firth, among others. The image of humans on which these investigations were largely based, however, is one in which the aversion to work, the *horror laboris*, was natural (Spittler 2001). Humans were perceived as inherently inclined toward art, sports, games, and leisure, and the question at the heart of these investigations was therefore what compels people to work in the first place? Malinowski (1922) concluded that the Trobriand islanders were ultimately motivated by an interest in food and shelter, but that the economic aspects of Trobriander life could not be understood in isolation of the disciplining function of magic, the role played by institutional structures such as family and village hierarchies, and the prestige created by the public display of the results of work. Audrey Richards and Raymond Firth, both students of Malinowski, stressed even more than their mentor the separation of work from biological needs. In her work on the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia,³ Richards (1939) argued that work was not related merely to food requirements, but was embedded in cultural traditions. In his work on social relations and cooperative labor in Polynesia, Firth substantiated many of his colleague's findings. Contending that it was misleading and inaccurate to separate the analysis of work from that of other human

³ Rhodesia was an unrecognized state located in southern Africa during the Cold War. From 1965 to 1979, it comprised the region now known as Zimbabwe.

activities, and arguing that work in Polynesia was combined and performed in commune with other social ventures (Firth 1972).

From a theoretical perspective, these scholars were staunch functionalists or structural-functionalists. Like the physical world, they believed the social world operated according to general laws. That these laws manifested in the form of social institutions, understood broadly as collective beliefs and modes of behavior, and that through the analysis of basic human institutions like work one could ascertain the relationship between “primitive economics” and other aspects of native life. Together they eschewed the prevailing doctrine of unilinear evolution, examining social facts for the role they played in the existing economic system of production and exchange, rather than for what they revealed about the nature of the development of human civilization. Methodologically, their work was based on years of intensive fieldwork, helping to set a precedent for the still nascent field at that time, and implying together that precise observation and participation were necessary for the analysis of work.

WORK AS A CURSE OR PUNISHMENT

Viewing work as a curse has deep roots in Western thought. God’s reprimand to Adam, that “cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life,” is seen in Judeo-Christian theology as making hard work humankind’s punishment for human imperfection and weakness (Genesis 3:17; Geoghegan 1945). This biblical story, moreover, parallels numerous tales in Greco-Roman mythology. In *Works and Days*, for instance, Hesiod tells of a story in which humans originally did not have to work, but displeased by human greed a god punishes them with toil. The burdensome nature of work is reinforced by the frequency with which it is used as punishment. From Zeus sentencing

Sisyphus to an eternity of pushing a large boulder up a steep hill, to the 19th century British penal colonies in Australia, the 20th century Nazi system of forced labor, and the chain gangs of the mid 20th century United States, the conceptualization of work as a curse and punishment is ubiquitous (Budd 2011).

Be that as it may, particular forms of arduous work are sometimes conceptualized as a curse imposed upon specific groups of people. In classical Greek thought, for example, a sharp division was drawn between proper and improper work (Austin and Vidal-Naquet, 1977). Individuals who worked for others—the precursors to today’s wageworkers—were seen essentially as slaves. “The artisan who sells his own products and the workman who hires out his services. Both work to satisfy the needs of others, not their own. They depend upon others for their livelihood. For that reason they are no longer free” (Mosse 1969, p. 27-28). Free men, according to men like Plato and Aristotle, sought virtue through contemplation and participation in government. Manual labor got in the way of these pursuits, making the pursuit of knowledge and virtue more difficult (Dover 1974; Budd 2011).

This division between proper and improper—or honorable and dishonorable forms of labor—can be seen in later eras. Like the Greeks before them, the Romans considered themselves morally and intellectually superior. They occupied one of the first genuine slave societies, enacting, justifying, and participating in a system of moral values that weighed heavily against their engaging in menial labor (Finley 1959, 1986; Carcopino 1940; Wiedemann 1981). This system was perhaps best expressed in a book entitled *De Officiis*, written by the Roman orator Cicero. In this text, Cicero discusses his views on honorable and dishonorable labor, stating “First, those means of livelihood are rejected as unbecoming to a gentleman, too, and vulgar are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual

labor...for in their case the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery. Vulgar we must consider those also who buy from wholesale merchants to retail immediately; for they would get not profits without a great deal of downright lying. And least respectable of all are those trades, which cater for sensual pleasures: fishmongers, butchers, cooks, and poulterers, and fisherman” (Cicero 1938, intro, xii, book 1: 42, 150-1).

Assigning dirty, dangerous, and laborious work to specific people has thus long been a part of Western society. Often justified by an assumption that god or nature requires some to engage in arduous work and that it is the natural place of the lowly classes to bear this burden, this program of social stratification can be seen in European colonial policies that dispossessed native peoples of their land and coerced them into growing cash crops, as well as the Caste system of contemporary India. More recently, moreover, the controversial book *The Bell Curve* (1994) argued that contemporary America is stratified by intellectual ability that is largely genetic in origin (Herrnstein and Murray 1994). That intelligence was one of, if not the most important factors correlated to economic, social, and overall success in the U.S., and that not only could it be measured, but that it varied significantly across racial, language, and national boundaries. Such an argument implies that the lower classes occupy their natural place in the social and occupational hierarchy, and demonstrates the persistence of this line of thinking. The marginalization in contemporary Western societies of some occupations as “women’s work,” or fit only for minorities or immigrants, similarly reflects a belief in a natural social hierarchy.

A particularly troublesome implication of seeing work as a curse or punishment is that it implicitly reinforces the status quo, marginalizing deeper considerations of the nature of work, and reducing the urge for reform (Budd 2011). If God or nature preordains hard work, then individuals should simply accept their burdens. In fact, until Calvin’s writings in the 16th century

Western conceptions of work did not provide for upward social mobility. Instead, by reference to divine or natural law political and religious leaders attempted to prevent individuals from advancing up the social hierarchy (Budd 2011). Such was the viewpoint of the renowned Christian philosopher Saint Thomas Aquinas, who wrote in the 13th century that “The diversification of men for diverse tasks is the result, primarily, of divine providence, [and that] in human affairs, in virtue of the order of natural and divine law, inferiors are bound to obey their superiors” (Gilson 1948). Such views did not pass away with Greco-Roman society or the feudal ordering of medieval Europe, but continue on, as I will attempt to argue, in the low status and menial pay conferred upon fast food workers in the contemporary U.S.

WORK AS A CALLING: MARTIN LUTHER, JOHN CALVIN, AND THE MODERN CONCEPTION OF WORK

Many locate the modern conception of work with the ideas of John Calvin and Martin Luther, and some argue that Protestantism and its perspective on work were the ideological precursors to capitalism (Tilgher 1930; Weber 1950). Hence, regardless of one’s personal religious beliefs, it is clear that understanding the ideas of these two monumental men is critical to comprehending how work is conceived and rewarded in the modern era.

Like other medieval Catholic thinkers of his time, Luther viewed work as a form of penance, a basis for charity, and a defense against the evils of idleness. He condemned commerce and the pursuit of profit, contending that God assigned each of us our place and that one honored God by staying in that place and working faithfully in whatever we were called to do (Applebaum 1992). In all of this, Luther differed very little from his religious contemporaries. The originality of his thought, rather, was in his view that all work done in the

spirit of God had equal spiritual dignity. “For as scripture teaches, no work is nobler than obedience to the calling and work God has assigned to each one” (Plass 59; 1497). With this idea in mind, Luther rejected the distinction between spiritual and secular work, a separation promoted by the Catholic Church and given formal credence in the notion of the three orders.

The concept of the three orders was an idea prevalent throughout Medieval Europe. Promulgated by Bishops such as Alelberto and Gerard, and Christian philosophers like Saint Thomas Aquinas, it stressed the higher value of spiritual and contemplative work, and the necessity of the lower and less esteemed orders working for the benefit of their superiors (Duby 1980). Viewing society as an interdependent system based on the mutual exchange of services, proponents of this theory of social organization rationalized the social structure of Medieval Europe by assigning each class of people a role, albeit unequal, in the maintenance and the realization of the common good. *Laboratores* (workers), the lowest order on the social scale, contributed the material goods of life. They worked so that *orators* (clergy) and *bellatores* (warriors/nobes) could focus on prayer, moral leadership, and protection. As Luther saw it, all work contributed to the common good of mankind, and hence no man was more necessary than any other to social piety and blessedness (Bainton 1995). As you can imagine, this proposition represented a clear threat to church hierarchy and the position of authority it held in the Christian world, one that contradicted directly with the model of the three orders and the stratification of society in general.

Luther, however, was by no means a revolutionary. His attack on the church, and the contemplative way of life in general, was based more on its laxity and corruption than its validity (Applebaum 1992). Luther considered the monastic way of life to be selfish, and an abdication of responsibility to the larger world. He thus advocated for a religion more closely aligned with

the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which, by way of renouncing “prizes and struggles that make the heart sick,” would convert society into a “band of brothers, performing in patient cheerfulness the round of simple work which is the common lot of mankind” (Tawney 1947:81). Luther preached that the concept of calling meant that all must work at what God summons them to do. That we must attend to it, and be faithful to it, and through it God would bestow his blessings (Plass, 59, 1494).

John Calvin, on the other hand, was a man of industry. Unlike his predecessor Luther, he viewed life from a bourgeoisie perspective, accepting the world of trade, banking, credit, and industry, as both necessary and beneficial. Like Luther, Calvin preached the necessity of work for all, including the rich, for to work was the will of God, but not just at any profession. Rather, Calvin considered it ignoble for individuals to remain in the class or occupation into which they were born. Instructing that it was our duty to seek out the profession that would bring the greatest return and that through our work and the wealth generated from it, the glory of God’s majesty would be reflected (Calvin 1964; Plass 1959).

Like the Lutherans, Calvinists preached a simple and austere existence. They condemned laziness as the most dangerous of vices, denounced luxury as reckless and wasteful, and raised ordinary work and professions in the secular sphere to the level of religiosity (De Greef 2008). From a mere method of providing for material needs, Calvin’s concept of calling lifted ordinary work to the level of an activity that provided the means for the exercise of faith through the work of one’s calling alone (Applebaum 1992). By combining hard work with profit and parsimony, Calvinists fostered thrift, savings, and the accumulation of capital. But work and the profits it engendered were not intended for individual interests. Instead, the entrepreneur was seen as a

steward of the gifts of God. He was expected to increase his capital, utilizing it not for himself, but for the good of society as a whole.

Puritanism, which developed from Calvinism, took the matter of profit even further, instructing that it was one's religious duty to extract the greatest gain from work. Puritan writers like Richard Baxter preached the necessity of labor for all, not just as a defense against idleness and the tribulations of an unclean life, but as a means of accumulating wealth for the works of God. "Idleness and negligence in our callings is sinful...But it is no sin, but a duty to labor not only for labor's sake, but for the honest increase and provision, which is the end of our labor; and therefore to choose a gainful calling rather than another, that we may be able to do good..." (Baxter 1925:169-70). Whereas under Catholic tradition there existed the concept of charity, and even the elevation of the mendicant, Puritanism did not emphasize social charity. Rather, it taught that success was earned through hard work, frugality, and foresight, and that if a person was poor it was due to their failures in one of these three. This was the legacy of the Puritan ethic in England, and this is the legacy that found such a favorable reception in the colonial United States (Applebaum 1992).

THE CONCEPT OF WORK IN AMERICA: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND THE EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT

The U.S. was influenced greatly by European political and moral thought, particularly that espoused by English, French, and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Francis Bacon, John Locke, Adam Smith, and Montesquieu. These men were part of an intellectual and moral movement that challenged the traditional authority of the church and crown, that "sacred circle" whose interdependent relationship had monopolized political and moral power in Europe since

the days of antiquity (Gay 1996; Bertrand 1967, p.492-494). Though the Enlightenment took hold in most of Europe, it did so over the course of more than a century and with very specific manifestations (Livingstone and Withers 1999). These conditions notwithstanding, the Enlightenment can be thought of generally as a social movement—ultimately born out of the Reformation—that opposed monarchy and the divine right of kings, questioned religious orthodoxy as the only line of truth, promoted science and human ingenuity and reason, and sought liberty from the yoke of feudalism and the social and economic destitution left in its wake (Cassirer 1968; Manent 1996; Gay 1996; Outram 2006).

Indeed, Laslett estimates that in 1690 about 200 families ruled over all of England (Laslett 1965, p. 40). This amounts to roughly 1,000 people in a country with a population of around six million at that time. The rest of the populous, most of which resided in poverty, were constituted by a single group distinguished not by class, but occupation (Laslett 1965, p. 43). In Gregory King's *Tables of 1688*, for instance, 26 distinct occupations are identified, including temporal and spiritual lords, Knights, esquires, gentleman, and paupers. Strikingly, Gregory estimates that nearly half the population of England, or just over 2.5 million people, occupied the status of laborer, cottager, or pauper. These were by far the lowest-esteemed positions in the social and occupational hierarchy. When contracted, they demanded little above subsistence wages for work that often lasted from dawn till dusk.

It is important to point out that at this time England was predominantly rural (Laslett 1965). The average Englishman gained his living from the land, farming small plots as either yeoman owners or husbandmen/cottager tenants, and depending on his family and friends for supplementary labor. There were no hotels, hostels, or other places for singles to live, and life played out largely amid circles of family. Even in the city, however, work was carried out on a

small-scale with workshops often attached to the home of a master. There was thus little separation between home and work, the hired hand who came to work for the day and went home at night being the exception rather than the rule. This all began to change with the onset of the enlightenment, and the emergence of English Enlightenment thought.

John Locke was one of the most influential English Enlightenment thinkers. He is perhaps best known for his assertion that individual's have a right to "life, liberty, and property" (Lamprecht 1962). In this now renowned statement are hidden several of Locke's preeminent ideas. Chief among them, the contention that property is an inalienable human right originating out of the labor of one's body and the work of one's hands, which remove from the state of nature whatsoever they touch. "Thus the Grass my Horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place where I have a right to hem in common with others, become my Property..." (Laslett 1967, p. 305-307). This was a pivotal notion for Locke, for he considered the basis of government to be a social contract between parliament and the people, with the latter relinquishing certain personal freedoms in return for the protection of life, liberty, and above all property (Ashcraft 1987; Locke 1967). Like Thomas Hobbes before him, Locke argued that the failure of government to protect people and their property amounted to a violation of this social contract, thereby granting the people the right to revolt, and if they chose so, to transfer their allegiance to another power (Dunn 1969). Prominent revolutionaries from the American, French, and Glorious revolutions used these ideas to justify the armed overthrow of what they deemed repressive rule.

Locke viewed agriculture as the foundation of society. He regarded landowners and laborers as the basic elements of the English agricultural system, and accepted without criticism that the latter were barely able to earn subsistence wages. Like many of his contemporaries,

Locke assumed that the division of labor in society was inevitable, and that the disparity in income between landlords and laborers was conducive to the maintenance of internal peace, since in their efforts to simply survive workers would be less likely to foment discord. “For the laborer’s share, being seldom more than a bare subsistence, never allows the body of men time or opportunity to raise their thoughts above that, or struggle with the richer for theirs...But this rarely happens but in the maladministration of neglected or mismanaged government (Wood 1984:44, from Locke 1692:71). Therefore, regardless of his views on the right of revolution and equality of men, Locke’s outlook clearly reflect his own class status, which was that of an absentee landlord of a notable estate he inherited from his father at the modest age of 29 (Applebaum 1992). The discrepancies that emerge from Locke’s assertion of the moral worth and equality of all men, and his laissez-faire attitude with regards to an individual’s actual changes for personal and economic success in the real world, are not specific to him, however. Rather, they represent the central condemnation of liberalism since the 17th century.

Benjamin Franklin epitomized the enlightenment. Printer, scientist, politician, philosopher, he embodied every bit of what Francis Bacon had in mind when he spoke of craftsmen who could contribute to science. Like Bacon, Franklin believed that inventions, together with social projects like libraries, could bring to the common man amenities formerly reserved only for the wealthy and privileged. Furthermore, his humble beginnings and Calvinist upbringing imbued his philosophy with a practical appreciation for work not often found in men of letters. Franklin became a consummate philosopher on the place of work in society, alluding to its importance often in his writings (Butterfield 1957).

In an essay entitled, *Information to Those Who Would Remove to America*, Franklin is especially revealing with regards to his thoughts on work in America. Written for the purpose of

rectifying certain misconceptions about North America that had become widespread in Europe at that time, Franklin argues against the notion that America was a land where one could get rich without working. Insisting, instead, to those interested in immigrating to the U.S. that if they chose to do so they should not expect land, animals, or money, but only good laws and liberty. “In short, America is the land of labor,” he said, a place where “the husbandman is in honor...and even the mechanic, because their employments are useful. The people have a saying [in America], that God Almighty is himself a mechanic, the greatest in the universe; and he is respected and admired more for the variety, ingenuity and utility of his handiworks, than for the antiquity of his family (Franklin 1987:605).

In essence, Franklin describes the U.S. as a meritocracy, a place where one is valued not for who he is, but what he can do. He warns that the U.S. has no need for men of standing, “who knowing nothing of value themselves, wish only to live upon the labor of others” (Franklin 1987:606). Regarding the kinds of men to whom emigration to the U.S. might prove advantageous, he identified young laboring men who understand the husbandry of corn and cattle, “tolerably good workers” in any of the mechanical arts, and poor men with children who are eager to place them where they may gain, or learn to gain, a descent livelihood. Due to the lack of land, excess of people, and feudal institutions that continued to prevail in Europe at that time, gaining a respectable living was something only the rich could hope for. America—with its rich soil, vast acreage, and minimal inhabitants—was accordingly seen as a place where one could rise. If only they were diligent, sober, and frugal in their ways.

WORK IN THE INDUSTRIAL AGE

With their system of masters, journeymen, and apprentices, and their rules, regulations, and monopolies of local industry and markets, guilds and corporations were viewed as restraints upon the growth of the mechanical arts and industry in Europe (Applebaum 1992). Their hoarding of trade secrets, and conservative outlook with regards to maintaining traditional rules of work and habits of technique, hindered the expansion of human knowledge and the increase in manufacturing output. The European Enlightenment, and in particular the French Revolution, thereby put an end to their dominion, paving the way for the amplification of manufacturing through the division of labor and the establishment of the industrial factory system, and leading to the advancement of technology in general.

If England was in fact the birthplace of the industrial revolution, which is evidently the case from Eric Hobsbawn's (1969) view on the matter, then the invention of the spinning jenny by James Hargreaves and spinning frame by Sir Richard Arkwright can largely be credited for the matter. These two developments revolutionized the English cotton industry, transforming it from a cottage industry in which fibers were carded and spun by hand, into a modern factory system based on the subdivision of labor, the substitution of machines for human skill and effort, and the use of inanimate sources of power like wind, water, and coal (Applebaum 1992). By the mid 19th century, England was the workshop of the world, producing up to one-third of the world's manufactured goods, half of its commercial cotton, two-thirds of its coal, and five-sevenths of its steel (Hobsbawn 1969, 134).

Although it was the English cotton industry that initially introduced the factory system on a large scale, the transition to an industrial manner of production had begun years before. Adam Smith, the father of modern economic theory, laid the foundations of modern industrial society in

1776. Arguing in his now famous book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, that the division of labor in society, along with the advent and use of machinery, increased the productivity and dexterity of workers, saving them time previously wasted in moving from one operation to another, and stimulating the advent of new techniques and machinery. To his credit Smith also acknowledged the “mental mutilation” and isolation brought upon workers confined to the performance of a single repetitive task. “Thus, although the worker may be encouraged by the division of labor to invent and innovate in the early stages of the industrial revolution, it appears that sooner or later that same division of labor brings with it a separation of mental and physical labor... the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labor, that is, the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations...[the worker] has not occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become” (Smith 1937:253; Smith 1961:302-3).

Of course, Smith was not alone in this view. Like him, Adam Ferguson believed that repetitive work contracted the mind, and Karl Marx used these ideas to formulate his concept of the alienation of labor. Smith stressed education as a means of overcoming these effects. He advocated a liberal wage policy, believing that men work better if given good wages rather than being pressed down to the minimum (Smith 1937, chapter 8), and argued for increased remuneration for work that was hard and dirty, recommendations that have clearly been ignored by most modern economists.

Karl Marx’s interests in work stemmed largely from his belief that it was our role as producers that united us to one another in society (Meek 1973, p. 139). Like Hegel, he viewed

work as the objectification of man's subjective powers. Through it we externalize ourselves, becoming objective social realities and relating to our fellow human beings through the means of exchange (Marcuse 1964; Avineri 1973, p. 201). The more that labor became divided and specialized, and the more it was removed from the immediate satisfaction of the worker, moreover, the more Marx argued it became monotonous and alienating.

According to Gellner, Marx wanted to create a society free of social stratification and the coercion of work (Gellner 1988:34). Instead of a curse imposed by God, he saw the possibility of work engendering liberty and choice as well as creativity and happiness, but only if it was universalized for all and separated from any form of remuneration. Marx states in the *German Ideology* that, "as soon as labor is distributed, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood... While in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow..." (Marx and Engels 1959, p. 254). According to Marx, it was thereby the faulty organization of work in a class society that engendered antagonistic relations between men, and the coercion to work in general, and only through the abolition of private property could the alienation of man from his work be eliminated.

But what, then, constitutes the alienation of labor? "First, the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only

feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself...His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor” (Marx 1844 *Manuscripts*, p. 72). A direct consequence of the alienation of man from his work is that he is alienated from other men (1844, 77). Only the wealthy are free in the sense that they can choose to work or not to work. The rest of us must do so out of compulsion.

Following Adam Smith, Marx acknowledges the efficiency gained by a person devoted to a single act in the process of manufacture as well as the time lost when a worker interrupts one task to take up another. Moreover, he points to the increased productive power of a group of workers gathered in one place for the purpose of producing the same commodity as the starting point of capitalist production, and of the birth of capital itself (1906, p. 367). Once the capitalist is released from performing the work himself, however, the work of directing, supervising, and securing the harmonious labor of individuals becomes paramount. Marx contends that the work of directing is thus one of the functions of capital, but as managers, supervisor, and foremen fill this void the form of worker control inevitably becomes despotic.

Throughout the manufacturing period, an era in which handicraft skill was the foundation of the productive process, capital was forced to constantly wrestle with the insubordination of the worker. Workmen were continuously changing their locality, and when possible abandoning their urban employment in favor of work in the countryside. It is only with the widespread introduction of the factory system and the use of large-scale machine production—together with the introduction of scientific management techniques and the deskilling of the working class—that the industrial system of production comes into full play (Applebaum 1992; Taylor 1947). Marx states that once society reaches the point of large-scale machine production the activity of the worker is limited to that of a mere abstraction. His skill and knowledge are no longer

essential to the productive process. Instead, the machine becomes the master craftsmen, and the worker a mere appendage, a watcher of the machine to protect it from damage (1906, chapter 15). Through this deskilling process, the worker loses many of the traditional welfare benefits and self-help institutions that went along with the traditional status of his trade. Becoming increasingly identified as a mere laborer.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN WORKING CLASS

Jurgen Kuczynski asserts that the “modern working class is the product of the machine” (Kuczynski 1967:51). If this is so, then England is the place where the modern working class was first formed, since it was in England where the Industrial Revolution, with its use of machinery and the modern factory system, first developed (Hobsbawn 1969; Applebaum 1992). Eighteenth century England already featured capitalists as well as wage workers who were accustomed to machine work. This process had been taking place over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, involving adjustments to the exigencies of time and work discipline which did not exist in precapitalist forms of work (Thompson 1963). A particular characteristic of early capitalism in England was its extensive use of women and children. According to Hobsbawn, “Out of all workers in English cotton mills in 1834-1847, about one-quarter were adult men, over half women and girls, and the balance below the age of 18 (1964, 70). Moreover, Engels lamented that “In so far as machinery dispenses with muscular power, it becomes a means of employing laborers of slight muscular strength, and those whose bodily development is incomplete, but whose limbs are all the more supple” (Engels 1978, 404). The labor of women and children was, therefore, paramount for capitalism and machine production.

As in England, the American working class was also based on the factory system and the use of machines. It was first established in the U.S. cotton industry, and, like the British system, depended heavily on the labor of women and children. According to Kuczynski the U.S. cotton industry, which was based initially in New England, employed women in 1831 to the extent of 3/5 of its workforce (Kuczynski 1967:62). Yet several factors are said to have retarded the development of an American industrial working class along the lines seen in Europe, and in particular Paris, France. These include the existence of African slaves, who by the year 1860 numbered some 4 million persons, access to cheap land, and last but not least immigration. These factors together “prevented the capitalist system in America from being revealed in their true light...enable[ing] the great mass of indigenous Americans, for years on end, to “retire” from wage-labor at an early age and to become farmers, dealers, or even entrepreneurs, whereas the hard lot of the wage-laborer with his status of proletarian life, fell mostly on the immigrant” (Appendix to American Edition, *Condition of the Laboring Class* in England in 1844. Frederick Engels, (1958:375), Cited by Kuczynski 1967:161).

During its colonial period America was free of guilds. Despite several attempts to form a socialist party, together with a strong labor movement, efforts were largely fruitless. In fact, not until 1842, nearly 70 years after the Declaration of Independence was signed, were American workers granted the right to strike (Boorstin 1965:47-48). Nonetheless, the work ethic in 19th century America remained strong. Besides the preaching of Quakers, Puritans, and religious writers like Henry Ward Beecher, American workers were subjected to a flood of handbooks, articles, conduct guides, and storybooks. All of these advised that America was the land of the self-made man, a place where hard work, self-control, and dogged persistence were the roads to success. Yet, writers like Daniel Rodgers have subsequently drawn attention to a contradiction

in the thoughts of men like Beecher. He “and scores of other writers as well, demonstrably held all these ideas at once, the creative and ascetic ideals, the rhetoric of an expansive economy and early Protestantism, a sincere fervent belief in toil and elitist reservations” (Rodgers 1978:26)

In 1850, the factory economy was just emerging in America. The U.S. remained predominantly preindustrial, with farmers, slaves, craftsmen, and tradesmen-merchants making up the majority of the population (Applebaum 1992). By the end of the century, however, the U.S. economy had outstripped that of all other nations in industrial production. As American industrial production grew, moreover, workers soon found that hard work in industrial factories did not lead to the success and wealth they expected. In one of the great ironies of American history, the same work ethic that helped spawn an economic system of factories and machine production, “left in tatters the network of economies and values that had given it birth” (Rodgers 78, xii). Factories poured an ever-larger volume of goods into middle class Americans homes, but the ascetic legacies of the Protestant ethic slowly and steadily eroded, “giving way to a noisy gospel of play and, at the fringes of middle-class thought, to a cultivation of a life free of effort itself...” (Rodgers 1978, 28-9.

Following the conclusion of World War I, the U.S. embarked on one of the most profound periods of economic growth in its history. Personified in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, this period in American history is remembered as a time of unrestrained materialism and unfettered capitalism. It gave fruition to unprecedented levels of industrial growth as well as the widespread dispersion of consumer-oriented commodities like telephones, movies, radios, and automobiles. Economic efficiency through assembly-line production and scientific management strategies became supreme, and the U.S. saw its gross domestic product increase by more than a third in the span of less than a decade (Carter 2006). Still, subtle

contradictions in the goals of scientific management and mass production remained. The experiments of Elton Mayo at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company in Chicago, showed that no amount of scientific or mechanical manipulation of human beings could force them to behave as automatons; that ultimately it was the worker who controlled the amount of his or her output (Mayo 1933).

The mechanization of production, the standardization of parts, and the application of power to machinery provided the basis for the factory system and the mass production of goods in industries like textiles and shoes. The assembly-line method of mass production, which was first attempted in the American meat-packing industry (Kranzberg and Gies 75, 118), but received its ultimate application in the automobile industry, transformed the output of goods to a higher level (Applebaum 1992). Henry Ford's integration of the production of automobiles into a single assembly line, into which parts and subassemblies flowed like tributaries into a river, was a clear success. In 1924, the Model T car sold for \$290, down from the 1912 price of 600, and more than half of all the automobiles in the world were Model T Fords (Applebaum 1992; Kranzberg and Gies 75, 121).

Assembly-line production, as well as the decade of affluence known today as the roaring twenties, produced its own set of complications, however. Like the characters in his books, F. Scott Fitzgerald fell into a decadent life of luxury, parties, and alcoholism that ultimately led to his untimely death at the modest age of 44. Figuratively a world away, assembly line workers toiled under ever greater stress. The assembly line provided a continuous flow to the production process, bringing all material to the worker who remained stationary, and simplifying work tasks so as to allow each worker to perform his or her duty in the least amount of time. This was accomplished through the use of trolleys and conveyor belts, which were regulated in speed by

management. The continuous flow of assembly line production forced the worker to perform his or her task before the next piece came down the line. If management wished to speed up production they could do so very easily. Speed-up thus became one of the leading causes of stress for workers, not to mention an important question of the social relations between the employing and working classes (Kranzberg and Gies 1975, 124-5).

These social and economic developments serve as the background for the theoretical perspectives on work developed by 20th century philosophers like Thorstein Veblen, Hendrik de Man, Adriano Tilgher, Hannah Arendt, and Pope John Paul II. Among the more pressing concerns of this group of intellectuals was what they perceived as a rapid weakening of the modern work ethic in the wake of its own success. Tilgher begins his analysis of work by extolling the record of industrial capitalism: “The modern idea of labor is the projection into theory of a new feeling in men’s minds. That feeling has changed the face of the earth...Articles useful and necessary for life which only a few centuries ago were luxuries of the privileged classes are now at the disposal of all...Culture and hygiene are widespread as never before...Agricultural and industrial production has been prodigiously increased, commerce intensified, the population of the world quintupled, and the human race amazingly brought together in time and space by the astoundingly sudden development of means of communication (Tilgher 1930:129-30).” Yet, Tilgher follows closely with a warning that the religion of work is beginning to falter. “It is certainly a serious matter that in the country which till yesterday was the veritable Holy Land of this new faith, in the United States of America, the religion of work should seem paradoxically but inevitably to be producing a religion its exact opposite, the religion of recreation, pleasure, and amusement (Tilgher 1930:141). This new faith, explicated in *The Great Gatsby*, was of chief concern to this group of modern scholars.

Thorstein Veblen coined the term ‘conspicuous consumption’ in 1899 as a wily manner of criticizing the inordinate acquisition of luxury goods and services on the part of the leisure class. In so doing, he touches on one of the essential elements of the problem of work in the modern epoch, that being that individuals no longer seek satisfaction in life through their employment, but through the commodities, luxuries, and lifestyles that their employment engenders. Tilgher and Veblen contend that should the trend toward dissatisfaction in work continue the foundations of contemporary civilization may prove precarious, since a civilization resting on a weak work ethic is by all accounts in danger of collapse.

Veblen concludes his book with the conviction that the interests of business and its drive for pecuniary gain conflict with the notions of workmanship and quality, which stem from the handicraft era. In precapitalist production, the amount of work done was determined by demand. Man made what he needed, and did so with the intention of it lasting. In today’s world, demand does not create supply (Veblen 1914). Instead, “supply, frantic to dispose of itself, rushes out to find demand, to engender it, command it, insinuate it, and create it through all means of advertising, both subtle and otherwise” (Applebaum 1992:461). Progress is thus measured by the amount of goods and services produced and consumed, not by their quality.

Denied the gratification of a sense of ownership in the products of their work, modern industrial workers are said to seek gratification outside of the workplace, most notably through the consumption of products like cars, cloths, food, drugs, and alcohol. Yet the presence of a work extinct, though difficult to prove, remains evident in the psychology of the modern human. Sar Levitan, a labor economist whose work had a profound impact on social policy reforms in the U.S., attributed this duty to labor to human nature. “...The most basic theory on work motivation posits the existence of a fundamental urge to exert oneself, a drive to learn, to achieve

and shape one's surroundings...this perspective on work motivation derives from traits we commonly associate with human nature: a sense of curiosity, a responsiveness to challenge, a capacity for pursuing hopes and aspirations" (Levitan and Johnson 1982, 28-9).

Long before the printing of these words, Hendrik de Man had identified a possessive instinct in the modern industrial worker. In his magnum opus, *Joy in Work* (1929), which was based on autobiographical reports of wageworkers participating in the socialist and trade union movement of Belgium, de Man talked about the tendency of workers to speak possessively of the instruments of their labor and the products of their work. They used phrases like "my machine" even though they owned neither their machines nor the products they created. After discussing various factors that enhance joy in work, including the possessive and constructive instincts of man, de Man considers the social obligations to work, which he believes are part and parcel to industrial society. As he expressed it, when people are part of a working community what they believe others expect of them becomes just as important as what they expect of themselves. Very few are strong enough to ignore these social standards, especially when the obligation to labor comes from one's family, which is dependent on one's earnings, as well as one's employer, who pays one's wages, and one's workmates, with whom one works cooperatively (de Man 1929, 58-9; Campbell 1989).

De Man's views on the social obligations of work have influenced many scholars. In "Sources of Self-Esteem in Work" (1988), for instance, Michael Schwalbe argues that workers generally strive to maintain or enhance evaluations of themselves as being competent and worthy workers (Schwalbe 1988:25). Schwalbe states that self-esteem is based predominantly on self-evaluation, the evaluation of others, and comparison with others, and concludes that self-perceived competence is the preeminent source of self-esteem for most people. Lastly,

Schwalbe suggests that a thorough analysis of the adequacy of the work environment for producing the self-esteem needs of the people in it must take place in order for joy in work to be possible (Schwalbe 1988:32). De Man, however, believed that the ascent of machine production had left the attainment of joy in work largely unrealistic. Moreover, he contended that the perpetual threat of unemployment in a capitalist society induced a sense of chronic anxiety in the worker, a condition that became particularly acute with the “deindustrialization of America” (Bluestone and Harrison 1982).

Hannah Arendt is without a doubt one of the most profound and detailed modern philosophers on the subject of work. Born in Germany, she immigrated to the U.S. just as her career as an author and major world thinker was emerging. Arendt thought of work as part of what she viewed as the three fundamental human activities—labor, work, and action. She defined labor as corresponding to the biological process of the human body, whose growth, metabolism, and eventual decay were part of the life process fed by labor. Work as activity corresponding to the unnaturalness of human existence, which provided an artificial world of things, distinct from nature. And action as activity not mediated by things or matter. Labor thus assured individual survival, work permanence and durability, and action political bodies and the condition for remembrance—that is, for history (Arendt 1958, 7-8). Arendt comments that few authors have made the distinction between labor and work, but that every European language has two separate words for what most believe is the same thing (1958, 79). The Greek language differentiates between *ponein* and *ergazesthai*, Latin between *laborare* and *fabricari*, French between *travailler* and *ouvrier*, and German between *arbeiten* and *werken*. With these terms, there is a connotation of pain and trouble associated with labor, but not with work.

Arendt sets up this duality between work and labor, not as an analytical tool in itself with which to discuss work and labor, but as an important distinction that throws light upon the *Human Condition*. As Arendt views the human condition and its development in modern times, she sees use-values as associated with work and quality giving way to exchange-values, as associated with labor and quantity. She sees the emphasis increasingly on *process* and on the *how* of the labor process, with its increasing emphasis on machines and automation and productivity, rather than on the *what*, the end product and the goal. The decrease in skill, the thrusting aside of the craftsman by the machine, the rapid exhaustion of even the most durable goods—such as houses, machines, and automobiles—the flooding of industrial society with the message to consume were all part of Arendt’s perspective of what was happening to the *human condition* in the modern world.

Writing before mass consumption began in earnest, Marx predicted the eventual liberation of mankind from the necessity of remorseless labor. He did not, however, account for the latent potential of machine production to promote a voracious consumer society “where nearly all human ‘labor power’ is spent in consuming, with the concomitant serious social problem of leisure” (Arendt 1958, 131). In modern society all use-objects—even tables and chairs—are treated as consumables and are used up as quickly as dresses; and dresses are used up as quickly as food. Even food becomes “fast food.”

Pope John Paul II’s influence on the Roman Catholic Church, perhaps best exemplified by the fact that he was beatified just over six years after his death, is difficult to overstate. His consideration of matters unrelated to religious dogma, however, have at times been overlooked. He was, for instance, one of the first Catholic clergymen to open a dialogue with Marxists, and though he ardently renounced the atheism and bureaucratic rigidity of communist countries, he

drew upon socialist arguments to criticize the individualism of the capitalist west as well. In his *Laborem exercens* (On human work), moreover, an encyclical he penned only two months after his attempted assassination, John Paul II placed himself at the center of social debates on work in a capitalist society. From its introduction he asserts the primacy of labor over capital, arguing that man alone is capable of work and that through it he transforms both nature as well as himself, thus “the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done, but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person” (1982, 105-106). John Paul II contends that the error of early capitalism was that man was transformed into a mere instrument of production. He believed that the conflict between labor and capital originated in the fact that workers put their powers at the disposal of entrepreneurs, who following the principle of maximum profit, tried to establish the lowest possible wages for the work done by their employees (1982, 100; Baum 1982).

IMMIGRANT WORKERS AND RESTAURANT WORK IN THE U.S. POSTINDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

The decline of manufacturing and the growth of the service sector are two of the most fundamental traits of all industrialized economies. In fact, the service sector comprises roughly two-thirds of the economy in many of the most prosperous countries in the world, including the U.S., Japan, and most of Western Europe (OECD 1999). Granted that the sector is two-tiered, with well paid and respected professions like accounting and law emblematic of the upper tier, and poorly paid menial labor that often include servicing the upper tier characteristic of the lower, it is the low-end variety that dominates the sector numerically (Bernstein et al. 2000; Moss and Tilly 2001; Waldinger and Lighter 2003; Zlotniski 2006). These circumstances have

important implications for the conditions of labor, as low-end service work is exceedingly routinized, largely without union protection, and as a result notoriously low paying with little to no benefits (Sassen-Koob 1981; Smith-Nonini 2007). As Ruth Gomberg-Munoz keenly points out, moreover, this also has important implications for the characteristics of workers themselves, since “the attractiveness of service labor is often evaluated on subjective criteria such as work ethic and good attitude, behaviors that are in turn promoted by conditions of vulnerability and powerlessness” (Gomberg-Munoz 2010, p. 298).

U.S. employers have employed and profited off the labor of Mexican workers for over a century (Gamio 1931; Galarza 1964), helping to establish the first of what would later become a multitude of Mexican immigrant networks spanning the United States and Mexico.

Conventional analysis of this growing trend was dominated, at least in the beginning, by the vernacular and theoretical schemes of economics. Mexican immigration to the United States was conceived as the natural outgrowth of a distinct set of structural economic factors, namely poverty, unemployment, and political unrest in Mexico, and higher wages and labor demand in the United States. According to Neoclassical economic theory, the consequent wage differential, which was inferred to be the result of limited investment capital and labor abundance in the sending country and copious investment capital and insufficient labor in the receiving, led to the emergence of international migration. Significantly, the so-called “push and pull factors” credited for provoking emigration from one region and into another, were said to operate independently of one another. A theoretical notion derived from supply and demand economics that had the ill effect of habituating Mexican immigration to the U.S., obscuring the economic domination exerted by U.S. corporations and empire particularly in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries (Hart 1997; Gonzalez and Fernandez, 2002), as well as the personal costs and desolation often associated with the immigration experience (Chavez 1992 p. 42; Rouse 1992).

Serious critique of the neoclassical theory of international migration did not emerge until the latter half of the 1970s. At this time, scholars such as Michael Piore, Alejandro Portes, Saskia Sassen, Stephen Castles, and David Gutierrez began promoting a host of alternative theoretical models to international migration. Though innovative in their scope, these theories remained very much within the purview of the push/pull thesis, and can generally be divided between those that privilege pull factors and those that privilege push.

SEGMENTED LABOR MARKET THEORY

Segmented labor market theory focuses explicitly on the labor demands created by modern industrialized nations. Piore (1979), for instance, contends that wage differentials are neither the primary nor the most critical factor governing the migration process. For him the distinguishing characteristics of the secondary job sector, including its flexible, low paying, and labor-intensive nature, “operate both to make the society tremendously resistant to their elimination and to make native workers reluctant to accept them” (Piore 1979, p.26). Piore argues, moreover, that the recruitment of foreign-born workers into secondary sector positions acts as a countervailing factor that moderates and diverts the homogenization and eventual unification of the industrial working class, and thus the inevitable class revolution predicted by Marx (Piore 1979, chapter 2). Basing his understanding of the migration process on the characteristics of the jobs that migrants fill, Piore asserts that the economic segmentation inherent to advanced industrial society necessitates an underclass of workers for whom employment is reduced solely to income. This built-in demand for immigrant labor stems from

several fundamental characteristics of advanced industrial societies, including the inherent duality between labor and capital, wherefore capital operates as a fixed factor of production that cannot be laid off while labor operates as a flexible factor of production that can be released or minimized when demand is low, and the fact that people ascribe social status and prestige to jobs, creating occupational hierarchies that confer inferior status as well as low pay upon those occupying jobs near the bottom of the job hierarchy. These factors create a permanent demand for workers who are willing to labor for low wages, in unpleasant conditions, with great instability, and facing little chance for advancement.

In the past, demand for such employment was met in part by women and teenagers. These two traditional sources of entry-level workers have diminished overtime, however. Three fundamental socio-demographic trends are theorized to be responsible for these circumstances, including the rise in female labor force participation, which has transformed women's work into a career pursued for social status as well as income, the rise in divorce rates, which has transformed women's jobs into a source of primary income support, and the decline in birth rates and the extension of formal education, which have produced very small cohorts of teens entering the labor force. The imbalance between the structural demands for entry-level workers in industrialized countries and the limited domestic supply of such workers has increased the underlying demand for immigrant labor.

According to segmented labor market theory, immigrants make exceptional low-end service workers because they typically arrive as target earners staying only for a set amount of time or until they earn their desired quota. Their transient status, as well as the belief that their social identities remain—at least in the beginning—in their places of origin, is viewed as an advantage. Allowing immigrants to separate themselves from the social disparagement of their

work, and permitting employers operating at the bottom of the U.S. labor market, i.e. in industries such as house and hotel cleaning and restaurant work, to maintain their often low paying and arduous terms of employment without having to entice native-born workers with higher pay, benefits, and meaningful opportunities for advancement. Of course, we now know that temporary migrations often become permanent, and that as immigrants age they often have U.S.-born children who are native, not only in terms of their nationality, but likewise with regards to their attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and job prospects. These youth, socialized into U.S. society and culture through their interactions with American television and school, gradually acquire distaste for the low paying menial employment that many of their parents perform, thereby increasing the demand for new immigrant service workers.

WORLD SYSTEMS THEORY

Although employing a similar macro perspective, world systems theory links the origin of international migration to the structural nature of the world market (Wallerstein 1974; Portes and Walton 1981; Ong 1987; Castells 1989; Sassen 1988, 1991). According to this philosophy, the penetration of capitalist relations into noncapitalist societies—in the form of direct foreign investment and land, raw materials, and labor in peripheral areas coming under the control of capitalist firms and markets—engenders a mobile population that is prone to emigration. This process is perhaps best perceived in the case of the industrialization of agriculture.

In order to achieve the greatest amount of profits and compete in global commodity markets, capitalist farmers strive to consolidate landholding, mechanize production, introduce cash crops, and apply industrially produced inputs such as fertilizer, insecticides, and high-yielding seeds. Land consolidation and modern inputs lead to higher crop yields at lower prices,

undermining small noncapitalist farmers and traditional social and economic relations based on subsistence (Chayanov et al. 1966; Collier and Quaratiello 2005). Mechanization decreases the need for manual labor, increasing labor redundancy in rural areas and thus the labor-incentive of rural-urban migration (Alba 1978; Hewitt de Alcantara 1976; Arizpe 1978). Cash cropping reduces the production of subsistence crops, causing increased dependence on food imports (Dewalt 1983) and dietary deterioration (Dewey 1981). Together these factors contribute to the creation of a mobile labor force displaced from the land and rendered redundant by the penetration of capitalist relations. Once uprooted, migrants are at the mercy of labor market forces, directing their movements along some of the same investment channels that have led to the exponential growth of global cities like New York, London, Tokyo, and Los Angeles (Sassen 1991; 1998).

HUMAN MIGRATION FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Some of the strongest criticisms of the purely economic approach to human migration came from anthropologists and sociologists, who together established that people do not always act according to economic protocol, and that migration decisions are often embedded in social networks. The idea that social networks are central to migration is nothing new. Research conducted in the 1920s demonstrated a tendency for migrants from particular sending areas to be channeled into specific districts (Zorbaugh 1929; Gamio 1931; Myrdal 1957). Likewise, anthropological studies have long underscored the importance of assistance provided to migrants by relatives and friends (Jongkind 1971; Lomnitz 1975; Arizpe 1978). According to Massey et al. 1993, migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared

community of origin. The idea is that overtime, as the number of social ties between sending and receiving areas grow, a social network is created upon which new migrants draw in order to facilitate departure and find work and lodging in the receiving society. The ability to draw upon a social network contributes significantly to the perpetuation of migration streams, “lower[ing] the costs and risks of movement and increase[ing] the expected net returns” (Massey et al. 1993: 448). Scholars favor the social network approach to human migration over the neoclassical model because it explains how people get to particular places, not just on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis, but on the basis of whom they know and from whom they can seek help. Framed in such a perspective, emphasis naturally swung to the role of agency, or the decision making of migrants themselves.

In order to offset what some have criticized as overly deterministic, top-down approaches to human migration (see for example, Heyman 1998; Kearney 2004; Massey et al. 2002; Ngai 2004; Portes and Walton 1981; Sassen 1999), anthropologists have increasingly focused their analyses of migration on human agency (Chavez 1992; Gomberg-Munoz 2010). By shifting their analytical focus thusly, anthropologists are better able to relate the everyday embodied experiences and complex humanity of immigrant people. For instance, Chavez 1992 depicts life in the labor camps of “Green Valley,” an unincorporated camp made up of Mexican and Central American immigrant day laborers and strawberry pickers that was bulldozed due to public protest. In this now seminal text, Chavez describes the embodied experiences of his undocumented immigrant informants, and their incorporation, or lack thereof, into larger U.S. society. Chavez explains that work presents the principle, and in some cases only, contact that undocumented workers have with their host country, and that immigrants face many obstacles, principally the perception of U.S. citizens towards undocumented and legal immigration, to their

incorporation into U.S. society. “Consequently, they remain liminals, outsiders, who may find work but remain isolated from the larger society” (Chavez 1992, p. 65)

Immigrant’s alleged liminality, which is augmented for some by a lack of immigration documents, has been compared to Giorgio Agamben’s “states of exception,” a mode of life in which individuals are in the nation, but not part of the nation. This allows them to be the object of state laws and other techniques of regulation, including discrimination and targeted police actions, while simultaneously occupying spaces of nonexistence that are actually hidden dimensions of social reality (Coutin 2007). It is specifically this ambiguity that makes undocumented immigrants particularly vulnerable, and thus an ideal source of cheap, diligent, and tractable labor (De Genova, 2002).

When the concept of agency is applied to immigrant workers, moreover, some of whom are highly constrained by a lack of documents, the question naturally arises as to whether these individuals are actually exercising agency or merely doing what they must to survive (Gomberg-Munoz 2010, p. 297). In his work on berry pickers in western Washington State, for instance, Holmes (2007) posits the existence of an ethnicity-citizenship-labor hierarchy. One adapted from existing ethnic, gender, and citizenship inequalities, and responsible for a “triple conjugated oppression” that denies undocumented Triqui berry pickers respect as well as the power to counteract mistreatment and abuse. But although human agency represents power in a broad sense of capability for action, it is not reducible to empowerment (Gunewardena and Kingsolver, 2007). Rather, agency is the “human capacity to exert some control over the conditions of one’s existence” (Gomberg-Munoz 2010, p. 297). Denying immigrant’s agency thus reduces them to mere spectators, rather than active agents in their own lives and work. On the contrary, emphasizing agency at the expense of structure can obscure political and economic

realities that create conditions of structural inequality and violence that impinge upon the embodied experiences of migrant lives (Gomberg-Munoz 2010; Willen 2011; De Genova 2002). How best to conceptualize the everyday interactions of culture, structure, and agency thus remains an enduring ethnographic problem, one that is nevertheless actively being attempted contemporarily (Chavez 1992; Bourgois 2003; Willis 1977; Zolniski 2003, 2006).

IMMIGRANT WORKERS AND RESTAURANT WORK

Anthropologists have noted the relationship between immigrant workers and U.S. restaurant work for some time (Alder 2005; Kim 2009; Gomberg-Munoz 2010, 2014). Some have proposed that this association is based on the preferences of employers (Waldinger and Lichter 2003, 159; Kim 2009). For instance, Esther Kim points to the rising cost of food, and the volatile nature inherent to the restaurant industry, as explanatory factors for the interdependence between U.S. restaurants and undocumented labor that she observed in her research. What is more, Kim contends that her primary informant “Mama,” was able to divert the frustration and anger that typically abounds in underpaid and overly worked workforces by creating a fictive kinship relationship among restaurant staff that included eating meals together, and referring to their employer as “mama” (Kim 2009). Others have implicated the onerous terms typical of restaurant work as well as the hierarchical relations prevalent in the industry to explain the overrepresentation of immigrant workers found in the sector (Paules 1991; Adler 2005). Moreover, Adler (2005) notes how the temporal patterns inherent to foodservice—most notably the fact that business occurs in bunches typically at the hours of breakfast, lunch, dinner, and on weekends, and often well into the night—increase worker stress and impinges upon their leisure time. Not only affecting employee sleeping schedules, but sometimes circumscribing sleep

altogether as some are forced to take on additional employment in order to supplement their meager wages (Adler 2005, p. 244).

My work adds to this body of knowledge primarily through its focus on fast food, an industry that is typically lower paid, more feminized, and far more socially disregarded than the upscale sit-down restaurants described by Kim, Gomberg-Munoz, Adler, among others. As such, it is not strictly focused on undocumented immigrant men. Rather, it takes as its object of analysis the work, fast food labor, and through an intimate and everyday description of the goings-on of a fast food restaurant delineates the place of women, immigrants, and racial minorities within it.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This study depicts ethnographically what it is like to work fast food, how it is that Latino immigrants have come to dominate this economic niche in Orange County, and why it is that natives seem largely indifferent to their doing so. By taking the reader behind the counter of a fast food restaurant, it also speaks to the misrepresentation of fast food work as “unskilled” labor and to why fast food workers just might deserve higher pay. Viewing the work and lives of fast food workers up close and personal suggest why educated, native-born, and thus “skilled” individuals like myself are reluctant and even unwilling to perform the same duties that nearly four million “unskilled” fast food workers do every day.

The following chapters examine life behind the counter of a fast food restaurant as I experienced it. Chapter one—The Setting—describes the location where my research took place. It examines the socio-economic characteristics of Orange County and the structural terms and industrial history of the fast food industry. Then the formal occupational positions and layout of

the restaurant I worked in are described. The central argument of this chapter is that while teens and students continue to account for a significant proportion of U.S. fast food workers, their work is segregated to “front” of the restaurant positions where they typically interact with customers rather than “in back” where food production takes place. There is also the issue of a general lack of compulsion or desire among citizens to work in fast food, the outgrowth of both the negative stigma attached to fast food work as well as the fact that most have alternative plans for their future, which results in a labor shortage that is increasingly filled by immigrants and under-employed adult Americans. With this knowledge in mind, the chapter then takes the reader behind the counter of the research setting; delineating the physical dimensions of the space, outlining the formal positions of the restaurant and the distribution of work-related tasks among those positions, and enumerating the demographic details of the restaurant’s staff. The primary goal of this chapter is to elucidate the occupational segregation communicated in the introduction and to expound upon the role that immigrants and under-employed adult Americans play in the U.S. fast food industry.

Chapter two, entitled: *Ni Moscas* (Not Even Flies): Economics and Corporate Control in the U.S. Fast Food Industry, describes the economics of the fast food industry, the mechanisms of corporate control that permeate throughout it, and the repercussions levied upon fast food workers by those mechanisms. The central argument of the chapter is that highly stringent and corporately controlled labor costs engender exceptionally stressful work environments in which employees are expected to produce standardized food at a quick pace often with an inadequate number of staff to do so. I argue that these working terms are both extensive and emblematic of the industry, that they increase intra-employee conflict and stress, and this chapter analyzes corporate labor and drive-through time requirements as a means of accounting for this situation.

Presenting notes from informant interviews and participant observation to demonstrate the effects that these mechanisms have on the fast food labor process.

Chapter three, entitled: *Jale de los Pobres* (Work of the Poor): Pressure, Fatigue, and Fallout in the Fast Food Industry, examines how fast food workers experience, respond, and endure the conditions of their employment. The chapter is based on the premise that the overwhelming majority of fast food workers, and particularly those who work full-time, perform the work out of necessity and given other opportunities would gladly transition out. With this knowledge in mind, the chapter then turns its attention to several distinguishing characteristics of life behind the counter of a fast food restaurant, including pressure, fatigue, and sleep-deprivation. The central argument of the chapter is that the structural terms of fast food work including its low-paying, flexible, and part-time nature, force workers to pick up additional hours in other restaurants and sometimes alternative occupations, and that as a result many workers are overworked, which has lasting effects on their family and home life.

Chapter four, entitled: *Asi es, Eudelio* (That's Life, Eudelio): Immigrant Life and Migrant Fatalism, examines the ideas of home and belonging of the people I worked with, their dreams and desires, goals for themselves and their children, and ideas of success and failure. The chapter arises from an adage I often heard at work, typically out of nowhere and conventionally through the enforced silence and steel-on-steel clanging produced by an incessant business rush. The central argument of the chapter is that those I worked with have largely accepted their lot in life, and that although nearly all holdout hope of alternative and improved employment most do not challenge or dispute the structural terms of their employment. Rather, they accept them as givens and endeavor against them on a day-by-day basis, characteristically with little complaint.

Chapter five, *La Gran Chucha: Life According to Don Cheto*, examines the happy moments I had behind the counter, including the camaraderie I established with my coworkers and the laughter shared between us. I was often dumbfounded by the ability of my coworkers to smile and laugh during incessant rushes that caused me to only frown and curse. With this knowledge in mind, the chapter presents observations and quotes collected during my fieldwork period on moments of defiance and gaiety and attempts to grasp the significance of these habitual, unforeseen, and thus telling moments.

CHAPTER 1: The Setting

This chapter introduces the research setting. It begins with a socioeconomic summary of the geographic area—Orange County—where the research took place. It then provides an overview of the U.S. restaurant industry and the rise in the demand of meals taken outside of the home over the last century. Finally, it culminates with an in-depth description of the physical dimensions, formal positions, and workforce demographics of the restaurant where the research was conducted, which I have entitled Arctic Taco,⁴ focusing specifically the occupational segregation of racial minorities and immigrants and the dependence of Orange County fast food restaurants on these two cohorts of workers.

ORANGE COUNTY

With an estimated population of nearly 3.1 million, Orange County ranks as the sixth most populated county in the U.S. and the second most densely populated in the state of California. Located along Southern California's coast corridor, it is bordered to the north by Los Angeles County, to the south by San Diego County, to the east by the counties of San Bernardino and Riverside, and to the west by the Pacific Ocean.

Following its founding in 1889, Orange County's population soared, increasing at a rate of nearly 86 percent per decade from 1900 through 1980. According to demographers, most of this growth was due to domestic migration (Center for Demographic Research, California State, Fullerton, Orange County Projections 2006). Over the past 30 years, however, international migrants—most notably from Asia and Latin America—have become a major contributor to the county's growth. Changing what historian Jon Weiner (2008) once called the whitest and most

⁴ Arctic Taco is a pseudonym for the corporate restaurant in which I worked.

Protestant metropolitan area in the U.S., into one of the more racially and ethnically diverse regions in the country. Today Orange County has a substantially higher proportion of foreign-born residents (30%) than the national average (13%). Among its residents at least five years of age or older, 45 percent speak a language other than English at home, and 21 percent report that they do not speak English “very well.” (US Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey). Economically, the county boasts one of the most robust business climates in the nation. It possesses the second highest number of jobs and firms in the state, and is home to a number of Fortune 500 companies, including: Ingram Micro, Allergan, First American Corporation, Broadcom, Western Digital, and Pacific Life. As of December 2011, its largest labor markets consisted of Trade, Transportation and Utilities (18%), Profession and Business Services (18%), and Leisure and Hospitality (13%)—a super-sector group that consists of Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (NAICS 71) as well as Accommodation (hospitality services such as hotels) and Food Service (NAICS 72) (2012 Orange County Community Indicators Report). Income across these three employment categories varies greatly, however, which is in part responsible for the bifurcated nature of the Orange County economy and its populace.

By and large Orange County is known for its tourism, a notion stemming chiefly from the presence of Disneyland, which was constructed in Anaheim in 1955, its miles of beautiful beaches, and the success of shows like *The O.C.* (2003), *Laguna Beach* (2004), and *The Real Housewives of Orange County* (2007). Yet opulence tells only one side of its story. Locally, the county is often divided between “North Orange County” and “South County.” A partition denoting the cultural and demographic distinctions between the older areas located closer to Los Angeles and north of the 55 freeway, from the more affluent and recently developed areas located to the south and west. This separation is apparent not only in terms of language and

phenotype, but more importantly in relation to income. South County residents average a per capita income of \$47,325 and a median household income of \$96,559, whereas north county residents average a per capita income of \$36,696 and median household income of \$78,435. What is more, in Anaheim and Santa Ana—by far the two most populated cities in North Orange County—these figures fall to a paltry \$19,836 and \$56,865 a year.

The notoriously high costs of living in Orange County are difficult for even moderate incomes earners to bear. The housing wage, defined as the hourly wage a resident would need to afford fair market rent on a one-bedroom apartment in Orange County, increased from \$25.52 in 2011 to 26.62 in 2012. This wage is equivalent to an annual income of \$55,360, meaning that a worker earning California's minimum wage of 9 dollars an hour would have to work roughly 119 hours per week in order to afford a one-bedroom apartment in the county (2012 Orange County Community Indicators Report). In terms of the prospects of buying a home, the picture is even bleaker. Although housing affordability improved in the wake of the rupture of California's housing bubble in 2008, Orange County homes remain costly compared to the rest of the nation, and especially so when local incomes are factored in. According to a report issued by FiServ, a global provider of financial services technology, Orange County homes sold for 6.3 times the median family income in the county. That is a little more than double the nationwide median of 2.9 years' worth of income versus median home prices (OC Register, November 22, 2010). Moreover, the minimum household income needed for a first-time homebuyer seeking to purchase an existing single-family home priced at 85 percent of the Orange County median price is approximately \$67,900 (2012 Orange County Community Indicators Report). A fact that prices many buyers out of the Orange County market, pushing them into more affordable

Riverside and San Bernardino counties or into multifamily homes and apartments that often end up cramped and overcrowded, both of which negatively affect quality of life.

Altogether these statistics support many of the inferences of Edward Soja (1996), who argued that Orange County was an ideal example of an *exopolis*, a term he invented to describe a form of postmodern urbanization that involved both decentralization and recentralization. Decentralization occurred as cities were created in what were once low-populated suburbs or farm lands. Recentralization resulted from the growth of these “suburban cities” as well as population growth among immigrants in the urban core (Soja 1996, chapter 3). In contrast to traditional suburbanization, what Soja, Baudrillard, and others have chronicled in Orange County is a preordained series of actions, initiated in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1848 and for the purpose of repressing the influence of native Californios and Americanizing and/or Anglicizing the greater Los Angeles region, which until 1889 included what is now Orange County, through “the production of “hyperreality” and the “precession of simulacra” (Soja 1996). Soja uses these terms to refer to a process invoked primarily in the form of modern media in which Orange County was transfigured into an advertisement. Orange County, according to Soja, is a 800 square mile theme park, equipped with transplanted palm trees, where the people are all beautiful, even if artificially so, and everything is available, albeit for a price; a place, moreover, where political awareness and activism are replaced “by the constant availability of enchanting pleasures” (Soja 1996).

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE IN THE ORANGE COUNTY ECONOMY

Given the reputation that Orange County boosters and residents actively cultivate, it is easy to see why menial labor and the people who perform it would present a disparate and at

times uncomfortable glimpse of reality for the leisure class. Nevertheless, in postindustrial regions like Southern California, where highly educated and skilled workers have flourished economically, demand for workers in low-end service industries like hospitality, maintenance, and food service has increased as well. In fact, Americans spent a record 649 billion—or roughly 50 percent of their total food expenditures—on the purchase of meals away from home in 2014 (National Restaurants Association). Moreover, the purchase of food and beverages outside the home has increased at a rate of 6.76 billion per year and 72 billion per decade over the past century (US Economic Census).

Full and limited-service restaurants together accounted for over 75 percent of all U.S. non-home food purchases, and over 9 percent of the nation's total retail trade (US Economic Census). So thorough has our dependence on these establishments become, that the U.S. restaurant industry is now the second largest private sector employer in the nation's economy. One in ten working Americans is said to be employed in a restaurant, and job growth within the industry has outpaced that of the overall national economy for 14 consecutive years (National Restaurant Association). Given the difficulty of outsourcing restaurant jobs and the fact that most entry level positions require no formal qualifications, the industry has tremendous potential to provide low-wage workers with opportunities for meaningful career advancement and incomes that will allow them to support themselves and their families. Yet even amid record profits and sustained growth, food preparation and service remains among the lowest-paying sectors in the U.S. economy. Workers earn on average 1/3 less than their counterparts in other industries, and the vast majority receive no benefits of any kind. In fact, a 2012 report by The Food Chain Workers Alliance found that only 16.5 percent of all restaurant and food-service workers earned a livable wage, that only 17 percent were provided health insurance via their

employer, and that 14 percent were consequently on food stamps and 35 percent were using the emergency room as their primary medical facility (The Food Chain and Workers Alliance 2012).

While there are some outstanding employers and livable wage positions in the restaurant industry, wages and working conditions vary greatly among restaurant staff. Women, immigrants, and minorities tend to be segregated into the industry's lowest-paid positions, with a general lack of formalized career ladders and training necessary for advancement. When promotions are available, however, immigrants, minorities, and females are disproportionately overlooked. In fact, according to a report issued by the Applied Research Center, 3 out of 4 of all U.S. restaurant managers are white and almost half of all white male restaurant workers are employed as managers, while less than 10 percent of ethnic minorities held similar positions. Moreover, occupational segregation and discrimination are noted not only in the industry's chain of command, but also in the placement of entry-level front-line staff. Workers that have continual contact with customers tend to be white, while black, Latino, and other groups of color tend to be hired into food preparation positions that are often obscured from the sight of patrons. This arrangement affects the distribution of work and pay, as back-of-the-house jobs tend to be lower-paying as well as more labor-intensive, while server positions tend to be higher paying and considered more erudite.

Food service workers also experience temporary and part-time employment rather than full-time employment. Although food service workers are not the only workers experiencing a shift to temporary, part-time and flexible work arrangements, they represent one of the largest segments doing so. Consequently, most restaurants maintain a payroll that far exceeds the number of people needed to operate the restaurant, creating a situation in which store managers are able to allocate labor hours based on prior work performance and immediate store demand.

This manner of dispensing labor reduces restaurants' overall labor costs as well as the cost of those benefits associated with full-time status, like health care, vacations, sick pay, and pensions. The combination of irregular hours and low wages make it difficult for many food service workers to provide for themselves and their families, which is why the industry has historically depended on so-called secondary wage earners like females and teenagers. Yet, teens make up only around 17 percent of all food preparation and service workers (US Census 2010), and many females cannot accurately be defined as secondary wage earners.

U.S. Census data indicate that restaurant workers are in majority white, U.S.-born workers whose primary language is English, and who have a high school degree. The data also show that half of workers are female, and two-thirds are below the age of 44. According to this data only about one in five restaurant workers are born outside of the U.S., and most have lived here their entire lives. Granted that government data may exclude workers who are difficult to contact, most notably undocumented immigrant workers, these estimates still situate the number of immigrant restaurant workers in the U.S. at 20 percent, more than three percentage points higher than that of U.S. born teenagers. Whatever the reason for this scenario, it is clear that restaurants rely heavily on immigrant labor, and yet occupational segregation and discrimination have contributed to people of color, and particularly documented and undocumented immigrants, being largely concentrated in lower-paid back-of-the-house jobs. Being exceptionally vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to complain than their native peers, foreign-born workers often earn less and are expected to work harder than their native counter-parts. They suffer disproportionately from wage theft as well as verbal abuse, and perhaps due to their lower wages, often work more hours than natives. Furthermore, immigrant workers are more likely to

be married and thus using their incomes to support themselves and their families, making relatively lower wages and higher levels of wage theft more difficult burdens to bear.

Given their direct contract with the nation's food supply, restaurant workers' lack of benefits and paid sick leave directly impacts consumer safety. Lacking basic benefits such as paid sick days and medical insurance, many restaurant workers end up working while sick which endangers the health of consumers nationwide. While restaurant employers save money by paying low wages and not offering benefits, these measures result in public expenditures born from the cost of subsidizing workers' resulting reliance on public health and assistance programs. Nonetheless, industry heads carp over health care reform, rising food costs, and the slumping economy. Small and mid-sized restaurateurs complain that they are not set up to pay for overtime pay and employee benefits and yet the government seems equally unprepared to do so as well. All the while, the world turns. Customers come, drive through bells chime, and restaurant workers work.

LIMITED-SERVICE AND/OR FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

Restaurants engaged in the provision of food services where patrons select and pay for items before eating, or what is colloquially referred to as fast food, have gradually captured an increasing share of the American food dollar. Based on a business model emphasizing speed, convenience, and value, this form of eating establishment has tripled its market share in the past 50 years (National Restaurant Association). Although people between the ages of 18 and 24 continue to be the staunchest and most reliable of fast food consumers, consumption has increased among middle-aged and older patrons as well as among families and singles (Emerson 1990). Even so, the economics of the industry are incredibly uneven, with non-supervisory fast

food employees—a group representing nearly 90 percent of the industry’s total workforce—reporting mean wages of 9.53 an hour, 232.51 a week and 18,790 a year (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). Many workers can barely afford rent let alone other living expenses, and yet industry heads like Jim Skinner and David Novak to earn upwards of 9 million a year.⁵

Movements like Fast Food Forward, which was initiated in November of 2012 in New York, are in part a response to this widening chasm, and to the mistaken and yet persistent conviction that those who work in fast food restaurants are themselves at fault. Fast food workers are often blamed for a lack of fortitude, skill, and intelligence as the reason for their being stuck in low-status employment. As the neoliberal creed puts it, if they are displeased with their occupation they should simply pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and find better jobs.

ARCTIC TACO

Arctic Taco’s layout, the physical dimensions of the restaurant, its formal occupational positions, and the socio-demographic profile of its workers illustrate both occupational segregation and the dependence of fast food restaurants on immigrant out labor. Arctic Taco store 182, where my fieldwork was situated, is one of the more profitable corporate-owned locations, owing to its close proximity to a public university and high school. The restaurant operates on a 24-hour timetable and employs about 30 individuals. Sixty-three percent of its workforce is native-born, 62 percent is Latino, and 48 percent is female.

Arctic Taco is housed in a structure approximately 2,860 square feet in diameter.

Roughly 65% of this space, or 1,860 square feet, are dedicated to the restaurant’s dining area. Within this area are situated 4 booths and 16 tables, with a max capacity of 60 patrons. In

⁵ Jim Skinner was the CEO of McDonald’s Corporation from 2004 to 2012, and David Novak has been the Executive Chairman of Yum! Brands—which owns and operates KFC, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and other restaurants—since 1997.

addition to tables and booths, the dining room is equipped with a soda dispenser and salsa bar containing various condiments, containers, and sanitary equipment. The establishment’s public restrooms are located outside of the restaurant, toward the back or east side of the building, and are built into space that is ostensibly apart of food preparation and storage.

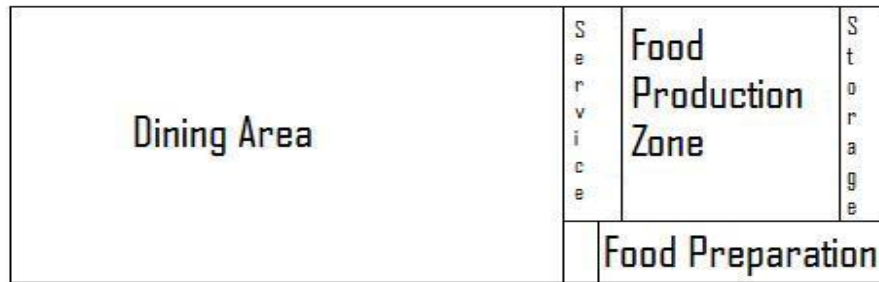


Figure 1.1: Restaurant Layout

Less than a third of the restaurant’s overall square footage, or approximately 900 square feet, is dedicated to the storage, preparation, and service of food. Within this area anywhere from 2 to 8 employees toil in one and often multiple formal positions. Cashiers, by far the youngest of Arctic Taco’s fast food workers, are responsible for managing the restaurant’s service area. The service area consists of a 12 by 3 foot service counter, with two cash registers used for taking in-house orders located to the south, and an elevated pick-up counter with a microphone mounted to its base used for calling out orders to the north. To the far north of the service counter, and along north wall of the building, is a drive-through window with a third cash register in its immediate vicinity. Tucked behind a wall on the south end of the service area is a pseudo office where the restaurant’s phone, fax, and computer are located. This is also where

the employee schedule is kept, and is the unofficial repose zone for store management, who can regularly be found when business is slow gazing at an hour-by-hour breakdown of the store's labor time provided by corporate headquarters.

English language skills are an essential part of the cashier's job, and 70 percent of store cashiers are thus native-born. Those who are not, however, are proficient English speakers. Cashier duties include taking customer orders, maintaining the dining area, including wiping down tables, throwing trash, collecting serving trays and sweeping the floor, and keeping their work area stocked with cups, napkins, straws, lids and various restaurant condiments. Although a couple of cashiers are known to help out with food preparation tasks when needed, the vast majority only cross the unofficial line dividing food preparation from food service on their way to and from the employee closet and when they are in need of service supplies like cups, lids, and straws, which are kept in the storage area of the restaurant near the freezers. Their limited skills and general lack of enthusiasm for food preparation work circumscribe their labor hours. As such, 80 percent of the store's cashiers can be considered part-time workers. They average 19.95 hours of work per week, 20.9 years of age, and 19.7 months of occupational experience. Furthermore, 60 percent of the restaurant's cashiers are female, 40 percent are White and/or Caucasian, 30 percent are Latino, 20 percent are Persian, and 10 percent are Black and/or African American.

Located immediately behind the store's service area is the restaurant's food production zone. This area can be broken down into 2 interrelated segments: the grill and the taco bar. The grill area is encompassed within a 90 square foot section of the restaurant. The actual grill is located along the north wall of the edifice, and alone occupies 18 square feet of this space. It is kept from 325 to 350 degrees, and is bordered to the east by a 12 square foot fryer with 2 vats.

The vat to the east has a red sticker attached to its base, which designates it for fish products, and the vat to the west for everything else. To the right or east of the fryer is a 10 square foot gas-powered stovetop on which are positioned two 20 gallon *ollas* (pots), one of which is used to heat packets of ground beef, pork, rice, and red and green salsa, and the other of which is used to cook beans. On the south side of the grill area is a 4 square foot fry station used to maintain the heat of French fries after they've been fried. The fry station opens up into the service area of the restaurant where cashiers use a scoop to shovel fries into their appropriate containers, and the bottom of the station acts as a drawer that the grill person pulls out to refill the station with fresh fries. It is part of the cashier's responsibility to let the grill person know when they are in need of fries and it is mandatory that the grill person calls out "hot fries" whenever s/he refills the station. Just to the east of the fry station is a 10 square foot table on which a planch used to heat quesadillas is situated. This planch (or *plancha*) is kept at 425 degrees and is the cause of many burns. In fact, forearm burns are part and parcel of working the grill and are often used as proof, shown with macho pride, of one having done so. Underneath this table is a 10 square foot rollaway freezer in which frozen French fries, chicken strips, and various other menu items are located for quick access. The grill person occupies a 20 square foot corridor in the midst of all these components, and is responsible for frying French fries, fish and chicken strips, grilling hamburgers, steak and chicken, cooking and preparing beans, and heating up quesadillas to order. The grill person is also responsible for restocking their work area, helping out with other food preparation tasks when necessary, hand cleaning the grill and planch with a wire brisk before clocking out, and filtering or replacing when necessary the fryer oil which is done twice a

day at 3 pm and 3 am.

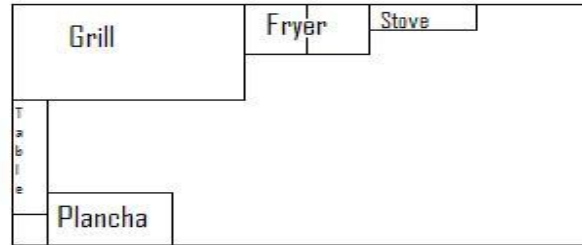


Figure 1.2: Grill Layout

The grill is one of the few occupational positions which men dominate, which is not to say that females do not work the grill, only that when available men, and particularly Latino men, are preferred. In general, grill workers are much older than cashiers, averaging 37 years of age. They work more hours, averaging 33.5 hours per week, and have a great deal more fast food experience, averaging 60 months or 5 ½ years of fast food work experience. As previously mentioned, grill workers are exclusively Latino, half of which are foreign-born.

The taco bar is the focal point of the restaurant's food production zone. It is by far the most taxing of all the restaurant's positions, stemming from the fact that it is responsible for assembling over 30 of the restaurant's approximately 40 menu items. During peak hours the taco bar is manned by two people, one of which is responsible for heating tortillas and preparing tacos and burritos, and the other of which is responsible for adding cold condiments like lettuce and cheese and packing items for take-out or immediate consumption. The taco bar is situated along a 30 square foot corridor in the middle of the food production area and running perpendicular to the north and south walls of the building. It is made of stainless steel, and is filled with hot water

which keeps the various taco and burrito ingredients—beans, rice, steak, chicken, pork, eggs, and green and red salsa—warm. It begins to the east with a 6 square foot griddle used to heat tortillas. This griddle is kept between 375 and 425 degrees and is stored on top of a stainless steel cabinet with different sized tortillas housed in each of 3 drawers. To the west of the griddle is the central component of the taco bar with the various taco and burrito ingredients placed in stainless steel containers (or *trastes*), and submerged in hot water. To the west of the central component is an area designated for cold ingredients, including: lettuce, cheese, tomatoes, cilantro, onions, guacamole and sour cream. These items are placed in stainless steel containers as well and kept submerged in ice. Just above and to the west of the cold ingredients are a group of differentiated stacks of wax paper, each of which is marked with the insignia of a particular menu item. The person(s) assigned to the taco bar is foremost responsible for fulfilling orders. Additional tasks include washing dishes, cleaning their work area, keeping it stocked with ingredients and ice, letting the grill person know when they are running low on steak or chicken, and generally doing food preparation for the shift that follows them.



Figure 1.3: Taco Bar Layout

Individuals working the taco bar average 34.42 years of age. Nearly 75 percent of them are female as well as foreign born, and they average 36.35 hours of work per week. One hundred percent of taco bar attendants are Latina/o, and they average 68.5 months of fast food work experience.

The food preparation zone of the restaurant is located on the Southside of the wall in the middle of the restaurant on which the taco bar is aligned. It is out of sight of customers and consists of a stainless steel table on which an industrial coffee maker and cheese grater rest. Food preparation tasks, or what employees refer to as '*la preparacion*', are conducted here. It is the responsibility of each of the restaurant's shifts—day, evening, and night—to leave food preparation for the following shift. It is the on-site manager's job to disperse food preparation tasks, but they are typically completed by the person assigned to first position or *primera* on the taco bar. Tasks include grating cheese, which starts out as a 50 pound block of American cheddar and is subsequently sliced using a wire connected to two handles into 14 smaller blocks that fit into the feeder of the cheese grater, cutting tomatoes and cilantro, and preparing *pico de gallo* and quesadillas. These items are stored in a walk-in cooler located behind and to the east of the grill zone.

Restaurant managers at Arctic Taco average 27.62 years of age. They are 62 percent male and 38 percent female. They average 38.56 hours of work per week, and have on average 127.5 months or just over 10 years of fast food work experience. They are overwhelmingly Latino, with the exception of one African American female, and 75 percent are foreign-born. Per requirement, managers are able to perform all restaurant tasks and often fill in for on-clock staff during breaks and lunches. They are all certified through corporate, a process that requires a 3 month training seminar and the successful passing of two examinations.

In addition to the aforementioned walk-in cooler, the rest of the restaurant consists of two 50 square foot freezers, which are located in the far back or east side of the restaurant and in which chicken, steak, French fries, and various other menu items are kept. Two sinks, one of which is used for hand washing and is located on the corridor running down the middle of the restaurant, and the other of which is located in the food preparation area and is used to wash dishes. And, lastly a 25 square foot employee closet located on the south wall of the edifice just beyond the food preparation table. This closet is equipped with a set of lockers and some coat hangers and is also where the federal labor and law regulations as well as occupational safety and health administrations (OSHA) guidelines are posted.

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION AT ARCTIC TACO

Finally, in order appreciate the dependence of Orange County fast food restaurants, like Arctic Taco, on Latino/a, immigrant, and female workers it is necessary to understand the labor hours provided by each distinct group of workers. For instance, on any given week Arctic Taco would average approximately 750 total labor hours. Latina/os worked 667.5 of these labor hours, or roughly 89 percent of these hours, while whites or Caucasians worked 42.5 hours, individuals of Persian decent worked 24 hours, and Blacks and/or African Americans worked 16.5 hours. In terms of nativity, immigrants worked 538 hours, or approximately 72 percent of the stores total labor time, while native-born workers were responsible for 212.5 hours. As a caveat, undocumented workers by themselves contributed approximately 269.5 labor hours, over 50 more than native-born workers.

Males worked 424 hours compared to 326.5 hours worked by females. However, since females were outnumbered by males 3 to 2 they worked on average more weekly hours than their

male counterparts. Lastly, in terms of age individuals over 20 years of age and under 40 worked the majority of store hours, working 450.5 hours, or roughly 60 percent of store hours worked in a week. While individuals over 40 worked 255 hours, and individuals under 20 and/or teenagers worked 45 hours.

Looked at through these numbers it's easy to see the contribution provided by immigrants, Latina/os, and people over the age of 20 to Orange County fast food restaurants like Arctic Taco.

CHAPTER 2: Ni Moscas: Learning to Labor in Fast Food's Racialized Work Environment

I clocked in at 5 p.m. today. When I arrived it was only Rene, La Flaca, and Lizzy working. Rene must have sent someone home early, because typically either Don Cheto or Doña Marta would be tending the grill and taco bar and doing last minute cleanup when I arrived. I ran into Doña Ariana before we started, and she said that Rene had been complaining about business. “*Ni moscas*” (not even flies) was apparently his response to her inquiry about the subject. I followed her outside since it was three minutes till five and we began talking about Rene, how he was always complaining, seldom encouraging, and seemingly ungrateful for the work we did. Doña Ariana brought up Hector, the restaurant's previous manager, and how he had awarded her like three Wal-Mart gift cards while he was managing, but that she had not received a thing since Rene took over. Then she called him a racist. “*El mismo es Mexicano y nos trata asi, es bien racista,*” she said (He himself is Mexican and he treats us like that, he's a big racist.) I had never heard anyone use the word racist, nor refer to the concept of racism in the restaurant before, but I had worked with La Doña long enough to know that her use of the word to describe Rene was not just about some five dollar coupons.

You see, Doña Ariana worked *primera* (first position),⁶ which made her responsible for assembling over two-thirds of the menu items. Since Rene rarely scheduled a person to work *segunda* (second position), moreover, her duties often included dressing and wrapping those items as well as maintaining and cleaning the entire taco bar before to her shift change at 12 a.m. To say the least working *primera* could be demanding, but add to it the washing of dishes, the

⁶ The person working *primera* is situated in the first position of the taco bar. Their work responsibilities include heating tortillas and assembling tacos, burritos, and are described in detail on page 16 of chapter 1.

mopping of floors, \$1,200 dollars or more in sales, and a short staff and it could feel downright oppressive.

Ideally the restaurant would be staffed with at least six people: two to take orders, two to work the taco bar, one to work the grill and one to give other workers breaks. Additional hands allow for more even workloads as well as state-mandated rest, but they also increase the restaurant's labor time, a figure Rene was expected to maintain at or below 19.27 percent of total revenue. As such, during non-peak hours Rene often scheduled only five, four, three, and even two crewmembers, minimizing the restaurant's labor costs, but leaving it insufficiently staffed to operate at full capacity.⁷

With two registers on the counter and one on the drive-through, Arctic Taco possesses the capacity to log up to three orders at any one time. Purchases are inputted into computerized cash registers, displayed along with a designated number on monitors mounted above the grill and taco bar, and completed by a food preparation worker. At its slowest, the restaurant can go up to a half hour without registering a single purchase. At its busiest, items occupy each and all of the 8 boxes displayed against a blue background on the two food-prep ordering screens. Much as traditional mealtimes are generally the busiest, people tend to eat in groups, and in an area laden with high school and college students rushes were known to occur suddenly and at the oddest of hours.

The problem with this scenario with regards to the distribution of labor is that fast food labor costs are calculated on an hour-by-hour basis. With results fed directly to individual unit restaurants and invariably displayed on the screen of the restaurant's one and only computer.

Moreover, shift managers are given frequent and explicit instructions about paying close

⁷ Non-peak hours range from 3 in the afternoon to 8 in the morning on weekdays, and throughout the entire weekend. In fact, if you happen to frequent a fast food restaurant tonight say around 12 a.m., it will most likely be tended by two workers, both minorities. One will be taking orders and the other will be preparing food.

attention to profit margins and labor time, and are thereby given few excuses for not doing so. In fact, over the course of my fast food work experiences I witnessed shift managers on two separate occasions receiving a one-day *descanzo*, or day of rest, for not sending labor home and thus allowing the restaurant's labor time to get too high.

The issue with sending labor home is that it is difficult to predict if or when patrons will come, and when a manager succumbs to the pressure of releasing labor and thereby controlling labor time, they inevitably leave themselves and their remaining crew vulnerable to a sudden rush. Rushes entail by their very nature, speed, haste, and urgency. Weathered full-handed they are enough to drive a novice frantic.⁸ Endured short-staffed, they necessitate stamina, fortitude, and grit, and for only a minimum wage salary many prove undisposed to the labor.

Doña Ariana was one of those who did not. She, along with her husband, depended on fast food wages to get by, and together they accounted for two of the restaurant's 15 full-time staff members. These 15 individuals represented the restaurant's core staff. They averaged over 35 hours per week, were highly effective and fast, competent at multiple work positions, and largely first generation immigrants—the three exceptions being an African American female from South Los Angeles and two second generation Chicanas. The racial component of this scenario is readily apparent in the fact that these individuals were all brown, albeit different shades, but what actually gives warrant to Doña Ariana's racial accusation—which I believe are not specific to Rene but rather emblematic of U.S. food service work in general—is the notion that some people are capable of enduring more. That a lack of education, English-speaking skills, immigration documents, or parental endowment, provides one with the ability to withstand excessive heat on the hands, or fryer oil on the skin for that matter, for wages that afford little

⁸ See chapter one of Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickle and Dimed* (1997) for an account of her experiences in the food service sector, and the working conditions that eventually led her to walk out in the middle of a work shift.

more than a life of poverty. What I learned from my experiences working fast food, is that my coworkers bore the terms of their employment not because they were born immune to heat, or the difficulties inherent in a life at minimum wage, but *por la necesidad* (out of necessity).

Now it was a lack of skill, experience, and most importantly *necesidad* (necessity) that made me all-in-all a shoddy fast food worker. Unlike many of my coworkers, including Doña Ariana, I never even mastered *primera*. I worked it in short stints and during slow times, but the combination of speed, endurance, and indifference to physical pain required evaded me until the very end. My coworkers would sometimes joke “*que me faltaba el callo*” (that I lacked the callus), but I always knew *lo que me faltaba eran las ganas* (that what I lacked was the will). You see anyone who has ever heated a tortilla for their own taco or burrito can tell you that it is not the immediate shock of that heated tortilla on the palm of your hand that generates a reaction, but its duration while you add the necessary ingredients—beans, beef, chicken, eggs, sauce, etc.—to make it personally savory. If calluses were actually caused by heat then their development would certainly aid in the production and distribution of such fare, but since they are not what my coworkers procured cannot accurately be described as a callus, or at least not one with a physiological manifestation.

Rather, what was described to me seemed more like willful amnesia. The power to hold out against your hands natural reaction to heat, “*hasta que un dia solo olvidas del dolor*” (until one day, you just forget about the pain). This capacity to bare pain, with patience and without becoming desperate, is what made the best the best, “*gallos verdaderos*” (true roosters) who could work the taco bar, the grill, clean the restaurant, and still leave *preparacion* (preparation). Of course, endurance of this kind is not a quality one is typically born with, being more often than not the fallout of hardship and the comrade of *necesidad* (necessity). It seems fast food

managers know this as well, for the allocation of work tasks and the assignment of work positions was often racialised, with Latinos and Blacks considered capable of withstanding food preparation work that Whites were not. In contrast to notions of unrecognized or hidden forms of symbolic violence, however, these work inequalities did not go unnoticed or unquestioned. Rather they were perceived, at least by Doña Ariana, as racist and often made for conflict.

Based on her analysis of New York City fast food workers, Jennifer Parker Talwar regards conflict amid fast food restaurant employees as “endemic to the industry’s structure,” and as the foremost contributing factor to the social divisions she witnessed within New York City’s fast food workforce (Parker Talwar 2002, pp. (see chapter 9). As Parker Talwar would surely appreciate, the first two months of my fast food employment were flush with conflict. I, for one, have never worked in an industry as demanding or fast-paced, and in the beginning I found it difficult to adjust to fast food’s exacting and incessant nature. Like many of my coworkers I blamed Rene for our working conditions, but unlike most I bore my work demands with little dignity and even less poise. I found the pressures of a business rush weathered with insufficient staff unjustly taxing, and as of a result I would often find myself glaring at the resolutely intoxicated youth that would line our walls at two, three, and four in the morning. Their blood-shot eyes and giddy mannerisms reminded me of a life I once lived, and yet from behind the counter at three in the morning I could not stop thinking that they just don’t pay enough for this shit. Not at \$8.25 an hour, \$330 a week, and \$15,840 a year. Not even at double that, and yet these are the wages and working conditions that fast food workers are in most cases expected to endure.

Initially my colleagues attempted to help me. They showed me tricks they had learned with regards to preparing food and cleaning equipment faster, always ensuring me that this was

just the way they did it and that I did not have to listen if I did not want to. They advised me on ways to keep busy, like cleaning out the left over food particles from the fryer, cautioning that *si no te mandan a la casa* (if not they will send you home). I would typically smile and thank them for their suggestions, but inside I was often rolling my eyes. I did not know how to distinguish between honest and helpful suggestions, and criticisms of my own work ethic, and sadly I interpreted most as the latter. The work ethic of my coworkers was evident, and as Ruth Gomber-Munoz (2002) has observed, an important part of their identity as immigrant service workers. Mine, on the contrary, left much to be desired, and regrettably for me and my rapport-building aspirations my coworkers let me know it.

Indeed, Doña Ariana and I had not always been on good terms. In fact, she had once told a coworker right in front of me “*que ellos podian hacer el trabajo mejor sin mi*” (that they could do the job better without me). I can still remember the sinking feeling her comments caused me, and the awkwardness of the moment as Tony—the coworker in question—withheld his response while turning to see if I had heard what she said. I despised that woman then, and I let her know it by rescinding my help and avoiding all conversation, but even I could not ignore Doña Ariana’s perspective. She proved herself time and again to be a hard, committed, and dependable worker, and although her complaints were always frank, often harsh, and sometimes misdirected, they were backed by sound evidence that others were not. I was, for a time, amidst that group, and hence the subject of both her and her husband Don Daniel’s resentment.

Don Daniel was a tall, dark-complexioned *Mexicano* from the state of Guerrero—not from Acapulco, where the people tend to be “*mas bajito y chinito*” (shorter and curly-haired) as Doña Ariana once clarified, but from an area more inland and proximate to the Michoacán border. “*Si no estuviera por eso, alla estare* (if not for that, that is where I would be), Don

would often lament when the subject of cartel violence was brought up. Yet, truth be told, Don Daniel had spent nearly half his life working in kitchens across the southern United States. He had worked in restaurants in Florida, Atlanta, Texas, and California, once disclosing to me that he had worked in this very same Arctic Taco from 1986 to 1989, earning the prevailing minimum wage of 3.25 an hour the entire time. Don Daniel's experience, the facility with which he worked the kitchen, the speed at which he prepared food, and his ability to remain calm through the most nauseating of business rushes, made him a pillar of our crew. Like a pillar he supported more than his fair share. Unlike one he expressed his resentment in an effort to hold others accountable. He and my lazy ass were doomed to clash, and we did so on more than one occasion; with things finally coming to a head on a Thursday night—or early Friday morning—just over a month into my fast food experience.

At the time, I had not yet accepted, nor been formerly told, that my work schedule was dictated by business—the number of customers who patronized the restaurant—and not the hours that were typed and sometimes handwritten into the black three-ring binder in which our work schedule was kept. As a result, I expected to work from 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. on that particular July night. Unfortunately for me and my stubborn outlook, however, Thursdays were chicken soft taco nights. Three tacos for \$2.09 and you better believe they were flying. I grilled up over 30 pounds of chicken that night and business didn't slow down till well after three a.m. Don Daniel, Fausto, and I weathered the brunt of the rush, with me on the grill, Don Daniel on *primera*, and Fausto taking orders. Nevertheless, with the rush finally subsiding, but our work area still a complete *desmadre* [chaos], I asked Fausto—our shift manager—if I could go home, and it was at that point that Don Daniel spoke up. He told Fausto that I needed to at least clean the grill, sweep the floor, and throw my trash, that he should not be expected to do his work and

mine. Don Daniel's interference with my own escape angered me and I retorted spitefully "*aquí estoy*" [I'm right here] "*y si tienes un problema conmigo, hableme a mí*" [and if you have a problem, talk to me]. Don and I had been quarrelling for several weeks at that point, a dispute played out in a series of under-handed comments, dirty looks, and a refusal to help one another. I thus fully expected him to respond turbulently to my outburst, but to my surprise, and in retrospect offense, Don Daniel did not rebut my contestation. Instead, seeing that I had become desperate, he told me to calm down, that he had not been speaking about me, but of our young Polish coworker who had been off since midnight. I did not believe him then nor now, but I did calm down and ended up cleaning the grill, throwing my trash, and clocking out at 4:32 a.m.

Needless to say, it took some time for Don Daniel and me to settle our differences, but even after we did it was always a bit awkward whenever we conversed. I could never stomach the sexual comments that he often made—although I typically laughed anyway—and I doubt to this day that I ever truly earned his respect. It was thus with some trepidation and a mouth full of tortilla and beans that I sat down with Don Daniel over lunch almost two years later and asked him where the new store he had asked to be transferred to was, and if Bob our regional manager would be the manager there too. He said that the store was on First and Main near the mall in Irvine and that the manager would be a white female. Don Daniel then spoke about some of the reasons he wanted to leave: having to man the taco bar by himself, no raises, constantly being complained about. I asked him if he thought it would be different at the new store and he seemed to think it would. He spoke about how his previous manager had always scheduled two people at the taco bar, and that only since Rene arrived had he been left alone. He spoke about a manager's need to motivate their workforce, identifying his or her best workers and rewarding them righteously. "*Yo vengo a trabajar,*" he said, "*por eso el trabajo no me afecta. Si estamos*

ocupados es mejor por que va el tiempo mas rapido. Pero cuando hay unos que hacen mas trabajo que otros, pero los pagan igual, eso no es justo.” (I come to work, he said, and for that reason the work doesn’t bother me. If we are busy its better because the time goes faster. But, when there are some who do more work than others, but they pay them the same that isn’t right.) Don Daniel then asked me how much I made. I replied “8.25 Don,” and he responded “*pues sabiendo lo que sabes Eudelio si viene otro que no sabe nada como lo van a pagar lo mismo?*” (Well, knowing what you know Eudelio, if someone else comes that doesn’t know anything, how are they going to pay them the same?)

I could not help but agree with what Don Daniel was saying, and I told him so that night, but although he insisted that Rene would have to schedule two people to replace him, I knew that this would most likely not come to pass. That the restaurants labor-time limits were controlled by corporate, and that if Rene, or any other unit manager failed to abide by them, he would be putting his own job at risk. In fact, I later learned that Hector, the manger referenced in Don Daniel’s denunciation, was relocated for just that reason.

Don Daniel transferred a month and two days later. He had been growing increasingly disgruntled as the day of his transfer approached and I did not attempt to engage him much in his last hour. He was busy telling everyone that he wasn’t really leaving, that they had not offered him enough hours, but I think he just didn’t want to draw attention to himself. When he left that Wednesday night at a little after 12 a.m., he walked right out the front door without saying goodbye to anyone. I, nevertheless, saw him two days later when he came to drop off his wife who still worked with us.

After Don Daniel transferred, Doña Ariana began covering his old shifts. Her husband’s absence, my improved work ethic, or the simple fact that we were working more hours together

sparked some camaraderie between us, and over the next couple of months she shared various details from her personal life. I learned, for instance, that she was from a family of some standing, with assets in both gold and the production of jewelry. That the recent increase in cartel-related violence had left many fleeing her native community, and that as recently as the summer of 2011 her sister had abandoned a fully-stocked shoe store in order to seek refuge in Toluca, Mexico. Doña, herself, was in the United States on an expired tourist visa, but since she was not permitted to labor she worked under the social security number of a friend. Her name, at last, was not Ariana, but rather Lupe, a name I had heard Don Daniel mistakenly call her a couple times in the restaurant.

Doña Ariana, or rather Lupe, said that she, Don Daniel, and their youngest boy shared a two-bedroom apartment in Santa Ana with their eldest daughter, her husband, and their two children. She said that her daughter did not speak English well, but that she had an office job, which we both agreed was better than fast food. Their youngest was 14 and about to enter high school at Siglo High in Santa Ana. She said the boy did not like the United States when they first arrived, that he did not want to speak English and asked to return to Mexico. In Mexico, she said that they would often leave him with a servant girl, and that he was “*bien rebelde*” (a big rebel.) He didn’t like to go to school and his teachers had a lot of trouble with him. Here, she said, he’s much more subdued. He enjoys playing soccer, but she worries that he is too childish and lacks friends his age with whom to socialize.

Notwithstanding Don Daniel’s apparent optimism, however, it seems at last that his relocation did not produce the change his heart desired. For nearly two months to the day of his transfer, Doña Ariana informed us that they were moving to East Texas. I had stopped by work to get some pay stubs for a subsidized childcare application for my daughter and on my way out I

had noticed Chino sitting outside in the picnic area. I sat down to say hi, and on her way out La Brava sat down too. Together we chatted about car problems and as Chino began collecting his things to return to work, Doña Ariana walked out of the restroom. She walked towards us in a slow and methodical manner, and began messaging La Brava's shoulders benevolently as she stood listening to the end of our conversation. After Chino left she sat down, and with her eyes downcast and voice pensive she told us she was moving. That Don Daniel had a brother in Texas and that it was going well for him there. That she would prefer not to go, but Don Daniel wants to. His brother is buying a house and he wants the opportunity to do the same. "*Es que aqui solo hay para la renta*" (it's just that here there is only enough for the rent), she concludes.

Three weeks later Doña Ariana is gone. She calls La Brava on Sunday to say goodbye, and asks her to tell Rene sorry. That she thought she could work until the 28th, but that Don Daniel had arrived and so she had to leave. She tells La Brava that she loves her. Six months later Chiquita tells me that she found Don Daniel on Facebook. His webpage had a couple of photos of him in a Taco John uniform, one of him standing in a friendly embrace with a white man who seemed to be his manager. Chiquita posted on his wall, "*Ahora somos recales*" (now we are rivals). And so it goes. One worker replaces the other, and yet the demographics of the U.S.'s fast food workforce, and increasingly that of its entire service economy, remain remarkably the same; brown in the back, white in the front, functioning together in a not so pleasant albeit highly profitable division of labor.

THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN SOCIETY

And yet, the division of labor in society is not of recent origin. It was not so in 1893, when Emile Durkheim published his dissertation on the subject, and it most certainly is not

today. Instead, it is a concept as old as this country, as entrenched as the people who fought for and achieved its independence, and as sacrosanct as God himself. Verily, Durkheim perceived its first beginnings in the setting apart of the Levites on the behalf of God, their purification, spiritual cleansing and social demarcation per his instructions, and the specialized tasks and social role henceforth bestowed upon the Levite clan (Durkheim 1893:133; Numbers 8:5). Though he fails to mention that only eight chapters later God castigates the Levite clan, “splitt[ing] apart [and] the earth [and] opening its mouth and swallowing them alive,” as punishment for opposing Moses and Aaron and questioning their preeminence (Numbers 16:31). Durkheim nevertheless uses their social distinction and vocational separation to denote the inception of a superior social type. One based on the specialization of labor and the concerted efforts of independent craftsmen, in contrast to those based on affinities, and in particular kinship, that characterized the past. Of course Durkheim was himself Jewish, and thus the fact that he perceived the dawning of a higher order in the actions of his own God is likely to strike some as suspect. To accuse him so, however, would be to deny the clear and concrete advantages brought about by the division of labor. Indeed, it would involve denying society itself. For how else could such an entity have developed, but through the concerted efforts of the farmer, the builder, the weaver, the cobbler, and the doctor? It was this division of labor that was at the heart of Socrates’ kallapolis—that utopic city and/or *polis* argued by Plato to be the destiny of man (Plato 1992)

According to the chief protagonist in *Plato’s Republic*, Socrates, cities and/or societies come to be because no man is self-sufficient. Possessing limited skills and many needs, we come together to live as partners and helpers. But because we are not all born alike, but rather each somewhat different in nature from others, and because it is impossible for a single person to

practice many crafts or professions well, we specialize. Focusing on the one thing for which we are naturally suited, and depending on our compatriots to provide the rest. “The result is that more plentiful and better-quality goods are more easily produced” and the development of society as we know it is able to unfold (*Plato’s Republic* 1992:44-45).

In reality, however, we know that no two jobs are alike. That the differences between a cobbler and a doctor are actually quite profound, and that for many—if not most—work is far from a passion; serving principally as a means to end. Plato, and his mentor Socrates, certainly knew this as well, for included in their city was a class of people “whose minds alone wouldn’t qualify them for membership but whose bodies are strong enough for labor” (*Plato’s Republic* 1992:46-47). These so-called “wage earners” completed the kallapolis, attending to rich men like Plato and Socrates, and performing the menial tasks which men of their class were by birthright above.

Based primarily on arguments advanced in his *Republic*, historians of economic thought have long considered Plato an early proponent of the division of labor. Yet, while Plato clearly recognized the economic and political benefits of such an arrangement, some believe he ultimately critiqued this system of organizing labor insofar as it hindered the individual from ordering his own soul (Silvermintz 2010). That being true would not make Plato the only intellectual to author conflicting testimony on the division of labor. Even the father of modern economics, Adam Smith, bemoaned the “mental mutilation” and isolation brought upon workers confined to the performance of a single repetitive task. Like many others including Durkheim, however, Smith ultimately reasoned that the economic, material, and intellectual gains accrued from the division of labor far outweighed their costs. That the specialization and concentration

of workers on a single subtask led not only to greater productivity but also skill, and that these two features were essential to the development of modern society.

Still, Durkheim remained conflicted. He argued that it was “because we have generally perceived no other function of the division of labor, that the theories that have been put forward regarding it are to this extent inconsistent...If the division of labor is not good, it is bad; if it is not moral, then it must represent a falling away from morality...We fall into unresolvable contradictions, for the economic advantages it affords are set against moral disadvantages. As we cannot subtract these two heterogeneous and incomparable quantities from each other, we cannot tell which one takes precedence over the other” (Durkheim 1893:15). Taking the standpoint that the division of labor represented a general biological fact. One found in organisms as well as societies, “the conditions for which must seemingly be sought in the essential properties of organized matter” (Durkheim 1893:3), Durkheim went about circumventing this impasse by focusing his analysis on the division of labor’s functions. “That is, the social need to which it corresponds” (Durkheim 1893:6).

With respect to the division of labor’s economic advantages, Durkheim arrived at much the same conclusion as his theoretical predecessors. Reasoning that it was the division of labor that brought about the necessary conditions for the intellectual and material development of modern industry, and that it thus represented one of the key sources of civilization. Unlike them, however, Durkheim was a sociologist. A man deeply preoccupied with the scientific acceptance of the discipline he helped to create, and one equally engrossed with human solidarity and in how societies could maintain their integrity and coherence in modern times. His answer to the modern moral gap created by the rise of industrialization and the concomitant decline of traditional social and religious ties was, at least in 1893, the division of labor in society.

Durkheim contended that the divisions of labor's "true function" lie in the linking of otherwise independent individuals to one another, the creation between them of a feeling of solidarity, and the "establishment of a social and moral order sui generis" (Durkheim 1893:17, 21). That by conforming to this law societies yield to a movement that arose long before they existed. Not a mere social institution whose roots lie in the intelligence and will of men, but one grafted into their economic and material existence, and fundamental to their social stasis. Durkheim thus challenged "certain moralists" of his day, chiding them for their failure to perceive the biological basis of the division of labor as well as the relationship between it and their own social and professional positions. Accentuating the alienation inherent in the industrial work process and the inequality and violence perpetuated by social hierarchies, such theorists unwittingly criticized the very apparatus responsible for the development of the sciences, and thus their role as scientists.

But, what if the division of labor fails—as in the case of fast food—to beget unity? What if rather than creating solidarity, it creates conflict? Well Durkheim had an answer for this too. Reasoning that like all social and biological facts, the division of labor does manifest "pathological forms," but that such conditions are only produced "in exceptional or abnormal circumstances" (Durkheim 1893:291, 307). When relations between labor and capital are not regulated, or when some form of "blocking environment" is interposed between them (Durkheim 1893:304). Of course, Durkheim himself admitted that matters were far from where we see them today, that the workshops of his day did not contain "enemy races," and that the development of large-scale industry was only just beginning to take flight (Durkheim 1893:293).

FAST FOOD IN THE 21ST CENTURY UNITED STATES

As indicated in chapter one, the U.S. fast food industry today is the epitome of large scale. Employing millions of American workers directly and helping to employ even more through its effects on tertiary industries like meat processing, and cattle and potato production.⁹ Its industrial ascension and gradual advancement within the American food system, however, were far from guaranteed. The industry's chief mainstay, ground beef, was a product largely considered disreputable in the early 20th century. Journalistic exposes, considered by some to be maligning, depicted the U.S. meat packing industry as a business brimming with corruption, one made putrid by both the smell of animal carcasses as well as the outright disintegration of its workforce (Sinclair's *The Jungle* 1906). The U.S. public was thus reasonably suspicious of the industry and its products. Ground beef was especially dubious, with many believing that its ground up nature was attributed to it consisting of spoiled or otherwise unsavory forms of meat. Fast food restaurants, and their principle mainstay the hamburger sandwich, were hence from the beginning not an easy sell.

Exactly who invented the hamburger sandwich remains a controversial topic, one attributed to a handful of men depending on the author. Just who was responsible for overhauling the product's image and making fast food restaurants our preferred way of consuming this dish, however, can largely be attributed to J. Walter Anderson and his partner Billy Ingram. Together these two Midwestern entrepreneurs created White Castle, our nation's first vertically integrated fast food restaurant (Hogan 1997). By standardizing and exercising strict control over all essential elements of their business, from the construction and layout of buildings, to the production of meat patties, and the baking of hamburger buns, Anderson and

⁹ Much of our nation's cattle production winds up in fast food wrappings, with hamburgers comprising more than 75 percent of the total beef consumed away from home in this country (Hogan 1997).

Ingram achieved a level of uniformity unparalleled by any other food service operation at that time. Ensuring that White Castle products served in the company's home city of Wichita would be indistinguishable from those served in other areas. Moreover, a streamlined menu of hamburgers, coffee, Coke, and pie, allowed for reasonably prompt service, and daily meat deliveries and buildings constructed of white enamel brick helped to divert the enduring stigma associated with ground beef and burger joints in general.¹⁰

Ingram, who bought Anderson out in 1925, was especially fixated on the aspect of selling, which he considered the most important part of his business. He designed standardized procedures for nearly every aspect of employee and customer interactions, directing his operators to begin their salesmanship immediately after the customer had entered the restaurant and urging that they be on alert for opportunities to sell additional products. Invoking modern sales techniques like upselling, which is standard practice in most fast food and other retail establishments today, Ingram advised his operators to always recommend another type of food that could complement a customer's order, particularly stressing the sale of coffee since it had the largest profit margins. Ingram and his White Castle system proved incredibly successful, even despite the Great Depression, and by 1934 the company had ballooned to 130 outlets, a workforce of more than 500 employees, and annual payroll of more than 1 million. All more than any other fast food chain at that time (Hogan 1997).

World War II brought about serious challenges for the world, the nation, as well as White Castle and the incipient fast food industry. Labor shortages and the rationing of meat were two of the most acute. The latter led to burger chains experimenting with new products, including

¹⁰ The idea of using white paint to promote cleanliness was already a norm for the interior of lunch counter businesses, but White Castle was the first to take "this technique a step further by proclaiming a white, sanitary atmosphere on the outside" (Phillip Langdon, *Orange Roof, Golden Arches* (1986), pp. 9-10).

potatoes and fried egg sandwiches, the former lead to changes in the perception and demographics of fast food employment that continue to endure today.

Although seldom recognized, fast food was, at least prior to World War II, an adequately paid working class career that offered health and other benefits. It was, in addition, predominantly male. The U.S.'s entrance into World War II altered this dynamic, propelling many former fast food operators into higher paid defense plant jobs, or into the military itself. Though White Castle increased its operator's wages early in the war, it could not keep up with the higher pay offered by industry, which more than doubled between 1941 and 1942. In only two years the U.S. progressed from operating in a depression-era economy, with an unemployment rate of almost 20 percent, to suffering from a labor shortage with workers needed in nearly every area of the economy. White Castle responded to this predicament by hiring younger and less desirable male workers, resorting for the first time to the employment of teenagers.

Productivity and profit both fell as a result of this new and less skilled and mature workforce. What is more, laziness, absenteeism, and even theft began to pervade the industry. After male worker pools became exhausted in the mid-1940s, White Castle finally began hiring females. Ingram had since the founding of his company adamantly refused to hire women, setting the standard for the entire fast food industry at that time. With labor shortages on the verge of shutting some of his restaurants down, however, he was forced to reconsider his views, and on September 24, 1942 the first female White Castle employee was hired (**cite**).

The feminization of White Castle, and the U.S. fast food industry in general, was swift. By the spring of 1943 most castle operators were already female (Hogan 1997). This gendered transition worked so well that women and teens became a permanent part of the industry's

workforce. Its effects on the terms fast food employment, however, were quite grave. American companies thought it perfectly acceptable in the 1940s to pay women less than their male counterparts, and to keep wages uniformly low in industries in which women predominated. Such blatant gender discrimination was commonly justified by the belief that the primary responsibility of American women should be that of wife and mother. Because they composed an increasing proportion of the fast food industry's workforce, therefore, fast food employment was soon reclassified in the collective conscious as "women's work," leading to significantly lower wages and diminished self-respect.

Although Japan's surrender in 1945 was by any account a joyous day for all Americans, the ending of the war forced Ingram to face the fact that his White Castle system had shrunk by nearly half. In 1935 Ingram owned 130 castles in 16 cities. Ten years later this number had dropped to 87 in 12, and system-wide sales were down nearly 30 percent (**cite**). Aside from a few brief attempts to "remasculinize" the industry, moreover, women remained overwhelmingly behind the counters. With much of the world in shambles, and American factories producing needed items at maximum rates, most men in postwar America could easily find employment at much higher rates elsewhere (Baritz 1982:182-85). And as the troops began to return home even former operators refused reemployment at White Castle, choosing instead to relocate to other regions of the country or opting to go to college on their GI benefits. At any rate, the majority of company officials were satisfied with their women employees, citing both their greater efficiency and dependability. The plight of these women and their teenage comrades, however, would grow progressively worse as the larger franchised chains began to blossom in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Post WWII America was a time of unfaltering growth, both economically and demographically. Many new fast food restaurant chains were established at this time, including: Tommy's, a Los Angeles-based chain specializing in the chili burger, In-N-Out Burger which was launched in Baldwin Park, California, and Jack in the Box which opened in San Diego in 1951, and currently ranks among the 15 largest fast food corporations. By far the most successful of these industrial newcomers, however, was McDonalds.

Founded by two transplanted New England brothers named Richard and Maurice, McDonalds originated as a burger and barbeque drive-in located in San Bernardino, California. Like other drive-ins of the day, the restaurant was designed to accommodate patrons who dined in their cars. Female carhops were thus employed to take orders and serve food, which was purchased from an extensive menu of items and prepared by skilled short-order cooks. Initially, the restaurant was quite profitable, but eventually competitive pressure and changing economics caused sales to decline, and in 1948 the brothers elected to close their drive-in and rethink their concept.

Certain that their target audience should be families, the brothers set about creating an environment that would encourage suburbanites and discourage groups of teens, who did not purchase much anyway. Consequently, they did away with their female carhops, banned jukeboxes, vending machines, and telephones, and focused their attention on reducing expenses and increasing profits through improved efficiency. A central feature of their "Speedee Service System," was the industrial assembly line popularized by Henry Ford. This model was essentially a manufacturing process broken down into individual simplified tasks, sequentially organized so that the motion of workers was minimized and their responsibilities limited to the performance of a single repetitive task. Ford had successfully employed this system of

organizing labor to the effect of increasing factory output, decreasing costs of production, and lowering the overall cost of the Ford Model T, which played an integral part in the diffusion of the automobile in American society. Richard and Maurice McDonald achieved a similar fate, creating a highly profitable system of fast food preparation that remains the basis for the industry today.

Ultimately the brothers wanted to make food faster, sell it cheaper, and spend less time worrying about replacing cooks and carhops. Being a short-order cook took skill as well as training, and good cooks were in high demand. Their system was thus set up differently. Instead of using a skilled cook to make food quickly, it used lots of unskilled workers, each of whom performed one specific step in the food-preparation process. This division of labor into relatively small tasks that could be performed with a minimum of training, meant that employees were essentially interchangeable and that they could easily be shifted from one task to another. The model created a militarized production system based on a workforce of teenage boys, some of whom were responsible for heating hamburger, others for pouring soft drinks and shakes, and still others for placing orders in paper bags. Moreover, the Speedee system disregarded indoor seating, it streamlined the menu down to a few low cost items, including 15 cent hamburgers and 19 cent cheeseburgers both of which came with the same condiments, and thereupon provided customers with fast, reliable, and relatively inexpensive food.¹¹

After a slow initial response, in part the upshot of unaccustomed patrons adjusting to the novel concept of self-service, the brother's new low-priced, fast service, limited-menu hamburger stand caught on, and by the mid-1950s McDonalds was achieving annual sales of over 350 thousand dollars. Reports of its phenomenal success spread quickly, and as of a result

¹¹ McDonald's prices, which included a 12 cent bag of fries and a 20 cent shake in addition to 15 cent hamburgers and 19 cent cheeseburgers, were not raised for nearly 20 years. The first increase in the price of the hamburger (to 18 cents) was not put in place until 1967.

many future fast food entrepreneurs visited the San Bernardino site with the intent of imitating the brother's system. Among these individuals were Matthew Burns and Keith Cramer who later founded Burger King, Carl Karcher the namesake and future owner of Carl's Jr., Glen Bell who later developed Taco Bell, and of course Ray Kroc, the founder and future owner of the modern McDonalds Corporation, which he bought from the brothers McDonald in 1961 (Anderson and Kroc 1992).

In reality, the brothers began selling franchises based on their new design even before they had completed construction on the San Bernardino site. In fact, the oldest operating McDonalds restaurant today, an establishment located in Downey, California, was franchised not by the McDonalds Corporation, but by the McDonald brothers themselves. Starting in 1953, however, they began advertising their franchising offers in several national restaurant magazines. Ray Kroc, a multi-mixer salesman from Illinois, noticed one of these advertisements and decided to visit the San Bernardino operation to have a closer look. He came away from his visit impressed, and in 1955 became McDonald's national franchising agent, selling himself a McDonald's franchise that he located in Des Plaines, Illinois.

Of course, franchising is essentially expansion through the use of other people's money, and thus some of the growth achieved by chains like McDonalds, Pizza Hut, and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) can be attributed to this. The rest, however, is the direct result of going public. Following the initial public stock offerings of KFC in 1964, McDonalds in 1965, and Pizza Hut in 1969, each of these chains boomed. KFC grew from 1000 stores in 1965 to 4000 in 1971, McDonalds grew from 738 stores in 1965 to 2272 in 1972, and Pizza Hut expanded from just over 250 units in 1969 to more than 2000 stores by 1976 (Emerson 1990). The infusion of new capital through IPO allowed for both store growth as well as increased investment. Television

sets had become commonplace in American homes during the 1950s, and businesses soon discovered their value as a means of advertising. Almost without exception, fast food companies used their advertising dollars to reach children. Though conventional marketing wisdom held that children did not have money and thus did not warrant being advertised to, what Ray Kroc and others discovered was that children possessed “pester power,” and that they often determined where their families ate. With these insights in mind, fast food companies resolutely went after the children’s market. Radio and television advertising became an integral part of fast food’s marketing approach, and money spent on advertising proliferated. In fact, according to Robert Emerson (1990) and Eric Schlosser (2001), McDonalds is the most heavily advertised brand name in the world, spending more on advertising and promotion than any other company (Smith 2008).

Already corporate powers in their own right, the growing profitability of fast food chains made them attractive acquisition targets for the corporate behemoths that systematically purchased them in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In some cases these larger food operators may have realized that the growth of fast food in America meant more consumers eating away from home and thus a decrease in their traditional market base of raw food products. Either way, the trend proved incessant and the selling of Burger Chef to General foods in 1968 unleashed a title wave of corporate buyouts. KFC, Burger King, A & W, Hardees, Arbys, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell were purchased over the next decade. The latter two by the same corporate conglomerate, Pepsico. Predictably, chain dominance within the industry intensified with the largest fast food chains achieving superior sales growth and increasing their share of the market more rapidly than their independent counterparts.

The story of fast food in the 21st century U.S. is thus largely one of corporate domination. It is an industry dominated by well-financed professionally managed chains, and one based fundamentally on the distinction between labor and capital. Within its confines, capital exists as a fixed factor of production, one capable of being idled during declines in demand, but never laid-off. Whereas labor operates as a variable factor, one simply released and/or sent home when sales are down. The significance of this industrial adage is that employees are forced to bear a disproportionate share of the cost of economic variation and fluctuations in demand (Piore 1979), the latter of which is customary to restaurants and food service in general. It is workers who are asked to go home when sales are down, and in the instance of an unexpected rush it is they who are in turn called on to make amends.

The correlation between this business structure and the hastened, hazardous, low-paying, and often incessant nature of fast food work today, hinges in part on the process of work routinization. Aided by royalties earned through franchising and increased capital through public stock offerings, most chains have mechanized all functions in their restaurants. Equipped with frozen patties, automatically timed cookers, computerized cash registers, and a series of premeasured soft drink servers and utensils, fast food employees need only rudimentary knowledge of the food preparation process, or the simple awareness of what button to push when preparing fries, chicken, or fish, to begin. This, of course, does not mean that workers sit around waiting for their respective bells to chime or timers to ring. Industrial automation is, ultimately, labor saving, and such investments would never be contrived nonetheless employed without the presumption of saving the company money. Employees are thus impelled to simultaneously make themselves useful in other ways. Be that washing dishes, mopping floors, cleaning bathrooms, throwing trash, or taking care of *preparacion*. Those who prove most willing to do

so are awarded with hours. Those who prove otherwise are relegated to the store's part-time ranks, limited to 10, 15, 20, or 25 hours per week, and invariably the first to be dismissed when sales are down.

CONCLUSION: SHE DIDN'T EVEN SAY GOODBYE

In fast food restaurants like Arctic Taco, Mexican immigrants often occupy all positions within the labor hierarchy. Those lacking English-speaking skills or immigration documents, however, are often segregated into the most labor-intensive jobs, expected to endure conditions that native workers would simply not support, and generally forced by a combination of precarious economic circumstances and a lack of alternatives to do so. Their sheer abundance, however, along with the onerous nature of fast food work and of immigrant life in general, results somewhat surprisingly in intra-ethnic exploitation and a general disregard for the individual struggles of members of this group. A lesson I first learned from my friend Ramona.

Ramona was perhaps my first fast food friend. At a time when Doña Ariana and I were at odds and Don Daniel and I not speaking, Ramona was patient, open, talkative and even helpful. It was from her painstaking lessons that I first learned the tricks of working *primera*, and it was from our enduring conversations that I first became aware of the politics revolving around the restaurant. Of course, from the beginning I could see, or rather hear, the maneuvering going on around me. Whether exemplified in Don Daniel's late arrivals in protest to Rene cutting his hours, or Lizzy's awkward strokes in objection to her not wanting to sweep. It was from Ramona, however, that I learned the *chisme* (gossip). That the real reason Chino was allowed to only work the front, and generally mess around, was because Rene worked at the Arco gas station that Chino managed on the weekends, that the real reason Doña Marta and Doña

Mari no longer spoke was because Doña Marta had told her about the rumor of Tony messing around, and that the real reason Santos and Miguel Angel no longer worked together was because Miguel had complained to Rene that Santos never helped him.

Nonetheless, a mere seven months after we first worked together Ramona was also gone. She had told me a few weeks before she left that she was planning on taking a “*descanzo*” (break) but I had thought that she would at least say goodbye. She didn’t, and she didn’t say bye to Doña Marta either. I remembered a conversation we had two weeks before she quit. We were talking about Doña Marta and I told her how I thought that they were good friends—they seemed to talk a lot and to enjoy one another’s company—but Ramona responded that they were not. That she had no interest in being friends with anyone, since she could ill afford to look after anyone else’s interest but her own, and that in end people would only slander her. “*Yo hablo de ti, tu hablas de mi, Doña Mari habla de nosotros, y todos estamos contentos,*” (I talk about you, you talk about me, Mari talks about us, and we are all content) she said. And yet content is not how I would describe Ramona nor any of the people I met over my fast food stint. In fact, everyone I came to know and talk to, from the store’s general manager on down, wanted out of the industry. But what else could they do? Collect cans, clean homes, take care of other people’s children; all jobs that pay the minimum wage and sometimes less.

CHAPTER 3: Jale de los Pobres (Work of the Poor): Pressure, Fatigue, and Fallout in the U.S. Fast Food Industry

Its 5:30 on a Saturday morning in mid-December. The sun is not yet up and people are not yet out, but the sky's violet tone hints at their rapidly approaching ascension. Amid the morning twilight and trash-strewn parking lot, Arctic Taco protrudes like a beacon; its illuminated edifice and 'Open 24 hours' neon sign signal humanity in a land of slumber. As I walk through the restaurant's familiar door I wave and smile sheepishly. It has been over a month since I last visited my fast food comrades and I feel bad for not having done so. But their inviting smiles and forgiving faces ease my discomfort and as I wipe my feet and walk toward the counter I realize that not much has changed.

Pelon, a mid-20s Mexican male from the state of Puebla who immigrated to the U.S. at age of 15, is mashing beans. One item along with scrambled egg, diced tomato, prepared quesadillas, pico de gallo salsa, and grated cheese that he is expected to leave for the ensuing shift. Reina, an early 30s Mexican female who is married to a Nicaraguan man and has a two year old daughter named Madison, is mopping the floor, drive-through headphones affixed to her head and receiver fastened to her belt. And Andre, a mid-20s Chicano who was raised in Anaheim and graduated from Loara High School, is sitting at a booth with his head down, eyes closed, and face nestled into his arms which lie folded on the table.

As I stand at the counter engaging Pelon and La Reina in conversation, Andre slowly raises his head. Signs of sleep deprivation are written onto his face. His eyes are yellow and pink veins striate across them like jet streams in the sky. As the familiar bell from the drive through chimes, I leave my friends to their work and walk over to Andre's booth. He has been off since three a.m., but since he has no car and depends on public transportation, he has to wait

until the morning to catch the first bus home. It will take Andre two and a half hours by bus to traverse the 18.6 miles to the apartment in Anaheim he shares with his father, sister, brother in law, and two nieces. He will shower upon his arrival and then lay down to sleep. Though he mentions that he sometimes experiences difficulty sleeping, particularly when his cancer-stricken father with whom he shares a bedroom begins to cough, Andre will attempt to stay down for about four hours before rising to eat, change, and catch the bus back for his shift that starts at eight p.m. Although he has over five years of fast food work experience and possesses the acumen, language-skills, and wherewithal to perform all duties in the restaurant, all this human capital earns Andre just eight dollars an hour with no benefits of any kind. His erratic hours and low pay afford him little economic security and even less disposable income with which to construct a social life. When I asked him, in an interview a month later, what he finds most difficult about his fast food employment. He mentions the irregular hours, the pace of the work, and trying to make people's food on time.

Like graveyards, you know. You have to do the prepping, the cleaning, and when you're cleaning and customers are coming in and you're trying to finish everything before the time you have to go. And for me, like the only transportation I have is mostly the bus. There are times my sister will give me a ride or I'll ask a friend, you know, but I don't like to bother them. And seriously dude, it's like I'm not even able to sleep. Like, I'm barely getting off, *este, de un dia para otro* (like, from one day to the next). I go home *y apenas tengo tiempo para llegar a mi house* (and I barely have time to get to my house), like change and everything, and then I have to come back. Then there are times that they schedule me for certain hours and then all of a sudden they'll change it, just

because another person wasn't able to, you know. So it's like what's the point of them even working there if they're not going to be able to. Even though I know they sometimes ask for the day off or stuff like that. They only, like every time they need somebody they call me, or like even if they don't even need me they still call me. Just cause I don't (his voice tapers off), because they think I don't have a life. Like, they think I'm able to do whatever they want.

With such terms of employment, Andre joins millions of other American workers at the bottom of the U.S.'s postindustrial economy. In some ways, however, he is lucky. Single, childless, and living with family, Andre lacks many of the pecuniary demands that impinge upon Pelon, La Reina, and many others I met along the way. Still, like them he struggles. He is often left pondering the impossible financial accounting of his life, reflecting upon whether to pay his phone bill, the rent, food, or a bus pass, and often despondent about his inability to get by.

When I met Andre he was dating Karissa, a part-time cashier at the restaurant who was attending a local university. Like most of his relationships, however, their romance quickly fizzled. She apparently grew frustrated with his delicate financial situation and his inability to take her out. She asked him to get his license and a better job, and when Andre was unable to do so, she broke it off. He says he thanked her for the opportunity to get to know her, but the lingering pain of their breakup was evident to anyone who saw them work together. The night Andre told me of his breakup with Karissa I asked him why he never got his license. He said he once passed the written exam, but could never get ahold of a car for the driving portion. His father had an early 1980s Ford F-150, but the truck had been without a transmission for several years.

Though separate and distinct, Andre's relationship woes were not exceptional. Rather, relationship issues were a recurring theme not only for my fast food comrades, but for me as well. The highly stringent, low-paying, and flexible labor arrangements that prevail in fast food restaurants leave workers at the behest of business. Being available on short notice and for odd hours, typically during the evenings and at night, is one of the few ways to secure work hours. As you can imagine, these terms of employment play havoc on home and family life, reducing opportunities for quality time spent with friends, family, spouses, and lovers, and forcing some to pick up additional hours in other restaurants or alternative occupations in order to make ends meet.

FAST FOOD AND FAMILY LIFE

My wife was extremely happy when I quit working fast food. In fact, she is the central reason I have never gone back to it. Through the ups and downs of writing about the industry, I have thought many times of returning to relive my experiences. With two daughters, one of whom is an infant, however, it is important that I am home and awake to help out. Working nights and weekends and often sleeping till noon, I typically was not. Even when I was, however, I was often groggy, irritable, and impatient. Sleep deprivation will do that to you, sapping you of your vitality and causing you to do things and act in ways you normally would not. Sadly, this is the department that fast food sometimes creates, zapping workers of their exuberance and leaving their children and partners with the residual. Dark-complexioned with a medium build and blond highlights running down her waist-length hair, Doña Flor's story exemplifies this fast food premise better than any other.

Like many of my fast food relationships, Doña Flor and I did not immediately get along. It was obvious to her, me, and everybody else that she handled a much larger workload than me, and I didn't always do my best to help her out. When she began covering for Ramona when she quit, however, I slowly began to learn more and more about her.

Originally from Mexico City, Doña Flor immigrated to the U.S. after becoming pregnant with her first daughter. According to La Doña, she informed the father of her pregnancy, “*pero el no queria ser responsable*” [but he did not want to be responsible]. She came to Southern California because she had a brother living in the area. She said that she was initially given a work permit, “*pero que ya se vencio*” [but it already expired]. That she had been working in the fast food industry—off and on—for around seven years, and that she chose this Arctic Taco over units closer to her home because she knew Rene's sisters and they told her that he was managing here.¹²

Doña Flor had quit fast food a couple of years prior. Working, for a time, in a *fabrica* [factory] making photo copy machines, but she said she grew tired of the recurrent lay-offs and of not earning enough to provide her daughters with the things they asked for, and so she returned to the industry. In addition to her job at Arctic Taco, Doña Flor ran a paper route seven days a week for which she earned about \$600 dollars a month.¹³ Although she appreciated the extra money, Doña Flor found the job rather taxing. She had to go to Anaheim at midnight to pick up her papers, and typically did not get back from delivering them until six in the morning, which left her only about two hours before her eight a.m. shift at Arctic Taco. Doña Flor's

¹² The importance of social networks as a vital resource for job seekers has long been recognized. In a study of 33 hotels, restaurants, and fast food establishments in urban and suburban areas of Los Angeles County, Roger Waldinger found that virtually all employers relied heavily upon referrals from current employees to hire new entry level workers, especially for kitchen jobs (“who makes the beds? Who washes the dishes? Black/Immigrant Competition Reassessed.” University of California Institute of Industrial Relations working paper 246, April 1993).

¹³ Calculated per week, this amounts to roughly 42 hours of work for less than \$150 per week—way below the minimum wage in California (\$8.00) at that time.

brother, who also worked part-time *tirando papel* (throwing papers), advised her to quit, but La Doña worried about not having enough money to pay for rent, a position she had been in before.

The day Doña Flor informed me of her work schedule, she had arrived home from her paper route at six in the morning. Her youngest daughter April was already awake when she returned, and as Doña Flor opened the door and greeted her child April asked, “*mami has estado trabajando todo la noche?*” (mommy have you been working all night?) Doña Flor replied “Si,” (Yes) and her daughter asked why. “*Por que tengo unas niñas bien tragonas*” (because I have daughters who consume everything) La Doña responded somewhat whimsically. When her daughter learned that her mother would be leaving promptly to her second job, she said “*No te vayas mami*” (Don’t go mommy). Doña Flor did not share how she responded, but I can only imagine how hard it must have been for her to leave her daughter anyway. But left she did, and left she must. For at \$8.75 an hour and \$1,400 a month—before taxes—Doña Flor could little afford not to. That is, if she expects to earn the \$1,300 dollars she needs to cover rent, her car payment, and utilities, not to mention food, insurance, and clothes.

Doña Flor said she used to own a home for which she was paying \$1,500 a month. She lived in it for the better part of four years before losing it during the 2008 housing crisis. Now, she splits the rent and utilities on a two-bedroom apartment in Santa Ana that she shares with her younger brother who is not yet married. La Doña’s daughters were conceived from two different men, neither of whom “*queria quedar con ella,*” (wished to stay with her), according to what Doña Flor said. She told me the eldest of the two had once spoken with her father on the phone. The man told his daughter that her mother never told him that she was pregnant and that if she had he would have come with her. According to Doña Flor, “*eso era pura mentiras*” (that was all lies), but she said her eldest was nevertheless noted for her grave, taciturn, and at times

melancholic attitude. Doña Flor related a story one day about her asking her youngest daughter to describe how her older sister looked, and the child putting a frown on her face to mimic that of her sibling. The youngest of Doña Flor's two daughters—a precocious seven-year-old who La Doña described as “*muy activa y siempre pasiendo pa ya y paca*” (real active and always going from here to there)—was conceived from a man named Rafa who Doña Flor met here in the U.S. Rafa makes his living *cortando pasta* (cutting grass) and since Sundays are his *unico dia de descanso* (only day off), La Doña would often leave her girls with him on that day. This scenario was an apparent inconvenience to Rafa, something that irked Doña Flor and sparked one of our perennial conversations.

Early on into my fast food employment I struggled mightily making conversation. I would often be washing dishes, making quesadillas, or doing some other random thing right next to Doña Flor, Doña Ariana, or Chiquita, and simply not know what to say. I recall thinking this exact thing the day Doña Flor first told me about her problems with Rafa. It started by her asking for my opinion as a man. She asked me if I was separated from my wife wouldn't my daughter take priority in my life? I tried to say that I imagine she would, struggling through my pronunciation of “*imaginare,*” imagine in the future tense. She started to share about the problems she was having with the father of her youngest daughter. How her girls were at his house right now, but that he would leave them there alone so that he could go visit his mistress, or at least that's what Doña Flor thought he was doing. She was fully immersed in his web of lies at the time and reasonably upset. Her elder daughter Brenda had called her while she was on break and told her that Rafa had been gone for over an hour. Doña Flor seemed weary of his lies and selfishness, yet I'm not sure that she wouldn't have preferred to be with him anyway or with someone that would care for her and help her out.

Doña Flor and I spoke for a bit about the situation. I tried to give her my complete attention. I turned toward her, kept eye contact, and tried to ask questions, but eventually duty called us both. Orders came in and we began to fill them. I continued to think about how to keep the conversation going. I asked her if Rafa paid child support, and she said he did and that this was one of the reasons she continued to take the girls to see him on Sundays. Doña Flor reasoned that if she didn't, he could say she wasn't allowing him to see his daughter and his mistress, who was born in the U.S., would begin to tell him to stop paying child support so she could get more of his money. Apparently Rafa already paid the woman's phone bill. Doña's elder daughter advised her to keep taking her and her sister to Rafa's house, too, that way when her younger sister grew up and asked about her father Doña Flor could at least say that she did everything possible to keep him in her life. I thought that was very mature of the girl to say, and La Doña agreed.

Doña Flor was clearly frustrated with Rafa. She needed to share her feelings and she sought me out most likely because there was no else there at the time with whom she could speak. I tried to be honest and sympathetic. I, too, have felt the sting of a bad relationship. In the end, however, I went home early. Business died down, and since I was not half the worker she was, I was told to go home. Knowing that she wanted to leave, knowing that she wanted to tell her daughter's father off, which he certainly deserved, I went home. Leaving her to sulk in her thoughts, one of the many regrets I have from my time spent behind the counter.

A couple of weeks later, Doña Flor brought up Rafa again. I was standing by the roll-away freezer taking all the food out because Rene had asked me to chip all the ice off and clean the device inside and out. She said, "*Recuerdes Eudelio, lo que te estaba diciendo sobre el padre de mi hija?*" (Remember Eudelio, what I was telling you about the father of my

daughter?). I said, “*Claro Doña*” [sure Doña], and she just went back into it. She said her daughter had just texted her and that Rafa had left them alone again. Apparently, he had taken the girls to McDonalds for breakfast, but had not eaten himself, and had left upon their return saying only, “*ahorita regreso*” [I’ll be back in a bit]. Doña Flor said that he was increasingly perturbed by his daughter, that he had no patience with her, “*y que no le caricia*” [and that he doesn’t embrace her]. This really pissed La Doña off, especially since she’d seen him do these things with the children of the women he was seeing. Apparently they even called him dad, which Doña Flor learned through an accidental phone call he made to her while he was with this woman. She says she is not going to leave them with him anymore, but I just don’t know. It almost seems like she’s still in love with him. She says that she is only doing it for her daughter, and maybe this is true, but love can be a bitch, in every language, every culture, and for everyone involved.

Doña Flor and I did not speak too much about Rafa after that. She did not bring him up and I did not want to be obtuse. She mentioned a few months later that the girls still stayed with him on Sundays and that Rafa “*sigue quejando pero yo le digo que no tengo alguien mas*” [still complains, but I tell him that I don’t have anyone else]. Instead, we spoke of our children, what they would be dressing as for Halloween and where we would be spending such and such holiday; of our cars, how expensive it was to maintain them and how ridiculous gas prices were; and sometimes we didn’t speak at all. It’s hard to hold onto a conversation when you are constantly being pulled this way and that by food orders. Plus, Doña Flor always seemed tired, weary, or simply not up to making conversation. I would try to help her out, but I could never match her speed, dexterity, and resilience. Sometimes I felt like I was just in her way. Other times, I would neglect my own responsibilities and end up holding up an order for a lousy order

of fries that I had forgotten to make. Doña Flor said that she typically laid in bed all day on her days off, which were Monday and Tuesdays, and that when she got home from work she was often so tired “*que ni salgo*” [that she doesn’t go out]. I generally did not know what to say. What could I—tell her about my sleeping eight hours a day and watching Sports Center until midnight. About flights home and vacations spent amidst family, friends, food, and what in comparison to her situation would appear as general excess. The privilege of such things embarrassed me, and I was constantly haunted by the questions of what do I do, what do I say, and how do I help?

Ultimately, I had to accept that there was very little I could do for Doña Flor, Andre, or any of the other people I met while working fast food. I was no one to say that their life was bad in the first place, and there was little I could do directly to help them anyway. In the end, all I could do was to be there as a friend, if, in fact, they would take me as such. I could work hard, listen to their problems, and help them out as much as I could, but I could not change their circumstances. I could not give them immigration papers, better employment, or more considerate spouses or partners. Although I often wished I could.

ARCTIC TACO 4.0

About six months before I quit working at Arctic Taco Rene put out the word that the store would be undergoing remodeling, and that there would be an all-staff meeting to introduce the changes. We would be paid for our time and thus expected to show up in a timely manner and in uniform. The meeting took place on a Monday afternoon, and all-in-all about 15 of us showed up. I brought my daughter because I had no childcare, but I was the only one to do so. Rene gave me a queer look, but did not say anything to me directly. He and a visiting general

manager named Jorge led the meeting. Jorge was a stout dark complexioned man with a crew cut and thin mustache kind of like that of Lazaro Cárdenas. He spoke English with little to no accent and carried himself in a very light-hearted manner. Rene, on the other hand, sported a stern expression the entire meeting, something I later attributed to nerves since he spoke nearly the entire time in English.

Rene started the meeting off by talking about how Arctic Taco was taking a new step in their growth as a company. Going off on some choreographed claptrap about all corporations evolving and how Arctic Taco needed to evolve too. Jorge put out two taco salad lids full of candy and Rene said that anyone who answered a question correctly would be given a piece. We were then quizzed on the various things that our customers wanted: cleanliness, food quality, speed, accuracy, etc. Jorge would pose a question, something like what does food quality mean, and one of us would answer it. All questions were posed in English with the exception of one, which Don Cheto answered, and at one point Jorge asked if anyone would like him to translate in Spanish he would, “because he spoke Spanish in case no one knew that.” Tony, who was seated directly to my right, responded “*si por favor*” [yes please], but Jorge never went ahead and translated. In fact, the vast majority of the meeting was conducted in English, while at least four attendees—those who work the most hours and carry the most weight—understood little to none.

Mid-way through the meeting we were split into three groups and given some markers and a big sheet of construction paper. We were told that “Arctic Taco 4.0 was about delivering value, service, and quality.” Each group was then asked to define what value, service, and quality meant to them. I was grouped with Doña Flor, Doña Tere, and Carolina. Doña Tere said at one point for me to come closer so I could write, but I responded that “*todos podemos escribir aqui*” (everyone can write here). Carolina ended up taking the pen and together we related value

to making food with correct portion-sizes; service to a friendly and helpful attitude; and quality to fresh food and items made per customer preference. Carolina wrote down and shared our group's answers, and after a few laughs and some more candy we all clocked out.

Altogether I felt the meeting was rather silly. They spoke about the qualities guests wanted, and how we were the means of providing those qualities and thus essential to the company. Yet on only one occasion did they speak about how they were going to make our administration of a quality guest experience easier. In that instance, Jorge spoke about tool improvements, saying that the company was putting money into tool development. For instance, sauce dispensers that would automatically disperse the correct proportion of condiment into every product. He quickly followed this statement, however, by saying that the company would expect more from us given their investment in new tools. Something that I took to mean as a faster pace of work and instruments that were intended to increase that pace. Neither raises nor increased benefits were discussed, but individual performance sheets, the development and maintenance of employee files, and the development of "A players"—never defined—were. Before the hour meeting was over we were asked to write down three things that we were going to do differently in order to provide a better guest experience. Rene made a copy of these things to put in our employee files. The next time I saw him before clocking in to my next shift he told me to remember the three things I promised, not that he knew what they were.

About a month after this meeting word spread that the store would be closing for two weeks in June for remodeling. Rene said that construction was set to coincide with the end of the school year, ergo a dramatic decline in our customer base, and that the store would be refurbished inside and out. The building would be painted, the food preparation area pressure-washed, and the lobby remodeled and fitted with a salsa bar. Anyone looking to makeup hours

in other restaurants was told to speak to him as soon as possible. Everyone began making plans for our “vacation,” and the store’s closing became my default conversation prompt at work. Doña Flor said she planned to “*descansar*” (rest) because she did not expect the closure to last long. Pelon said he was planning on going to Chicago with his father, a cousin of his was getting married and he had not seen that side of his family in a long time. Chiquita said she was planning on going to Arizona, her husband had an uncle there and they had not visited him in years. I said that I was going to take my family camping, we had just bought a tent and we wanted to check out the Cleveland National Forest.

By the end of the first week in June management had changed the date and duration of the remodel twice, and Rene warned that still nothing was set in stone. This irritated many of us including Chiquita who fretted “*creen que es un juego*” (they think this is a game). A week later Rene informed us that the store would be closing on the 20th of June, and that it would only be closing for four days. I was disappointed by this to say the least, but so was Pelon. He responded in English, “fucked up my plans,” to which I responded “hell yeah.” At long last the store didn’t close until mid-July. By then, of course, most people’s plans were ruined. I still went camping, but everyone else said they just chilled out at home or picked up a few hours in another restaurant.

The first time they changed the date of the store closure, Chiquita said she would be going ahead with her planned vacation anyway. “*Ya avisamos a sus tios y nos estan esperando*” (we already informed his uncles and they are expecting us). Her trip, however, never came to pass. She revealed later that although she was a manager and her position came with paid vacation, she had yet to receive any and had not been paid off for her time either. She said that many—in particular “*los indocumentados*” (the undocumented)—are afraid to ask questions.

Afraid to seek out the services available to them, but Chiquita felt that there was a higher moral order and that there should be limits on what any person has to do to “*hacer la vida*” (to make a life).

This conversation occurred in the midst of a discussion we were having on medical insurance. Chiquita said she and her husband qualified for emergency medical through their U.S.-born children. I did not know you could get any form of insurance without a social security number, but Chiquita assured me that you could and she showed me her state medical card to boot. She said she had not visited a general practitioner in part because her “insurance” would not cover that, but seemed content by the fact that she could get treatment in the case of an emergency. Chiquita asked Pelon if he was insured and was surprised by the fact that he was not. Pelon is applying for U.S. residence through his U.S.-born wife and kids and he offered that because of his tending status he could not collect any state benefits for risk of them rejecting his application. He then added that he never got sick anyway.¹⁴

About three months earlier, Chiquita had been hit on the head by a stainless steel pan while at work. She said she was standing at the wash basin doing dishes when a bean *traste* (pan) fell from the shelf above her and struck her on the crown of her head. I was not working the night of the incident, but Chiquita told me the next day that the blow had brought tears to her eyes. She left work early and went directly to a hospital in Garden Grove to be examined. Her nurse, however, made light of her injury. She told Chiquita that she was fine and that she should have never come in. Chiquita was upset by these comments. She said she had been experiencing recurring headaches since the night of the incident and that she recently saw a

¹⁴ This conversation took place before the implementation of President Obama’s Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Interestingly enough, however, many of my former co-workers continue to be uninsured, choosing to pay the 95 dollar penalty rather the monthly rates charged for insurance.

specialist, but was thinking of canceling her future appointments because they were taking away from her sleep and did not seem to be helping anyway.

Chiquita's injury was brought about by an ill-advised corporate mandate which requested that all dishes be faced; meaning they be brought to the front of their respective shelves and left in line with the front of the counter similar to what you would see at a grocery store. The day Rene informed me of this mandate, he pulled me and Doña Mari into the walk-in cooler and told us in a very serious tone that Arctic Taco had a new vice president and that "the guy likes everything clean and tidy." He proceeded to tell us that all items, including boxes, dishes, cups, and food wrappers were to be pulled to the end of their shelves and faced. This apparently was the vice president's one big thing because this was the end of our lesson and five minutes later Rene gave Cholo the same speech. As one might imagine, however, when both the shelves and pans are made of stainless steel, and when the shelves themselves are located just above the wash sink, such a practice can become hazardous. Specifically for the person washing dishes and particularly when the dishes are wet.

A couple of months after her injury, I arrived at work ten minutes late and informed Chiquita that I had been sleeping as I clocked in. She responded, "*todos venimos igual*" (we had all arrived the same). Later on she told me she had not slept that day at all because she had worked graveyard the night before and had a doctor appointment the following morning. She received a CAT scan for her recurring headaches. She said after her doctor appointment "*tenia que hacer de comer*" (she had to make lunch), and she never found time to lie down. She said she didn't see well anymore and that she thought it might have something to do with "*las desveladas*" (the sleeplessness). I said I did not know about the eyes, but that I agreed that *las desveladas* (sleeplessness) were not good and that whenever I didn't sleep well I had to drink

sugary things to stay up and that that wasn't good for you either. Talk of *desveladas* (sleeplessness) led to talk of life in the U.S., and how "*la vida aqui era pura trabajar*" (life here was all work). Chiquita said she repented her decision to come to the U.S., but that at the time "*yo era muy rebelde*" (I was real rebellious), and things happen for a reason.

Chiquita was born into a family of ten, and was raised in the same town in rural Guerrero as Doña Ariana. In fact, she said her sisters used to clean and cook for La Doña. Currently only four of her siblings remain in Mexico, with the rest spread across northern and southern California, south Texas, and Atlanta. Chiquita was only 14 when she immigrated to the United States. She said she went to Atlanta first, but that she could not get comfortable there in part due to a lack of Latinos. When she came to California she became more confident and began to familiarize herself more. At the time, she had an uncle that was managing an Arctic Taco, and she was able to get her first job through him. Since she was only 14 and without documents, however, she had to first secure a "*permiso chueca*" (fake visa), but this was accomplished rather easily and she has worked with the same social security number ever since.

Chiquita moved in with her eldest brother when she first arrived to California, but she said he never really looked after her. If it had been her, she says, she would have encouraged her siblings to become educated and to learn the language so as to better their lot. Instead, her brother always demanded that she work and pay rent. She spoke about an aunt with whom she lived after her brother moved to northern California. Chiquita said this aunt had borrowed money from her that she never repaid, and how she had taken care of her aunt's girls after she was deported, only for her aunt to tell her upon her return that Chiquita could no longer live with them because they were moving into a smaller apartment and it would be too crowded. The torment of this moment was still evident on Chiquita's face more than ten years later. She said

she was nevertheless respectful to her aunt and that she ended up renting a room with one of her aunt's husband's sisters, but never again brought up the money her aunt borrowed. Chiquita grew up in a family of ten and said they always ate and slept together. Yet for the past 14 years she has not seen her mother nor returned to her home and siblings in Mexico.

A couple of months before this conversation, Chiquita asked me if my wife liked to get her nails done. I was cutting cilantro and she was sitting on a foot stool in the food preparation area while on lunch. I said yes and she showed me these "natural" flower prints she had bought to do nails. They were nice and I asked her how long she had been doing nails. She said that she didn't remember. I thought she might have been thinking that I was checking on her skills, but she went on to say that she had taken a class in Santa Ana about a year ago and that so far she had only done them for her friends and Chris's sisters. She said she was trying to get experience and that she'd only charge us ten dollars. I said cool.

Later on that night while Chiquita was on *primera* and I was on the grill, I asked her if she'd always been interested in cosmetology, pronouncing the word in English because I had no idea how to do so otherwise. Chiquita didn't skip a beat. She answered yes, adding that she would like to get a certificate and maybe learn how to cut hair, but the schools asked for papers and cost up to \$17,000. Before I went home I asked Chiquita where we could arrange the nail thing, whether in Anaheim where she lived or here. She said she would rather come to me because her apartment was small and not properly ventilated, and that the chemicals were dangerous.

On a Sunday afternoon two weeks later, Chiquita, her husband Chris, and their two boys (Christopher and Xavi) came over to the house. They met me after work at five p.m. and I rode along with them over to our house. It took Chiquita about two hours to do my wife Luz's nails.

She did a great job. She took her time and clearly wanted to do well so as to impress Luz. While she worked, Chris and I played outside with the kids. He was a nice guy and easy to talk to. He told me he was 30 and that he came from that state of Hidalgo when he was 17. Chris said he had spent the majority of his time in southern California, aside from a brief trip to “*Carolina del Norte*” (North Carolina) to visit a friend who was now here and to get a license, and short visits to Utah and Arizona. He said he’d spent almost half of his life in the U.S., and that he was used to it here. He had not returned to Mexico since coming, and that his father and mother, great grandfather, and brother and sister were back in Mexico. Chris said he had built himself a house back home and gave the impression that everything was in order for his return, whether he will in fact go, however, seemed very much in the air. Mexico’s economic and increasingly violent conditions troubled him and for now, he said, he stays for his two boys.

Chris was a confident man. He graduated from high school in Mexico and had taken English classes since arriving here. Chiquita spoke of him fondly. She said he was a good man and she was lucky to have ended up with him. Chris worked as a painter/carpenter. He said that his ability to speak English enhanced his work opportunities. Those who can’t communicate in English are more likely to be treated badly he said. He’s done the work for over 12 years and works mostly for himself now. He says it got real slow around 2011, but has picked up as of late. He seemed to really enjoy his work and particularly liked the fact that it afforded him the opportunity to meet a lot of different people and “*conocer a otros lugares*” (become acquainted with different places).

Chiquita was less confident when it came to her English speaking abilities. She explained that she had learned most of what she knew by rote. After working food preparation for three years she was transitioned to the counter and the woman who was training her told her

to put the head-set on and to just listen to what she said, and that's how Chiquita went about learning English. Later, she brought up going through management training and how when they were broken into groups to do some role-playing exercises she didn't know what to do. When they asked her to participate she just responded "I don't know." Truthfully, Chiquita knew exactly what they were asking her to do, but she lacked the words and confidence to articulate her opinions. Her lack of English language skills frustrated her immensely and led her at times to relinquish her management privileges in favor of an apron and food preparation work.

Chiquita worked strictly evenings and nights, which is one of the reasons we didn't get to know each other until about mid-way through my fast food employment. She said Thursdays were the worst because she worked graveyard on Wednesday and had the boys to take care of all day Thursday. She said she gets tired of working nights and weekends, but that Chris's work has not always been steady and when it dies down she appreciates what she has. I asked her if she was able to sleep, and she said yes that her youngest still breastfeeds and that he would stay right by her while she slept during the day, while that the elder one, who is three, watched cartoons. She said he knows not to open the door or leave the house, and that he snacks on yogurt and string cheese, which she buys him specifically for this reason. The same evening that she related this information, Chiquita told me that her pediatrician had informed them that their eldest boy was overweight, and that they needed to change his diet and make him more active. I did not think that the boy looked overweight at all, but still I wondered about his inactivity and its relation to his mother's work schedule and him having to entertain and feed himself at such a young age. Not to mention his restriction from the outdoors during these times.

Three months earlier Chiquita had arrived to work on a Friday evening rather solemnly. She did not say hi to anyone as she entered and seemed to be carrying something with her from

home. Later in the evening I asked her what her family was doing when she left, and she said that she had been waiting for Chris to get home so she could come to work. It sounded like they only saw each other in passing. We spoke about California and rent prices, and Chiquita mentioned that she and Chris had considered moving to Arizona a couple of years back. Chris had an uncle there and she said they were thinking of selling the house they had constructed in Mexico, which was worth about 200,000 pesos, and investing in something there. After Arizona passed SB 1070, however, they were glad that they hadn't gone. Chiquita said that Chris's uncle was still there, but that "*el tiene muchos anos alli y ya esta bien establecido*" (he has many years there and is very established).

Later that evening Chiquita asked me what I ate at home. I said I didn't cook much, but when I did I liked to make soup or sandwiches. I then turned the question on her. She began by saying, "*No, es que yo cocino puras cosas de me tierra, frijoles, arroz, guizados*" (No, its just that I mainly make things from my home, beans, rice, stews). I asked her what Chris made for the kids when she was at work and she said that she usually would cook something for them before she left, but that sometimes she was so tired that she would just buy *Pollo Loco*.

THE BIO-COGNITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Sleep is a fundamental human need. It supports metabolic and physiologic regulation as well as human homeostasis. While a person can voluntarily stop eating until he or she dies, the human body cannot force itself to stay awake. Rather, sleep is incessant. It beckons, it implores, and in the end it overwhelms even the most resolute. In spite of all this, even after prolonged deprivation people can still pull themselves together to perform short-term problem solving or

well-learned sensory-motor skills, perhaps the central reason why some discrimination in sleep has since antiquity been deemed acceptable.

Though it was once believed that the mind simply turned off during sleep or that the soul left the body, contemporary analyses show that there are parts of the brain that are even more active during sleep than during wakefulness. The development of the electroencephalography (EEG) in 1924, an electrode that attached to the scalp and made the reading of electrical impulses emanating from the brain possible, triggered investigations into sleep in major research centers throughout the world. Setting the stage for the discovery and subsequent analysis of brain waves, and leading to the categorization of sleep into two main stages: REM and non-REM.

In humans, REM and non-REM sleep alternate in 90 minute cycles approximately three to six times per night. During the first part of the sleep cycle, REM sleep takes approximately ten minutes of each cycle, but as sleep progresses REM periods gradually become longer and closer together. Non-REM sleep is divided into four stages. As one progresses from stage one to stage four, sleep gets deeper and EEG waves become taller and slower. Stages three and four are often grouped together and called slow wave sleep (SWS). During SWS muscle and eye movements are diminished in comparison to wakefulness, and the EEG is more synchronized, indicating that large portions of brain tissue are firing together. REM sleep is characterized by a desynchronized EEG, a lack of thermoregulation, loss of tone in the skeletal muscle, erections of the penis or clitoris, rapid eye movements, and dreams. As seen by the desynchronized EEG the brain is very active during REM sleep. However, one part of the brain that does shut off during REM sleep is the part of the hypothalamus that is responsible for temperature regulation. During REM sleep, the body does not thermoregulate and therefore does not shiver or sweat. Skeletal

muscles are also less active during REM sleep and thus lose muscle tone. This loss enables the muscles to relax during REM sleep. It also prevents people from acting out their dreams (sleep walking occurs during NREM sleep, when muscle tone is maintained but diminished). Not all muscles lose their tone during REM sleep. The diaphragm, necessary for breathing, continues to contract. Muscles are also active in the eyes: although the lids are closed, the eyes dart back and forth, which gives REM (rapid eye movement) its name.

Although most systems of the body appear to hold up remarkably well to the loss of sleep, our grasp of the bio-cognitive implications of sleep deprivation remain limited by the ethical acceptance of human sleep manipulation. Most controlled studies of sleep in humans apply acute sleep deprivation protocols, while little is known about the consequences of chronic sleep restriction and disruption as they often occur in real life. Though animal models have been used to identify the mechanism by which prolonged sleep deprivation affects behavior, investigators have drawn attention to the importance of differentiated between animal and human responses as well as the human body's distinctive reaction to acute versus chronic sleep loss. Nevertheless, a host of bio-cognitive consequences of sleep deprivation have been identified. All of which are exacerbated by chronic exposure.

Sleep Deprivation is defined as a reduced ability to achieve nocturnal sleep, with increased wakefulness and altered sleep architecture (structure and pattern of sleep) resulting in a decrease in non-REM and short wave sleep (Delves 2009). It has been linked in biomedical research to altered immune function and slower recovery from illness (Benca and Quintas 1997; WHO 2009); inflammation through the increased secretion of pro-inflammatory markers like cytokine which activate the body's stress system and affect brain functioning and metabolic processes (Kamdar et al 2012; Meerlo et al 2008; Mullington et al. 2009); negative effects on

metabolic and endocrine functions which mimic vital factors of ageing and possibly increase the severity of age-related chronic disorders (Spieffel et al. 1999); increased risk to diabetes and hypertension with detrimental effects on glucose clearance and carbohydrate metabolism (Nagai et al. 2010; Spiegel et al. 1999); parasympathetic and sympathetic disequilibrium which results in the maintenance of blood pressure, heart rate, and systemic vascular resistance at higher levels than typical during sleep (Mullington et al. 2009); and cardiovascular consequences due to increased blood pressure and reduced aortic distensibility, both of which are correlated to increased cardiovascular events like heart attacks and strokes (Akdemir et al. 2013). Moreover, cognitive performance and one's ability to store and retrieve new information are also impaired, with notable increases in irritability, lethargy, disinterest, unease, and even paranoia. During periods of sleep deprivation, cognitive alertness declines and individuals appear markedly less alert (Banks and Dinges 2007). Tasks requiring vigilance are adversely affected (Pilcher and Huffcutt 1996; Belenky et al. 2003; Van Dongen et al. 2003), and one's ability to make decisions and carry out usual behavior become more difficult (Banks and Dinges 2007; Stone et al. 2008). Alterations to mental status in a manner resembling depression or anxiety have been noted. As have been increased incidences of falls, car accidents, and so-called problems behaviors like aggression, self-injury, tantrums, and learning problems.

All in all, sleep deprivation seems to affect the body more through attrition than infection. Producing small effects that when combined over time become significant loads, which ultimately shift the brain from adaptation to disease (Meerlo et al. 2008). Interestingly enough, attrition is now the country's de facto immigration policy, and according to some it is working.

ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENT AND THE MOOD AT ARCTIC TACO

The day that Alabama HB 56 went into effect thousands of school children were reported absent across the state, and many workers did not show up for their jobs. In the aftermath, media reports indicated that immigrants who remained in the state were confining themselves to their homes, fearful of driving their kids to school, getting groceries, or seeking medical attention. In response to a question about the “unintended consequences” of this piece of anti-immigrant legislation, Alabama Congressman Mo Brooks responded, “Those are the intended consequences of Alabama’s legislation with respect to illegal aliens. We don’t have the money in America to keep paying for the education of everybody else’s children from around the world.” The Alabama State Representative behind the law, Mickey Hammon, was even more explicit, stating that the intention of HB 56 is to “attack every aspect of an illegal alien’s life.” “It is designed to make it difficult for them to live here so they will deport themselves.”

HB 56, and its better known sister SB 1070 in Arizona, are examples of a new breed of immigration enforcement legislation. Measures that go beyond border security initiatives, focusing their force instead on making life more difficult for the undocumented individuals already living in the U.S. Like HB 56 and SB 1070, as well as Proposition 187 before them, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) was unapologetically aimed at internal enforcement. Making life as miserable as possible for undocumented immigrants and thereby supporting the doctrine of self-deportation.

When viewed through an attrition through enforcement lens, Sara’s *desveladas*, Dona Flor’s irritability, and Andre’s despair emerge as foreseen and expected consequences of the anti-immigrant sentiment reflected in national public discourse (see Chavez 2008) and state laws aimed at immigrants. Public opinion polls taken around the time of the signing of Arizona’s SB

1070 indicated that a majority of Americans were in favor of the Arizona law, and the number of 1070-like bills introduced in the aftermath further that supposition. Yet at the basis of all this political posturing are American families. In 2008, 8.8 million people, including 4.3 million undocumented immigrants (36 percent of the total undocumented population at that time), were members of mixed-status families—families in which at least one member was undocumented. Moreover, 340,000 children were born in the U.S. to undocumented parents in 2009. Ultimately, the only way to ‘get rid of’ the undocumented population is either to integrate those living here by implementing a program to register them and get them on a path to legal status, or to deport them altogether. Either way the U.S.-born children of the undocumented will likely remain in the U.S. Meaning that our decision to make life harder for their parents will be reflected in how and who these children turn out to be. A story reflected in chapter four.

CHAPTER 4: *Asi Es La Vida* (That's Life)

Expounding upon the title of his book, *Life is Hard*, Roger Lancaster states that “implicit social knowledge often takes the form of a proverb. [That] proverbs distill into the shortest and most memorable form a tentative collective agreement on the nature of reality,” and that they often have multiple meanings. Thus common expressions *la vida es dura* can have a range of significations; connoting, “by turn, the banality of suffering, the intimacy of power, the comfort of resignation, and the resilience of the oppressed” (Lancaster 1992:xv-xvi). In this chapter I argue that *asi es la vida* (that's life) accomplishes a similar feat. Indicating at certain times the banality of strenuous low-paying work within the Mexican immigrant community, and at other times the comradeship established between those who share it.

Don Daniel was the first to express the adage *asi es la vida*, doing so initially on a hectic summer night at about 12 a.m. while I vigorously scoured the *plancha* (iron quesadilla press); desperately trying to manage the fine line between leaving my area *bien chingon* (super clean) and singeing my knuckles on the hot metal. I had painstakingly flipped the *plancha* on its top in order to burnish the upper side, an undertaking necessarily performed with the device on and heated to 400 degrees, since grease stains are inherently difficult to remove and particularly so in the absence of heat. As Don Daniel walked through the corridor separating his area from mine, he smiled and hailed “*asi es Eudelio*” as I arduously scrubbed at the stains that had accrued on the appliance from seven hours of broiling quesadillas. Of course, a little melted butter does wonders to loosen up such blotches, but let Rene catch you throwing butter on the grill and *plancha* before burnishing them, and you'll get an earful about rising food costs and shrinking budgets. In fact, we were lucky to be furnished with the appropriate tools. “*Fibra gruesas*,” metal scouring pads about a quarter inch thick designed specifically for the brown-handled

contraption used for burnishing the grill and *plancha*, were a hotly contested commodity. They deteriorated quickly and the restaurant was perpetually running out. Rene blamed us for discarding them too soon. He would deliberately not order more, forcing us into using an inapt *fibra delgada*, a wire scouring pad the width of say a credit card, to do the job. This scenario provoked many a burn and even more curses, as *fibra delgadas* (thin wire brushes) were not thick enough to fit properly under the two metal hooks that extended from the bottom of the brown-handled contraption, compelling whoever's job it was to scour the grill and *plancha* to use a wad of paper towels as a buffer between their hand and the heated cooking surface.

In all honesty, I did not at first understand Don Daniel's aphorisms. In fact, I did not even recognize them as signaling a positive assessment of my work. Sometimes I said nothing at all, and other times I replied simply, "*Asi es, Don.*" In retrospect, however, I believe that some of the confusion I felt with regards to the appropriate response due was the result of the multiple meanings proffered by the saying. You see, in Don Daniels enunciations "*la vida*" was always left implicit, and instead he would either hail "*asi es Eudelio*," as I was busily engaged in some seemingly laborious task, or bemoan "*asi es, Eudelio*"—emphasizing the word "*es*" in the phrase '*asi es*,' and then lowering his voice through the pronunciation of my name. Although small and not overly conspicuous, the difference between these two expressions is actually quite profound, with the former expressing approval and the latter resignation.

While Don Daniel was the first to express the adage *Asi es la vida*, he was by no means the last. By the end of my fieldwork period I'd heard this and other analogous mottos expressed in both English and Spanish by a number of people. *No hay mal que por bien no venga* (things happen for a reason), *hay que trabajar* (you have to work), *dios aprieta pero no ahorca* (God tightens but does not choke), and *asi es* (that's life), were time and again asserted. Yet even in

the wee hours of the morning as I sleepily recorded my recollections of the night, it would occur to me that *asi no es la vida* (that this is not life), or at least that this is not life for the people we serve. Sure everyone has to work, but not everyone has to do so at 8.50 and 9 dollars an hour. Not everyone has to work nights and weekends, and certainly not everyone has to work at the pace fast food workers are forced to do so. Rather these are conditions reserved for a certain class of people, one that due to a lack of education, English-speaking skills, family support, and alternative job prospects, can do very little but accept them as given. This chapter elaborates on the saying “*asi es la vida*” (that’s life), expounding upon its significance within the Mexican immigrant community and U.S. fast food industry, through the story of one of the people I got to know best while working fast food.

LIFE ACCORDING TO GRACE

I worked from 10 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. today. I was only scheduled till three a.m., but we were pretty busy throughout the night and there was no getting out at three for me. I had the fryers filtered by 1:30 and four *trastes* (pans) of chicken stored in the hot box, but customers kept coming and so I kept cooking. Everyone was palpably beat by three and I even heard Pelon let out a “*puta madre*” [son of a bitch] when someone ordered a party pack at about 3:10 am. I stayed on the grill for the most part, with Pelon on *primera*, Andre on drive-through, and Chiquita taking in-house orders and handing out food. Nobody received a break throughout the night, and by two my back was stiff and the heels of my feet ached.

The privilege of our patrons still gets to me, and as a result I often find myself glaring at them through the interstices of the grill station. The privilege of getting drunk, acting stupid, and washing the night away with a late night fast food run, and yet this is a privilege I once enjoyed

and thus I hate what I once was. I don't know how my co-workers keep their composure. You hear occasional sighs, a few *puta madres* (son of a bitches), but in general they just bear it. Some stern-faced, and others with no outward expression of grief besides the sweat on their brow whatsoever, not a sigh, not a word, not even a facial expression. Maybe they know there is no time, or maybe they've just accepted that there is no point to becoming upset. Customers nevertheless come, and orders nonetheless continue.

Last night we were pretty busy too, yet I still managed to clock out at 12:04 a.m. That's the closest I've come to getting off on time since I can remember. I did it in large part by not helping out Grace very much over the last two hours of our shift, which allowed me to mash beans, filter one of the fryers, restock my inventory, and burnish the grill and *plancha* early. Grace was getting hit steadily throughout the night. There was always something on her screen, and I did not see her get 30 seconds to rest. Still, I could only think of myself. I reasoned that it wasn't too bad and that she could handle it. At about 8 p.m., in the midst of an incessant dinner rush, I lamented "*no se como lo haces* Grace, I would be crying" (I don't know how you do it Grace). She responded that she was crying, yet I saw no outward expression of her anguish. At a little before 11 p.m. I went back to the food preparation area to get a spoon to make *juevo doblado* [folded egg], and Grace was back there "catching her breath." She said she had gotten light headed. The work is arduous and too much for one person, yet doing it well and without complaint is the only way to get full-time hours.

Grace has anemia and the story of her diagnosis is emblematic of her childhood. She said she was seven when she began experiencing headaches, and that she would always end up at the nurse's office after lunch when at school. The school nurse told her mother to take her to the

doctor, but Grace said they never went. “They would just take me to the eye doctor and the doctors would always say that there was nothing wrong.”

Grace’s headaches went on for about three to four years, until one night she awoke with a real bad one. She said she told her mother about it and that her mom played a “joke” on her. She told Grace that she was just going to take her to the doctor and drop her off. Grace responded, “You’re just going to drop me off?” And her mother said “Yeah, well I got to go to work.” Grace told her mother that she didn’t want to go to the doctor anymore. Her mother told her she was just joking and that they could still go if she wanted to, but Grace said no. The next morning her mother took her to the doctor anyway and that’s when they found out that she had anemia. The doctor told them that Grace’s anemia was really high. That she was at risk of developing leukemia, and if they could not bring her levels down within the week they would be forced to give her shots. After her diagnosis Grace told her mother, “I wish I had leukemia that way I could die and we would see how you would laugh at your jokes.”

To her mother’s credit, anemia is a condition that under the best of terms often goes undiagnosed, and one can imagine how this would be increasingly so for family’s headed by non-English speakers lacking immigration documents. Nevertheless, Grace remained affected by the incident. She said she felt stupid crying over it, but “it was hurtful that she didn’t believe me.” Grace never again bothered her mother about her headaches. She said her mom would ask, but she would just say that she was fine and that her head didn’t hurt.

Grace was born in Santa Ana, California in 1993. She said her mother migrated from the Mexican state of Hidalgo when she was pregnant, and that they lived in a garage along with her grandparents and an aunt and uncle until she was three. That’s when the family moved to Anaheim, and also when Grace’s stepfather came into her life. Grace described her stepdad as a

nice man. She said “he was not a bad person to me,” just “overprotective. Like he would never let us go out after dark, and when I would hear about my cousins going to Las Vegas or San Francisco or something they would never let us go. They would never let us go with other people but them.” Grace said her mother was always working and that her stepfather would be around the house more. “He would spend his time in the garage,” she said. “Like he would always fix up motorcycles and sell them again. Like buy them, fix ‘em up, and sell them, and it was a good business because he was good at it, and he liked it. Sometimes it was difficult, but he liked it and I guess he would be getting good money.”

Grace’s sister, the first of her three half-siblings, was born soon after the family moved to Anaheim, but as her and her siblings got older Grace said that their parents began to fight a lot. Their arguments were generally about money and on a few occasions her stepfather would hit her mother. At the time, Grace said she was still “at it” with her headaches, and that at one point her mother took her to see a psychiatrist because she thought she was faking them. Grace said she only went to see the psychiatrist once, because “the woman was like you can tell me anything and I won’t tell no one, and I started telling her. Like I’m seriously suffering from headaches, and she started asking me about my mom and I told her that sometimes my stepdad, like once or twice they got physical, and child services were at our door not more than five hours later.”

Grace said her mother was always their family’s primary breadwinner, and that she worked for several companies including TDK, 24-hour Fitness, and Mary Maids, often working multiple shifts. I asked her if and how her mother working so much affected her, and she said it made her miss her a lot. “Like she would always not be around, and even when she was home she would be like cooking, or if she had already cooked she would be sleeping, and I didn’t

really get to talk to her that much, but I still loved her. I mean it's so sad remembering it, but she would always come home late at night and her skin would be so cold, and we grew up in a family where we kissed on the cheek to greet, and I can still remember her cold lips made it feel so warm. Like she's home, mommy's home, and just hugging her and feeling the cold was like the warmest feeling in my heart. But you could say my relationship with her didn't really start until we moved to Mexico, that's when I started making her my best friend."

Grace was 15 when her family moved to Mexico. She said she came home from school one day and her mother told her out of the blue that they were moving. Grace was not happy about it at first, "because it's like really different over there, and I was 15. I was just starting to be with my friends, but my mom said we had to go. I asked her why, and she said I just don't want to live here anymore. And I was like OK, but I don't really want to go, and she said you can live with your grandparent's then, but at the last minute she didn't let me stay and we moved to Mexico." I found it odd that after 15 years of living in the U.S. Grace's mother would suddenly uproot her family and move them to a country they'd never seen or experienced before, and Grace said initially she didn't understand the move either, but that "lots of people do that. Lots of people come from Mexico and just hate living here. Because you're always working, and yeah all of this stuff is nice, but you just get tired. Like life doesn't live up to the American dream, and they just sometimes get fed up, and I think that's what happened to her because she was the one who made the decision and my stepdad just went along with it."

In Mexico, Grace and her family moved into her grandparent's house. She said her aunt had a convenience store and that she worked there until she started school. "It was like a kickback job. Like people would barely come in and then they would just buy like one little thing. I guess you could say I would deal with thieves, but I would just look away because I was

too afraid. I was shy and I guess you could say I stopped being shy when I started working [here]. Because that's life, you have to stop acting childish because your mom is not gonna come here and defend you."

Grace did not enjoy school in Mexico and she did not remain enrolled for long. She said "School was awful there, like they don't give you anything, not even books. You have to pay for your books, your lunch, your bus rides, your tuition, your school supplies, everything, and worst of all are the teachers. Like they don't even show up half the time, and they wouldn't even teach us well when they did, and it kind of pissed me off because I was doing so well in school over here, but over there I was like forget this. Like some of the student would be like 'oh I paid this guy this amount of money and he gave me this grade,' and I would be thinking that's so corrupt. I'm not gonna pay for a grade, and I would even study, but then the answers on the test would be totally different and I would fail a lot, and I remember thinking I don't remember school being this hard, and I just didn't like it. I mean paying money, wasting money for something that I can get for free and do better here."

Grace said not all of her teachers would take money, and that "some would spend their time teaching and one day one of those teachers—I had him for my last semester—he just told us straight out that he wasn't gonna give out grades to people who didn't earn them. He said I know the people who work hard and the people who don't, and why come to school and waste your parent's money just so you can come here, spend time with your friends, and not get good grades. It's not paying them back, and you're just here doing drugs, drinking, and its true lots of kids were drinking over there. They would drink behind the school or smoke, and I took it like why am I wasting my mom's money when I don't even want to go to school anymore. I don't

like the classes, I'm not doing well, I don't like computers anymore, and yeah, I just quit. I didn't go to school for like half a year until I decided to come back to Anaheim."

Despite her experiences with school, Grace said she did not regret going to Mexico. The experience taught her to appreciate what she had and gave her the opportunity to get closer to her mother. "We became like friends," she said. "I wasn't going to school and she wasn't working so we would just hang out, but there was [still] a lot of screaming and yelling and especially problems with my stepfather, and eventually I got tired of it and I left. Like it was a good opportunity to leave and start my own life far away from all the yelling and screaming. [So] I came to live with my grandparents and my uncles, but it was the same situation here because my aunt and uncle were also fighting a lot. So it was like going from one dysfunctional family to another. I mean it wasn't that dysfunctional. It's not like they beat us, but it was just bad. Like when they call you useless or whatever when they're mad. But yeah, I just wanted to forget it. Like when you want to get in your car and drive away, I just got on the plane and never looked back."

There are many factors that prod Latina youth like Grace into the workforce, some spring from positive impulses such as a desire to pay their own way and thereby free their families from the burden of providing their basic needs. Others derive from negative stimuli, such as the urge to flee a chaotic home life. Grace was an example of both, which became clear when I asked her what the hardest part of coming back to the U.S. was. She said "I came with my sister and I just remember we cried, we cried a lot. Like I knew I wasn't gonna see her or my mom anymore, and it was just really hard. The last time I was far away from them was for a sixth grade camping trip, but that was because I knew I was coming back, and this time I didn't. And I don't know, it was just like I thought she was telling me that I was abandoning her and everything, but

I just couldn't take it anymore. So I took the opportunity and left, and I thought it wasn't gonna be hard. I mean I thought I was just gonna live with my grandparents, like in the living room and everything, but no it was actually really hard. I mean lots of people say it's easy, but they don't get used to it, they really don't. One who always had a room gets used to having their own room, and I always had my room. Like I said, we never needed anything. I mean my parents were always fighting over money, but we always had our stuff, like our own stuff. I mean there were times when we didn't have money and we would go to the store and ask if we could pay them back, like get things and pay them back, and I guess I didn't like that. It was, how do you say, just an awful feeling and I remember thinking like if I was over there I would send them money. So basically that's the main reason I came. I had nothing over there. Well I had my mom, but being with my mom all the time was like not wanting to grow up, and I wanted to grow up and I felt there was more opportunity for me to do so here."

Grace returned to the U.S. in May of 2010. She said she did so under the pretense of a vacation, but that her mother knew she wasn't coming back. "She was like you didn't want to be here since the beginning, and back in Anaheim you weren't happy either, so I'm guessing it's us and I won't take it the wrong way, but you're already 18 and I know you're not coming back." Grace told her mother she was crazy, that of course she was coming back, but just two months later she called her mom and told her that she had decided to stay. Her mother said "I told you so, but it's OK. It's your decision, and if you want to do it go ahead. And I was like yeah. I got on the plane supposedly as vacation, but I never looked back."

Grace left most of her things in Mexico and only brought a small amount of clothes with her when she came. She said she thought it was going to be easy, but it wasn't. "Like looking for a job, no high school diploma, no references, it was so hard. Nobody would call you back or

they would just give you a reject letter through email.” I asked her where she had all applied, and she said “Target, Taco Bell, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Dominos, everywhere they were hiring, but nobody hired me.” Grace spent six months looking for work, and only got on at Arctic Taco because her uncle worked at an Arctic Taco in Anaheim and he was friends with Pelon who moonlighted at that restaurant too. Pelon told him that they did need people, that they always needed people, and her uncle told her about it and she came and applied. She still remembered the date that her uncle called her to say that Rene wanted to interview her. “It was the 13th of November,” she said. “I remember I was coming home from school and my uncle called me and said that the manager wanted to give me an interview, and I was like heck it’s better than nothing because I never even got a reply.” She said the day before her uncle called her she had a nervous breakdown. “I just started crying. Like I knew I wasn’t gonna find a job and what was the point, I didn’t want to go back to Mexico. Until the next day he called me, and I thought it was just a joke, but no he gave me the interview and one week later I’m working at Arctic Taco.”

As Robin Leidner, Barbara Garson, Katherine Newman, and many others have argued, the image of fast food as dead-end employment could not be more ubiquitous (Leidner, 1990; Garson, 1988; Newman 1999). This stigma is said to arise not only from the assembly-line structure and de-skilled nature of fast food work today, but also from the low-status of the people often found behind the counter of these establishments, namely, immigrants, minorities, teenagers, and women. Nevertheless for immigrant youth like Grace, who often land in the U.S. with adult obligations already in hand, any job even one as lowly as fast food holds importance. The precariousness of their economic condition, along with the necessity of their maintaining themselves and in some cases their families as well, impels them to endure labor conditions that more privileged workers would simply refuse. Grace related these conditions and how she was

able to overcome them when I asked Grace what her first impressions of the job were. She said “When I first started I was working in the morning, and it was like the busiest time of the day. I would see the screens go up and I would want to quit. I mean since the very beginning I’ve always wanted to quit, but then I was like why quit? If you quit you’re a loser (she laughs). If you quit you don’t know how to do anything. If you quit you’re useless, and you’re only quitting on yourself, you know. Then I started working graveyard with Jesus Robledo, which was so bad. He would always scream at me, and sometimes I even wanted to cry. But then, I don't know, I just started talking to him. I was like well I do want to learn, I really do, and he actually calmed down and started talking to me. He was like corporate wants this, like you gotta work this fast and this is how you can do it. We worked together for about three months, and like I said the first month was awful. I wanted to quit that month, but during the second month he kept giving me advice and stuff and he would even congratulate me, and in the end we actually became good friends. Well not good friends, but we started talking. Like we joked around, and then sadly he had to go,¹⁵ but you could say it was because of him that I didn’t quit. Because he had the same strict attitude as my stepdad, and sometimes my stepdad would make me cry, but I was like I'm not gonna cry this time. Because I'm not a little girl anymore and I have to grow up, and Jesus even said that to me (she laughs). He was like you’re not a little girl anymore, and you gotta get yourself working hard. Because if you say you’re here alone, then you gotta work for yourself. You’re lucky you don’t have to work for anyone else, and I was like OK. I'm gonna work hard and do my best. I mean it’s gonna take some time, but I'm gonna do it.”

Though fast food workers do typically end up establishing friendships with their coworkers, the laborious and poorly-paid nature of their employment often leaves them with

¹⁵ Don Jesus was transferred to the same restaurant Don Daniel was transferred to. He did not volunteer, however, but was chosen along with some other experienced staff member in order to train the staff at the new store.

little sympathy for indolent or otherwise useless employees who would rather have others do their work for them than to take the initiative themselves. As we saw in chapter two, intra-employee conflicts can at times become contentious. Coupled with the hectic character of fast food production, this scenario can make for an unpleasant atmosphere. When I asked Grace how she was initially treated, she said everyone treated her well in the beginning. “Everybody’s always nice the first time they meet you, but there was one person (La Flaca) who came up to me up front and told me the real deal. Like you know what, this is a very stressful job. Don’t trust people here, because they’re two-faced. Like they may talk good things to you up front, but they will talk bad about you behind your back, and I was like OK. I didn’t believe her, but it was a really stressful job. I mean they expect you to work hard and I’d never worked that hard before.”

I asked her to clarify how the job was stressful and she said, “because the company, I’m not gonna say the boss, but the company wants us to give out food the fastest we can, the best quality we can, and like it’s stressful because you have to be at their speed, at whatever they want, and for any little reason they [customers] might complain and it all goes back to you. And like the stress about it is that lots of people come to buy cheap food and lots of it and they want you to do it fast, but they don’t know what it’s like to work behind the counter. It’s like you want to yell at them, cry to them, explain to them, to stop coming (she laughs). Especially when you’re working alone and they keep coming and you obviously have to get things dirty, but you try to keep it clean, but you get it all dirty again and it’s like useless work. And you never know if people will come. Like in some places they know what time people come, but in this job you just don’t know. It could either be slow or fast, and you just get stressed when they start coming a lot and you have to leave everything clean, but they [customers] just keep coming. They don’t understand, but it actually changed me. Like it helped me learn that sometimes things happen,

and when you go to another restaurant you actually understand them. You don't complain. If you're missing something you just go to the side and tell them...and they know to do better. That somebody noticed they did something wrong and you didn't make a whole fuss about it. It's like, I don't know, you just understand sometimes when people are working and for whatever reason someone didn't show up for work, and this poor girl has to make double the work for someone else, and you just understand. You know not to complain. Like I never noticed it before, but when I used to live here with my parents they would complain a lot and I wouldn't say anything, but now I just tell them not to. Like just tell them nicely what they did wrong, but you don't have to tell it to the boss or talk in an angry voice, you know. Just tell them and they might take it in the wrong way or the good way, but at least you know you didn't do badly. Like if you could get every person that goes to fast food and let them know what's going on maybe it would be different, but I don't know a lot of people are ill-tempered."

I asked Grace why she stressed the company's role for the restaurant's working conditions and not the boss, and she said "because the company is the one that hires everyone. So basically they're like the captain and the boss is the sailor. They follow the rules, they don't make them, and sometimes I feel bad for Rene. Like they say he's this or he's that, but what they don't realize is that they're [the company] stressing him out too and he's just taking it out on us. So it's best just to tell him not to take it out on us, like just tell us slowly and we'll do it or we won't, depending on the worker, but I don't blame him. I mean I do blame him for some things, like scheduling and stuff, but not for company rules. If Arctic Taco says to wear blue, and you don't want to wear blue, don't blame Rene blame the company. But I don't know, like I guess he gets stressed out a lot and you realize he's just a person. He's a good, what's the word, a good convincer. Like he tries to befriend you to get what he wants, and like it or not he does

convince you sometimes, which is why I try to make myself apart from him. Like I try not to be his friend, because at the end of the day I'm gonna have to complain about something and I'm not gonna want to because I don't want to break his feelings. So I guess its best not to make friends. Because in the end you're gonna want something, or they're gonna want something from you, and you don't want to have any remorse saying no. So yeah, I don't blame him, at least not for everything. He's just a corporate monkey, another flying monkey.”

Although Grace perceived the vulnerability she and Rene shared in relation to the corporation, she also recognized the divisiveness that economic constraints and poor working conditions created among workers. For example, La Flaca's admonition that people at Arctic Taco were “two-faced” is in part a reflection of the pressures that impinge upon fast food workers and how they affect intra-employee relations. When I asked Grace if she really thought people at Arctic Taco were two-faced, she said that she did. “Like in the beginning people want to be nice. They want to be friends with everyone. That's how I was, but either way at the end of the road they're gonna be like she's a hypocrite. Like she's this or she's that. Her hair's this, her hair's that. She's too fat, she's too skinny, she's too ugly, she's too hairy, whatever, but they're always going to be judging. Like I remember when I started there was this one other worker. I don't know if you remember her, Xochi? She hated me, but to my face she would be nice, but behind my back I knew she was talking bad about me. Until finally I was just like I don't need her. I mean she wasn't even teaching me anything. Like to tell you the truth, the people that really taught me a lot were Don Jesus, Jose Guillen, Ariana and Daniel. Well Daniel sort of, like he taught me not to be shy, but he taught me something. He took the shyness out of me, but Ariana taught me to be detailed with my work. Like it's the little details that make your work outstanding, that make it look nice. So did Don Jesus. Like he taught me not to be

nervous, I mean they're still gonna come, and to work faster, and I actually miss working with him. Because we would finish so early and I realized if they make a time limit for me, like you gotta do this before this time, I do it. Because I challenge myself, but if nobody challenges me I start lazying off. But like I said, at first he started screaming at me, but then in the end he started talking to me and I'm just glad that he didn't see me fail. That he actually saw me going up. And Guillen—how can I say how he taught me—he would teach me the little tricks. Like to make things go faster, and he just gave me good advice. I mean that's how I learned not to hate Rene. Like either way he's still gonna to be your boss, and you could always change your job, but if you have no choice it's still your job and no matter how little your job is always make it a good job so it can say good things about you. But every one of my teachers is gone now and maybe I'll teach someone else a few tricks and maybe they'll take it in a good way or maybe in a bad way, but in the end, like Ariana said, the one that's going to be suffering is you because they won't be able to help you because you didn't teach them, and she was right. I mean when I'm working with Tony I try to help him, and I can still do my job, but if I was still stuck in my little shell I would still be stuck on grill and people would be like she doesn't work. She can't do anything, but now they know that I can be on grill and taco bar and it's annoying because they give you more work, but then again it's better to be the one they give more work to and recognize as a hard worker than a lazy person.”

Outside of an occasional Facebook chat with Jose Guillen, Grace said she didn't speak to any of her teachers anymore and that it was sad to see them go. “Like you begin to know people and when they leave I guess you do kind of miss them, but oh well. They didn't want to be there and we're not gonna force anyone to stay, but it's still sad to see them go. It's very sad, but

that's life and pretty soon I might leave too, who knows. Like if I knew I would be slacking off, but I don't, I don't know what's gonna happen.”

The average entry level fast food worker passes through his or her job in just under six months (Newman 1999). This colossal rate of turnover is in part responsible for the negative connotation of fast food work today. But contrary to public opinion, this does not mean that shifting workforces are easy to deal with. The departure of experienced fast food workers inevitably disrupts business, increasing order times, dampening productivity, and causing others to pull up the slack. This came out when Grace began to speak about Liz, a white 19-year-old co-worker of ours who had recently finished high school. “Like Liz, she wants to leave and she's a good cashier. She's one of the best and you don't want to see her go. Yeah, she's just a child. A young girl going to young adult, but she's still got to learn. I mean she's being nice to people that are not nice to her and you just want to tell her to stop doing that. I mean you gotta learn that not everybody's going to like you. So give yourself some dignity and be a strong person, but I don't have enough confidence with her to tell her that. Like she wants to leave because she's tired of people talking bad about her, and in the beginning I would be kind of annoyed by her too, but then I realized she's just like that. She's a princess. She's not used to doing chores, but then you realize she's a good worker and if she puts her mind to it she's gonna go far in life. But if she wants to leave OK, sad to see her go, but oh well she's tired of it too. I mean she doesn't need the money. She still lives with her parents. She's still young, and I know she's gonna do well. She's a hard worker and it's surprising for a young girl. It's very surprising, because you see all these students—some students, I'm not gonna say all of them (she laughs)—and they don't wanna work hard. Like they don't wanna work their butts off, because they know they're gonna graduate and get a better job, but that's the thing. What are they gonna

do when they go back for references? Oh, she was lazy and everything. I think it's dumb. I mean if they don't want to work there, don't work there. There are plenty of people that can take over your job, but then that's the thing. It takes time. It really takes a lot of time for them to get up to speed, but if they don't wanna force themselves to work hard I don't know what they're doing there. They're just wasting company money, like especially when they're really useless. I don't know, I feel bad when I see someone struggling and sometimes I wanna help them, but I can't even help myself, but I just go and help them [anyway], but I don't know. If they don't want to force themselves to work harder why would one keep telling them to do a better job? I mean what's gonna change them, nothing. It's like Andre, he's been there for like ten years and he's still in the lowest paying job, and you think about it and you're like that's embarrassing. I mean how much did he have to put up with to be ten years in the same position? But I'm not saying I'm better. I'm not better. I know he's a good worker, when he puts his mind to it, but if he doesn't force himself to work harder that says something bad about him, you know."

At the time of our interview Grace had just turned 21. She had been working at Arctic Taco for just over a year and was making \$8.50 an hour. She received no work-related benefits of any kind and was averaging about 37 hours per week.¹⁶ Her work schedule was Tuesday through Thursday, 4 p.m. to 12 a.m., and Saturday and Sunday graveyard (12 a.m. to 8 a.m.). I asked her if her schedule changed frequently and she said that in the beginning it did, "but now you can say even if there isn't a lot of work I for sure have my hours. Like some people that work part-time don't always get all their hours and they still want them, and I'm glad that I'm not one of those people. Heck, he even gives me an hour more, even though I don't want to, but then

¹⁶ Calculated for the entire year, this averages out to roughly 16,354 per year, an income that, believe it or not, is still about \$5,000 dollars above the 2015 U.S. poverty threshold for a family of one.

I realize he's giving me the hour. Either because he needs someone and he knows I'll say yes, or because—how do I say—he knows I'm good for the job. At least, that's what I like to think.”

I asked Grace how long she planned to work at Arctic Taco, and she said she didn't know. “I mean like for any reason I could get fired. I could quit. I could get myself a better job or one closer to home, but I don't know. Like to tell you the truth I don't know how long I'm gonna be working here. It could be years, it could be months, days, tomorrow.” I asked her if Rene or anyone else ever complained to her about the drive-time or anything else, and she said “yeah, only Rene. Well he complains about everyone's time, but he knows that I'm not that bad because when I'm working Thursday's or Wednesday's the time is not horrible, it's just graveyard. Those days, like I said, you never know. You never know if there's party's or not. You never know if there's gonna be people or not, but it's not a big burden on me. I mean he tells me about it hoping he can get me to work harder, but sometimes not everybody is on the same page. Like sometimes on Sundays Chiquita's in a bad mood because she hates Arctic Taco. She doesn't care about the time and I start being lazy. I just like stop working hard and sometimes our time is horrible, and then there's not like a lot of sales, but a lot of people come with their big orders and I can't work harder. I mean I'm not a robot.”

Like Chiquita, Pelon, and many of the other people I met while working fast food, Grace possessed no medical insurance. When I asked her if she had ever been hurt on the job, however, she laughed and asked “do burns count?” I said sure and she continued “burns, cuts, bruises, and like with the fries—how do you call it—I pushed the chute in so hard that it broke the little tip of my finger. See, it really hurts. But yeah, I got tons of burns. Like they call me Emo or something because they all look like little cuts, but luckily I've never been seriously injured. Because I don't know what I'm gonna do if that happens. It's like a lot of going to the

doctor and everything and I don't want to do that before work. So I pray that I don't slip and fall and hit my head or anything, but other than that I just got burns and in the beginning they would hurt. Like they would hurt so bad and I wanted everybody to stop and look, but now I get burned and I just keep working. Like they only hurt when I touch hot things, but when I continue working they don't hurt. And I remember my first burns, like the scabs would fall off and they would start itching and I would be really scared that they would get infected, but they never did and now I just see them and before I know it they're healing. They itch sometimes, but I don't even mind them anymore. Like I get burned and I don't even care, like you can't stop to cry about it that's for sure."

As indicated by Grace's testimony, fast food employment is filled with small insults to the body: scrapes, burns, and bruises. With most lacking medical insurance, however, such pain and injuries often go untreated. Working hurt, especially during periods of customer rushes, only adds to the existing stress, further impairing social relations in the restaurant and making the development of work friendships and co-worker comradery more difficult. For example, when I asked Grace if she considered her coworkers friend, she said it depends. "Like in the beginning I used to trust people and say things about my home and stuff, but now I don't. Like I still talk to people and joke around with them, but only with very few people do I talk about personal things. La Flaca, we've been through a lot (she laughs). Like I said, she was the first one to tell me that a lot of people are back-stabbers and two-faces, but I never expected her and me to be friends. But since she was like the youngest one when I started working we starting hanging out. We started talking, and when I got my first phone and we started hanging out a lot. Her family knows me and my family knows her, and I guess you can say she's my best friend at Arctic Taco. You, like I tell you things about my personal life because I trust you. You have a trusting

face (she laughs), and like I know you're not going to be blabbering about everything. Like in the beginning I would talk about myself, like I used to live here and there, and they would just like sometimes bring it up. Like throw it in my face, and I would be like now I know who not to trust. [But] one tends to learn not to tell everyone everything. Like you can joke around with everyone, everyone can be your friend, but only with those you trust can you talk about your private stuff.”

GRACE'S WORK DAY

I asked Grace to walk me through a day in her workaday life, listing the tasks for both her evening and graveyard shifts that she is expected to complete prior to going home. She explained that it depended largely on what the previous shift left and whether or not it was busy. “Like if they stock up everywhere in front you don't have to worry about that, and if they have all the prep done in the back you don't have to worry about that either.” I asked her what the front consisted of, and she said “cheese, tomatoes, lettuce, onions, cilantro, sour cream, guacamole, cabbage, lemons, sauces, and ice. Like sometimes they don't restock the ice and the pans are like swimming in there, and in the back there's chicken, beans, chips, taco shells, and prep. Like usually the first thing I do is check if they have tomatoes. Because I like to cut tomatoes first so I can do the *pico de gallo* and I won't have to do it later. But if everything's there, I just walk around and try to clean in places where like they say ‘oh she did something,’ or like try to do something so they won't say I'm lazying off. You always have to do that because they always talk about what you're not doing, and just try to take out orders as fast as I can and keep cleaning. It's like doing the same thing. Keeping it clean, stocking up, making sure nothings left, taking out food as fast as you can with the best quality you can, and then toward

the end I take a long time cleaning. Like I take two hours before I have to finish to change my dishes and start cleaning from where you don't get it dirty that much to where you get it dirty a lot, and sometimes unexpectedly customers don't stop coming and I have to do both things at the same time, sometimes because of a lack of workers and sometimes because there's a lot of business. So in that part of the day, it either goes good or bad. Like you either finish or you don't, but then at 12 you just do the details. Like you stock up what you've used and you're ready to give it out to the next shift.”

Regarding *la preparacion* (the preparation), Grace said that she tries to do half. “Like I try to chop a bunch of tomatoes and leave a lot of *pico de gallo* because that takes a day for the red time (expiration time). I make enough to fill up both tupperwares and leave a little left over so that they can use it for their shift and they won't have to make more. I think its better that way because it's awful when you come and you find nothing and you have to do everything from the beginning, and I'd just rather have them do half. Like I did half for you and now you just have to cut cheese or whatever. Sometimes I end up making too much, but like I said, you never know if there's gonna be a lot of work and if there's not at least I can say I helped. Like I helped them do half of the work and they just need to cut cheese and refill sauces. I don't know, that's just the way I do it, and I think it's a little less work for them and sometimes Tony even tells me thanks, now could you do the cheese (she laughs).”

Because *la preparacion* was so time consuming and tedious,¹⁷ not to mention a central component of the job, Grace said that it made her frustrated when she came into work and someone didn't leave her prep. “Because they're like ‘oh you just need this,’ but you look and they'll leave tomatoes halfway gone and you know at the end you're still gonna have to cut more

¹⁷ *La preparacion* (the preparation) consisted of chopping tomatoes and cilantro, making quesadillas and pico de gallo, grating cheese, slicing tomatoes for hamburgers, refilling containers with sour cream, guacamole, and sauces, and heating up taco shells. “I try to do half,” she said.

in order to fill up the tub and for *pico de gallo*. You need tomatoes for all of that, and you're thinking don't they know that, but you can't do anything about it. I mean, like they said, they left prep, and like I even do the same thing for Doña Flor when I work graveyard. I try to help her the same way, and just leave her to do the other half. But I do get frustrated when there's nothing at all, and then they leave with like 'oh, we couldn't do anything' and they just don't care, but I do. Because I put myself in their shoes, like if I was working I would need this and that, but I guess not everybody feels the same way. Like they just try to get there work done as fast as they can. They just try to help themselves out, but that's not teamwork, that's—how do you say—just doing a fast job so you can go home. I don't know, I can't complain. I mean I could, but what's the point. They're just gonna be like, 'oh well, you can do it anyway.'”

I asked Grace if her graveyard routine was any different, and she said “according to my routine I do prep. Like what I said, when I start early prep I try to prepare enough so I can set aside enough for me and my shift and also try to fill it up so I can leave for Doña Flor. Like hopefully she likes that, but I've never asked her. The only one that told me I did a good job was Tony, but for Flor I can't leave a lot because they always want everything fresh. So I just grate the cheese and she does the quesadillas and I try to do as much tomatoes as I can, as much *pico de gallo* as I can, and a lot of cilantro. So like later she won't have to do it all over again. Like if I leave a little bit of everything she's gonna have to do everything again. But I've never asked her if I left prep well, because one time Rene said we also had to leave blocks of cheese cut up, but I did not know that was part of prep, and Flor told Rene that graveyard wasn't doing that and I overheard her and she thought I got mad, but I told her no its cause I did not know that was part of prep. But I did not get mad about that. I was mad about something else, but I just like to be told to my face so I can improve it. But like I said, I've never asked her about my work, but I'm

guessing that the cheese was a big deal. Like something I wasn't leaving. So now I know that I have to leave it and I always do, and on Saturday and Sunday mornings she always finds a block of cheese cut up. But, like I said, I don't know what Flor's opinion about my prep or like how I do my job is, but I'm guessing its OK because she complained about Pelon (she laughs). But it feels awful when I don't leave anything at all. Cause the only one that tells me to my face is Tony, and like I say sorry I couldn't because I was working alone, or this happened, or like I did leave but it got used up. But, like I said, I don't know what Flor's opinion is about me. I don't have the guts to ask her, but it is nice to know how you're doing then to just think oh they're talking [about me]. They already know I didn't do this or I didn't do that. I guess it's better not to hear nothing then to hear bad things, but like I said they always notice what you don't do."

I asked Grace what it was like when Doña Flor showed up in the morning, and she said "we always talk and sometimes there's big news. Like someone quit, or someone fell, or this happened, but we just always talk. We don't talk about private stuff, but she's a nice a lady. At the beginning I didn't think she was nice because she was always so serious, but no you find out she's actually nice. Like she's funny, and I hope she's not two-facing me because I really respect her a lot. She's a hard worker and nobody takes notice of that, and I'm not gonna talk bad about that other lady (she laughs), but yeah she's always taken for granted, and like Jose Guillen was the first one I saw helping her, but I didn't know it at the time. Because I barely worked with her and he would always help her. Like 'oh can you leave this, can you leave that,' or sometimes he was just like 'leave it all full. Make a lot of egg, folded egg, sausages,' just for her and I started to think about it. Like why is he doing this and finally I was like 'oh, because she's coming in.' Like I've worked with him when the other morning people come in and he wouldn't leave it very stocked up, but for Flor he would and I started thinking about it and I was

like oh because he's helping her out. He knows she's a good worker and she's taken for granted and nobody respects her, so why can't we help her? I don't know, she's like a single mom and everything and I just really respect her. She works hard and she doesn't get the pay or the respect she deserves. When other people just slack off or have other people help them do their job. It's really stupid. I mean she deserves a bigger paycheck, otherwise why would she have two jobs? Like I think she's getting \$8.75 or something, a little bit less than nine, and I thought she was getting nine something, but no she's actually getting almost the same thing as me and she deserves more. Because she always leaves everything nice, and by herself when other people can't even do it by themselves. I don't know, that lady needs a raise, she really does."

Breakfast is served from 11 p.m. to 10 a.m. at Arctic Taco. It adds roughly 15 items to the restaurant's menu and thus increases the workload for food preparation workers significantly. As Grace explained, "I used to make a lot like Guillen would say, but then Miguel Angel told me not to make so much. So now I just do like ten sausage patties, ten pieces of bacon, ten folded eggs, I fill up the container with [scrambled] egg, and put like eight biscuits in the hotbox because they don't use that many. Towards the end if it's slow I'll only have to use a couple and I'll leave six of everything, or sometimes a little more and they won't find it empty. But I used to leave like 15 of everything because that's what Guillen would tell me, but then Miguel told me that was too much. He told me to put six, but I would be like I don't want to be cleaning the grill again and be putting and putting. I just want to take it easy in the morning because we don't get to rest, and he doesn't understand that. Like sometimes he puts Pelon to work and I don't get along with Pelon, but I just can't believe that he [Miguel] is that dumb. I mean we get paid

breaks,¹⁸ so sometimes we don't sit down the whole night, and when it's a bad day we work from twelve to eight straight. We get no rest or anything and people think we slack off. They do, but they don't know what it's like to work graveyard. I mean sometimes people do slack off. Like Chiquita, she plays around the whole day, but then she does her job so fast you're like how did she beat me (she laughs)? But I can't do that. It's work first, play later, and sometimes it's work first and keep working. But like I said, people think we slack off, but they don't know what it's like to work graveyard. They think we're just sitting around waiting for orders, but that's not true. It's very not true."

As for when Grace typically finished her graveyard routine she answered seven a.m., laughing as she did, "and I don't know why. Maybe because sometimes I just wonder off, and then I realize what I'm doing and I just try to finish as fast as I can. I don't know, maybe I should start challenging myself to finish at six and sit down for once, but I just always finish at seven whether it's a slow day or a fast day. Sometimes when I'm working with Pelon, I don't talk to him so I just work slowly to get the time going by fast, and we end up leaving it cleaner (she laughs). We actually do, and we finish faster because we're not talking or anything we're just working and then I just do the little details. Like cleaning up the nacho cheese machine and putting it back together, and he's just like mopping the floor, but you can say we don't finish because we're both still cleaning. Sometimes I even go sit down to eat a little breakfast before the day shift gets there, but like I said, Miguel Angel makes him [Pelon] put the shake machine back together or take the boxes out to make room for when the order comes in, and I think it's dumb. We've been working all night, we're just starting to take a rest and he's making him clean again thinking he's slacking off, and sometimes I defend him because he [Miguel] doesn't

¹⁸ In order to get graveyard wages, one has to work from 12 a.m. to at least 5 a.m. Those who work graveyard are given paid breaks, meaning that they do not receive breaks, and a dollar more an hour over their standard rate of pay.

know. Like Flaca used to do the same thing, and I told her ‘don’t do that,’ because you don’t know what kind of day they had and she hasn’t done it since. She was like you’re right, I don’t know what kind of day they had and if they rested or not. Like people do get tired, and I don’t know, I guess they think we’re slacking off, [but] they just don’t understand. Like sometimes OK the sales are down, but you gotta ask were they coming in all at once or were they coming in separately, but I don’t know. I think Arctic Taco is going down, at least that one’s going down. People who were good are leaving and people who are bad are leaving too, and it’s because they don’t even teach them well. They’re too scared, but maybe not. Like I said, Liz is young. She’s a good worker and there might be other people that come in that are hard workers too, but who knows. Nowadays they don’t wanna work hard, especially not for a low-paying job.”

I asked Grace if she ever felt lonely without her family, and she said “you could say I’ve always that way, like I’ve always been missing someone. My mom says that maybe it’s the fact I never got to know my dad. That maybe if they were still together or they still knew each other, like maybe I would have gotten along with him, but now I’ll never know. I mean he died three years ago.” I asked her if she ever got to meet him, and she said “I met him once, and that’s the one thing I do regret, that I didn’t speak to him. His sister called us while we were in Mexico and asked if it wouldn’t be too shameful for them to meet us, to meet me, and my mom said it’s up to Grace and she asked me and I was like sure, I mean I’ll be OK if I met them. So like a week later my mom took us to the park, and we went behind my stepdad’s back. I don’t know why. I guess she really did love him, and you know there’s always that one person you can’t forget and I’m guessing my dad was that person, and my stepdad didn’t like that. So we went to meet them behind his back and they were talking and you can say she’s my aunt because it’s his sister. She took my sisters and my brother for ice cream and I stayed with my mom and him and

like he told me, 'My name is Jorge, I'm your father,' and all I did was nod. He said, 'You don't have anything to say,' and I was like 'no,' but I didn't know how to respond. Like was I supposed to jump into his arms, or was I supposed to complain to him and ask him why he never looked for us or came from Mexico to beg my mom back. Like to tell you the truth I don't understand why they didn't end up together. It's like a mystery and only they know the truth."

"It was his birthday on the 20th (of May) and my mom said she dreamed of him and that they were talking. She said she was complaining to him, asking him why he didn't ever come for us, and he was responding. He said he was young and really stupid. That he didn't know what to do and I'm guessing people were telling him not to. Pressuring him, you know, and they were both really young. She was 17 and he was 18 and when you're 18 and a dad, you're like teen dad (she laughs), I guess he just didn't know what to do and the fact that he would have to risk his life to come over here for us is another thing, too. I mean, he didn't know how she was going to respond to him and it could be like a big trip for nothing. But sometimes I wish for once for him to visit me. I mean I wouldn't recognize him, but maybe I would. I have a picture of him. His sister put it on Facebook and I'm guessing if I look at it long enough I'll keep his picture in mind."

"So I don't know if it's a father figure I need or something else, but I've always felt like something's missing in my life. Like since I was 10 or 11 I always remember I've always been depressed. Sometimes I didn't want to go out with my friends. I would just stay home and watch TV, and every now and then I still feel depressed. Like you're just watching TV and you feel like nobody's home. Like nobody's around. Like if people are doing this why bother them. Just be here by yourself. I don't know, like I've kind of gotten a little bit over it, but then I just go out and buy things and that's how my credit got so high. But I don't know, sometimes I think

about looking up a psychiatrist and like getting help, but sometimes I don't. It's like I don't think I need it when maybe I do. But I've thought about suicide. I've had suicidal thoughts, but I've never really done it because I've always been too afraid of the pain. I mean they make it look so easy. Like maybe they don't suffer because what they're suffering inside is bigger than what the wound really is, but I don't know. I've never actually tried to commit suicide, but I've thought about it. Like looking up at buildings or drowning, and then I think about it and I'm like you can't breathe (she laughs). I mean you think about it and then you think of the pain. But yeah, sometimes when I have like urges to cry I tend to scratch myself, and be like there are bigger pains than what you're feeling inside. And I don't know why, but I just don't cry a lot anymore. Like I used to [cry], but ever since I just scratch it out. You could say I scratch it out to like avoid crying and stuff. Because people would be thinking I'm either crying about this or that, when they don't know I'm just crying about nothing at all."

CONCLUSION

The details of Grace's life are all too common for individuals stuck in low-paying jobs life fast food (see Newman 1999 for similar examples). Still, what stands out most to me is not her wasted potential, but rather the honor and tenacity she displays each and every day in her efforts to get by. I could only think that in another

These are qualities that many of the students that I have had the privilege of teaching simply do not have, and yet the fact that they will go on to better paying and more prestigious employment is indicative of how wealth and power are passed from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to convince me that I or any other student or faculty member at UCI possesses any more intelligence than Grace. Rather, we are simply the benefactors of societal

endowments, whether they be in the form of financially well off parents who allowed us to concentrate on our studies instead of paying rent, or government programs that allowed ourselves and perhaps our parents to become educated. In the end, however, all work is honorable, whether or not it is recognized by society as so and whether or not it is remunerated as such.

CHAPTER 5: *La Gran Chucha*: Life According to Don Cheto

A la gran chucha is a Nicaraguan expression used to indicate the occurrence of a mistake, and the necessity of repeating an act of labor. For instance, say a customer orders five chicken tacos with no cheese and you instead make them regular. Upon realizing your lapse in judgment you might cry out, “*a la gran chucha, otra vez voz tengo que hacerlo*” (goodness gracious, once again I have to do it). Interestingly enough, the man I learned this saying from was born and raised in Sinaloa.

Stout, light-complexioned, with salt-and-pepper hair and glasses, Don Cheto was the elder statesman of our crew. He trained Grace as well as myself and was the person responsible for imparting me with the advice of *borrar, borrar, borrar* (erase, erase, erase.). Previous to fast food, Don Cheto had worked for over 20 years as a car “*washero*.” Fifteen for a company in the San Gabriel and five for an auto-detailing business he started in Fresno. The adage, he said, was something he often heard from his coworkers in San Gabriel. “*Yo trabaje con puro Nicaraguense, puro la gran puta, bola, chucha y todas esas cosas, por eso digo yo a la gran chucha. Es como una expression cuando te equivocan. Por ejemplo, sale en la pantalla una quesadilla y tu ya lo tienes hasta partada, pero te dicen ‘hey Jude*¹⁹*, la quesadilla la quieren sin verde.’ A la gran chucha, estoy ocupado y tengo que hacerlo otra vez. Eso es la gran chucha, a eso se refiere*” (I worked with a bunch of people from Nicaragua, and it was pure puta, bola, chucha and all that stuff. That’s why I say a la gran chucha. It’s like an expression for when they mess you up. For example, a quesadilla comes up on the screen and you already got it like parted, but they tell you, hey Jude, they want the quesadilla without green sauce. A la gran chucha, I’m busy and I got to do it again. That’s the gran chucha, that’s what it refers to).

¹⁹ Don Cheto had always called me Jude and I never bothered to correct him. Eudelio is not a very common name in Mexico, much less the U.S., and honestly I was happy to be called anything above and beyond muchacho, which is how Doña Ariana typically referred to me in the beginning.

As you might imagine, orders change frequently in fast food, and given the pace at which we were expected to fill them one could count on at least one *gran chucha* from Don Cheto per shift. These calls, however, were rarely expressed in anger. Instead, Don would cry out whimsically, drawing attention to himself and his troubles in a way that made people laugh instead of frown. This charm of manner, as well as the ease with which he conversed with virtually all, were two of the traits I admired most about Don Cheto. Little did I know, that he maintained them despite logging nearly 90 hours of work per week between Arctic Taco and a Chevron gas station he tended at night.

When I interviewed Don Cheto for this chapter, I did so while he was standing behind the counter of this Chevron, working one of the two 12-hour night shifts he worked per week. At the time, Don had only weeks earlier given up his job at Arctic Taco. A decision provoked in large part by the 18th birthday of his eldest daughter Angelina and the subsequent reduction in his child support payments from 1,150 to 335 dollars a month. According to him, however, “*la senora me sigue hablando*” (the women continues to call me). In fact, Doña Paz—the manager who had taken over for Rene after he was transferred to Arctic Taco 106—had offered him and Miguel Angel a dollar more an hour to return, neither of whom had accepted. Nonetheless, the offer and repeated “*llamadas*” (calls) moreover, were proof in Don’s opinion that though his English was poor, “*hablando de trabajo, ninguno me hace nada aqui ni en el taco tampoco, y no es porque me hecho flores. En el taco yo era uno de los mejores y aqui soy uno de los mejores tambien. Como te digo, lo unico que no he logrado en este pais es el idioma, que no me ha entrado. Sera porque ya estoy mayor, ya estoy cansado de tanto trabajar, pero aun con mi ignorancia de ingles, no me quedo atras de nadie*” (regarding work, nobody can touch me, here and at Arctic Taco too, and it’s not because I’m tooting my own horn. At Arctic Taco I was one of the best

and here I'm one of the best too. Like I said, the only thing I haven't accomplished in this country is the language, which I just haven't been able to grasp. Maybe it's because I'm older, I'm already tired from working, but even with my ignorance in English, I can keep up with anyone). Of course, I needed no such proof of this. I had worked with Don Cheto on numerous occasions and knew well the quality of worker he was. What I didn't know was what it was that made him this way.

The second son in a family of twelve, the imperative to work came early on in Don Cheto's life. His father was a farmer who subsisted chiefly on the cultivation of beans and corn, products that even prior to NAFTA did not pay well, and Don was consumed early on by *"deseos de superacion (dreams of excellence)."* *"Yo siempre queria escalar porque siempre he sido un luchador. Nunca me he quedado en un solo nivel y como te has dado cuenta ahorrita, conozco todos los niveles de la vida. Arriba, abajo, en el medio, pero no porque estaba arriba fui pisitando a la gente, y he estado abajo en el piso pero siempre me levante. Me tiraba por un ratito y me levantaba y seguia y hasta ahorita pienso que estoy levantado. Nunca me he dejado caller y no soy de los que queden alli sentados llorando para que se callen del cielo las cosas. No, y me siento orgullo de ser asi. Porque lo dejo el ejemplo a mis hijos, mis padres, mi esposa y mis hermanos que luchando luchando pero aqui estoy y aunque es un poquito matado, con el minimo si vives. Hay otras personas que son hasta Americanos y andan hay pidiendo limon, pero aunque yo trabajo el minimo aqui estoy trabajando."* (I've always wanted to climb because I've always been a fighter. I've never stayed at just one level, and like you've discovered recently, I've known all the levels of life. Up, down, in the middle, but not because I was up did I go treading on people. And I've been down on the floor, but I've always gotten up. I would be down for a bit and then I would get up and keep going and up to this point I'm still standing.

I've never let myself fall and I'm not one of those that sits there crying waiting for things to fall from the sky. No, and I'm proud to be like that, because I leave the impression for my children, my wife, my parents, my brothers and sisters, that struggling and struggling but here I am, and though it might be grueling, you can make it on the minimum. There are people that are even Americans and there out there asking for handouts, but even though I work for the minimum here I am working.)

Regrettably, many of Don Cheto's relatives could not attest to the same distinction. Rather, a number had become involved in drugs and crime, and according to Don his last name was synonymous for such behavior in the *rancho* in Sinaloa in which he was born. In fact, on one of the first nights that I visited him at the Chevron he showed me a photograph he had downloaded onto his phone from Facebook. In it were the figures of three young men with the word "*detenido*" (detained) inscribed across their chests in red lettering. They had been arrested for abducting, raping, and murdering a 20-year-old woman from El Rosario. Don said his cousin was the one in the middle. Two years earlier this same cousin had lost his elder brother to cartel violence, and soon thereafter his father who was killed while trying to enact revenge on killers of his first-born son. In spite of all this, however, Don felt little sympathy for the life and actions of his *primos* (cousins). He explained that he had also grown up in and around drugs and delinquency, yet was not one of those that presumed, "*dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres. No, el que calle en la droga calle por iniciativa propia, haci sencillo. O sea para mi hay que no echar la culpa a nadien, ni a tu papa, ni con quien andas. Todos somos duenos de nuestras acciones, las tomas y punto. O que crees tu?*" (tell me who you hang-out with and I'll tell you who you are. No, the one who falls into drugs does so out of his own initiative, or for me there's

no reason to blame anyone, not your dad, not the people you hang-out with. We are all responsible for our own actions, you take them and period, or what do you think?)

I told Don Cheto that I agreed, but that I also believed that some were more likely to abuse drugs than others, particularly those immersed in lives poverty, and he responded, “*pues si, dicen que muchos caen en la droga por la pobreza pero que te puedo decir yo? Mi pobreza fue extradamente alta, podiamos decir, y nunca calli en eso, en drogas, en robo. Simplemente dije que voy a luchar, a trabajar y como te digo, empece de mandadero. Que limpiando la banquetta los carros, que arrancando el sacate a los patios de las senoras y haci ganando que dos pesos, que cinco pesos. Haci era my trabajo de nino. Sea no fue trabajo de estudios pero trabajo es honrado honrado lo que sea.*” (Well yeah, some say that people fall into drugs because of poverty, but what can I tell you? My poverty was extremely high, you could say, but I never fell into that, into drugs, into robbery. I simply said that I was going to fight, to work, and like I said I began as a gofer, cleaning the sidewalk for the cars, removing weeds from the women’s patios and like that earning two maybe five pesos. That was my work as a child. It wasn’t a real prestigious job, but work is honorable regardless.)

Nevertheless, the ability of Don Cheto to avoid drugs, crime, and the life of his *primos* in general cannot be attributed solely to his own efforts. For the fact of the matter is that nobody accomplishes anything alone. At the same time, not all are able to embrace the trials and tribulations of life—particularly one lived at minimum wage—with quite the same gusto as Don Cheto seemed to do so. Something that he ultimately attributed to the *carencias* (disadvantages) he’d overcome as a youth. “*Es mejor sufrir, es mejor batallar para prepararte. Como la vida te prepara mas cuando tienes ciertas carencias. Porque imaginate si todo fue facil en la vida, no hubiera retos, no existia los retos. Si todo fuera facil paque estudio? Si te va llegar el dinero*

paque trabajo? Sea yo lo veo haci, como es parte de la vida que tengas ciertos obstaculos, porque si fuera facil todo, como te digo, nadien luchara. Asi es y he tendido ciertos ejemplos en mi vida como mis primos para demostrarlo. Me refiero que esos primos mios tuvieron dinero, no sufrieron, y ahora son unas lacras, unos encerrados, otros muertos, no tienen nada. Yo soy grande al lado de ellos. Como te digo, porque sufrí mucho valore mas a la vida y ellos no. Por eso te digo que es mejor sufrir, es mejor batallar para prepararte.” (It’s better to suffer, its better to fight in order to prepare yourself. Like life prepares you more when you have certain disadvantages, because imagine if everything were easy. There would be no challenges, challenges wouldn’t exist. If everything is easy why study? If the money’s gonna come why work? At least that’s how I see it, like its part of life to have certain obstacles because if everything was easy, like I said, no one would fight. That’s how it is and I’ve had certain examples in my life like my cousins to demonstrate it. I mean those cousins of mine had money, they didn’t suffer, and now they’re all a mess, some locked up, others dead, they don’t have anything. I’m exalted compared to them. Like I’ve told you, because I suffered I learned to value life and they didn’t. That’s why I tell you that it’s better to suffer, its better to battle so as to prepare yourself.)

As I’ve already mentioned Don Cheto’s privation began early. It became acute, however, at the age of six when he moved in with an aunt in El Rosario, Sinaloa, a city about 10 kilometers southwest of the rancho of his birth. He lived with this aunt for about a year, but after her husband began mistreating him he moved in with a family around the corner who owned a bakery. *“Pues alli nomas me llegue de arrimado como se dice verdad, pero alli me quede por como 16 anos. Ellos tenian una panaderia y alli yo aprendi hacer pan. Les ayudaba hacer pan, les ayudaba entregar el pan a las tiendas, a los camiones que llevaban a los ranchos, y haci era*

mi vida con ellos. Les ayudaba lo que podia y ellos me daban de comer, me vestian. Como te he comentado en otras ocasiones, mi ninez digamos de los seis a los doce anos fue demasiada triste. Nunca tuve dos pantalones, nunca tuve dos zapatos, nunca tuve dos cosas de nada. Sea solamente una cosa, la lavaba y lavaba y con esa seguia y seguia, pero con ellos cambio mi vida un poco y hasta la fecha sigo agradecido verdad. (Well, I arrived there by approach as they say, but I stayed there for like 16 years. They had a bakery and that's where I learned to make bread. I would help them make bread, I would help them deliver bread to the stores, to the trucks that would take it to the ranches, and that's how my life was with them. I would help them with what I could and they would give me food and cloths. Like I've told you on other occasions, my childhood from like six to twelve was real sad. I never had two pair of pants; I never had two pairs of shoes. I never had two things of anything. That is, only one thing, I would wash it and wash it and with that I would go on and on, but with them my life changed a little and I'm still grateful to this day.)

Beyond food, clothes, and shoes, what Don Cheto's adopted family provided him was an education; a luxury divested from many of his siblings, not to mention his future coworkers at Arctic Taco. In El Rosario, Don completed elementary, middle, and high school. In fact, he was on the verge of entering the Mexican Aeronautic Academy when his elder brother was killed, and "*por fondos economicos, me cerraron las puertas.*" (for economic reasons, the doors closed). Don's elder brother was 20 at the time of his death, and was murdered over what Don described as a confusion. Apparently, his brother had been working for a farmer with a bad reputation at the time, and his assailants mistook him for the son of this man and killed him out of "*venganza*" (revenge). Looking back, Don cites this and the death of another brother less than a year later, as "*el punal*" (the dagger) that ultimately led to his migration north. "*Porque*

yo me podia quedarme en Mexico esudiando otra cosa, una carrera tecnica, pero yo sabia que con un sueldo de alla no podia ayudar a mi familia pues. O sea, yo no queria trabajar en Mexico para sobrevivir yo. Yo queria ayudarles a ellos, que mi papa dijera 'a no voy a trabajar hoy a cabo que mijo va mandar,' y sabia yo que con un trabajo en Mexico no lo iba lograr. Iba lograr sobrevivir yo pero no para ayudarles a ellos. Por eso me vino paca." "Como ya te he dicho, desde que yo estaba chico mi lema siempre fue de que si yo no les daba no se les iba quitar y increiblemente pensar eso a los seis anos podiamos decir que es sorprendente, pero asi lo pense. De que el hecho de que yo ya no estuviera en casa comiendome un taco le podia servir a otro hermano mio. Por eso me vino aca con mi tia. De esa manera podia ayudar a mi papa. Como te digo, mi mente siempre fue de que si yo no lo daba, no lo quitaba y hasta la fecha siempre les he dado. Desde 1986 hasta la fecha siempre les he sostenido, siempre, y dicen que por eso me va bein. Por eso Dios me ayuda. Porque ayudar a los padres es una bendicion."

(Because I could have stayed in Mexico and studied something else, a technical career, but I knew that with a salary from over there I wasn't going to be able to help my family. That is, I didn't want to work in Mexico so only I could survive. I wanted to help them, that my father could say 'oh, I'm not going to go to work today seeing that my son is going to send,' and I new that with one job in Mexico I wasn't going to be able to achieve that. I would have been able to survive, but I wouldn't have been able to help them. That's why I came over here. Like I've already told you, since I was a child my motto has always been that if I didn't give to them I wasn't going to take from them, and as incredibly as it seems to think that way at the age of six that's how I thought, that the fact that I was no longer in our home eating a taco could benefit another of my siblings. That's why I moved in with my aunt. In that way I could help my dad. Like I just said, my mentality was always that if I didn't give I wasn't going to take and up until

now I have always given. From 1986 to the present I have always supported them, and they say that is why it has gone well for me. That's why God helps me, because helping one's parents is a blessing).

Don Cheto immigrated to the U.S. in the winter of 1985. He did so less than a year after the death of his elder brother Ricardo and without informing a single family member of his intentions. *“Si le dije alla al barrio porque me estaban viendo pero a mi familia directa que eran mis papas y mis hermanos, no los dije. Me vine y ellos dieron cuenta cuando yo ya estaba aqui.”* (I told the people from the neighborhood because they were watching me get ready, but my direct family like my parents and siblings I didn't tell. I came and only told them after I had already arrived). I asked him why he didn't tell them, and he said *“Pues como soy un poco sintemental, a lo mejor me hubiera traicionado el sentimiento, de dejar a mi papa, de que como me iba ir en el camino, por eso no lo hice. Porque, pues ver a tu mama llorar o que te pide que no te vienes y no te vienes.”* *“Pero cuando regrese Jude, hijosuchingadamadre. Ya iba yo gringo verdad (he laughs), ya llevaba papeles pues, y como te digo, en aquellos tiempos, ahorita no se puede, pero en aquellos tiempos con el permiso de trabajo salias un mes. No vas a creer que llegue, como es muy feo venirte sin despedirte, se te puede morir tu papa y tu mama y no despediste de ellos, algo muy fuerte eso. Pues llegue el 19 de noviembre alla de 1986. El dia 20 hay baile en todo Mexico porque se celebra la revolucion Mexicana y hay baile en todos los pinches ranchos y como a mi me encanta el baile pues me fui el 19 cabron para ir al baile el 20. Pues yo llegue el 19 alla al rancho con mi papa y dure cabron como una hora sin poder hablar, llorando guey (he snorts and breaths deeply in and out mimicking the sound of someone weeping zealously). No pudo ni hablar por la emocion de ver a mi papa alli y de ver tanta pobreza cabron. De verlos como estaban en ese momento. Era una emocion pero como te pone el techo*

haci que desueyas cabron. Senti alegria y senti tristeza de verlos en la pobreza que estaban ellos. Eso pues me amime a trabajar aqui y luchar mas y mas y se acabo eso. Las saque de la pobreza. Son pobres, pero como te digo, millionarios a como eran antes.” (Well, since I am a bit sentimental I was afraid of changing my mind, of leaving my dad, of how the road was going to go for me, that’s why I didn’t tell them. Because, to see your mom cry or for her to tell you not to leave, and you won’t go, but when I returned Jude, son-of-a-bitch. I was returning as a white guy you know (he laughs), that is I had papers, and like I said, in those days, now you can’t, but in those days with a work permit you were allowed to leave the country for a month. You wouldn’t believe it, but since its real bad to leave without saying goodbye, your mom and dad could die and you didn’t even say bye to them, something real heavy you know. Well, I arrived the 19th of November 1986. On the 20th there are dances in all of Mexico because they celebrate the Mexican revolution and there’s a dance in all of the fucking ranches, and since I love dancing well I left the 19th fucker so I could go to the dance on the 20th. Well, I arrived the 19th at the ranch with my father and I couldn’t talk man for like an hour, crying dude. I couldn’t even talk due to the emotion of seeing my father there and from seeing so much poverty man, of seeing how they were in that moment. It was an emotion like where you feel the ceiling caving in and you tremble fucker. I felt happiness and I felt sadness at seeing the poverty they were enduring. That, well it motivated me to work harder here and fight more and more and it finally ended. I took them out of poverty. They’re poor, but like I’ve told, millionaires in comparison to how they were before).

Don Cheto received his green card less three months after arriving in the U.S., an altogether remarkable occurrence without which he would not have been able to return home so soon. How it is that he did so is a story entailing luck, profit, immigration networks, and U.S.

immigration policy. “En 1985 fue cuando yo me vine para los Estados Unidos en el mes de diciembre con un señor que se llama Juan Crespo Garza que actualmente es mi compadre. En ese momento él no era nada mío, simplemente un conocido. Era muy amigo de un hermano de un amigo mío. Bueno, en esa ocasión que me vine en diciembre con él yo no pasé en diciembre para los Estados Unidos, pasé hasta enero y sufrí bastante porque pues no conocía ni lo que era un semáforo aquí. Miraba una policía y pensaba que era la migra, pues yo no conocía nada. Pues después de cruzar dure yo como un mes en Oceanside con otro amigo mío que se llama Juan Martín Orozco y de allí me vine para acá y llegué aquí con mi tío en febrero no recuerdo que día. La persona que me trajo no supo dar con la dirección y me dejó tirado en un 7-11. Yo no creía mucho en Dios pero con todas las cosas que me han pasado, pues me dejó tirado allí en el 7-11 como a las dos de la mañana, un frío encabronado, y pues pa donde. Yo no sabía la dirección, no tenía dinero, no podía llamar a mi tío ni nada, y que mi tío llegó a las ocho de la mañana en el 7-11 para comprar cigarrillos. Nombre, fue como parasio Dios allí verdad. Ya me recojo mi tío, pues ya me llevó a su casa, me bañé, comí y me dormí y todo y al siguiente día a trabajar señor. Al siguiente día, en un car wash que se llama todavía Imperial Car Wash en San Gabriel, California. Empecé a trabajar allí en 1986 y dure trabajando allí 20 años con el mismo patrón el cual se llamaba Abel DeLeon. Fue él unas de las personas que más me ayudó en los Estados Unidos, porque gracias a él tengo documentos, soy lo que soy. Me enseñó a trabajar, me enseñó a administrar, él me enseñó todo lo que yo sé aquí de cómo se maneja uno en este país, económicamente, moralmente, como persona. Él fue, podíamos decir, como un padre para mí. Ya se murió él, pero fue muy buena persona, ayudó mucha gente, y yo hablo lo mejor de él. (I came to the United States in 1985, in the month of December with a man named Juan Crespo Garza who is now my friend. In that moment he was nothing to me, simply an

acquaintance. He was a friend of one of my friend's brothers. Well, on the occasion that I came with him in December I didn't pass to the United States until January and I suffered a lot because well I didn't even know what a stoplight was here. I would see a cop and I would think it was the border patrol since I didn't know anything. Well, after crossing I stayed for a month in Oceanside with a friend of mine named Juan Martin Orozco. From there I came over here and I arrived here with my uncle in February, I don't remember the day. The person who brought me couldn't locate my uncle's address and he left me in the parking lot of a 7-11. I didn't believe much in God then, but with all the things that have happened to me, well he left me there at the 7-11 at like two in the morning, a bitter cold and where was I to go? I didn't know the address, I didn't have money, I couldn't call my uncle or nothing, and then my uncle shows up at eight in the morning to buy cigarettes. Shit, it was like God had appeared before my eyes. My uncle picked me up, took me to his house, I showered, ate, slept and everything, and the next day to work, the very next day, in a car wash that's still named today to this day Imperial Car Wash in San Gabriel, California. I started working there in 1986 and I stayed working there for twenty years with the same boss whose name was Abel DeLeon. He was one of the people that helped me out the most in United States. Thanks to him I have my documents and I am who I am. He taught me to work; he taught me how to budget. He taught me everything I know about how to manage in this country, economically, morally, like a person. He was, we could say, like a father to me. He died already, but he was a good person. He helped a lot of people and I speak the best of him).

Don Cheto remained single for the first six years of his life in the U.S. He would send 300 hundred dollars a month to his family in Mexico and would visit once a year for about a month. During one of these visits he met and later married a woman from Agua Verde, Sinaloa.

Together they had three children, but according to Don their marriage was troubled early on.

“Yo pienso que el error de ella fue que era muy celosa y muy, como podíamos decir la palabra correcta, porque nunca aceptaba que tu le corriibas un error. Ella siempre tenía la razón, como no aceptaba que alguien supiera más que ella. Lo cual que nunca podíamos hablar porque siempre terminábamos en discusión y para mí esa fue la cosa que acabo con nuestro matrimonio, de que nunca hubo confianza. Porque cuando yo estaba bien con ella nunca la fui infiel. Decían que yo era infiel porque andaba con otras mujeres, pero estaba casado por papel pero de pareja yo estaba nada nada con ella bien. O sea, yo empecé a buscar otra mujer porque allí con ella no servían las cosas. Bueno, dure con ella como te digo 14 años, pero al cuarto año ya mi matrimonio no funcionaba. Me quede allí para que mis hijos crecieran y pa que se podían entender un poco la situación, pa que se defendieran, y se me hacía muy doloroso dejarlos pequeños a ellos verdad. Por eso me aguante diez años más así, pero es una tortura vivir así, cuando no hay amor, cuando el amor se acaba.” (I think her mistake was that she was real jealous and real—how could we put it correctly—because she would never allow you to correct her. She was always in the right, like she couldn’t except that someone knew more than her, which is why we could never talk because we would always end up arguing and for me that’s what ended our marriage, that there was never any trust. Because while I was good with her I never cheated, they would say I was cheating because I was with other women, but I was married with her only on paper, but as a couple we weren’t together. That is, I began to look for other women because things weren’t working out with her. I stayed with her for fourteen years, but by the fourth year our marriage was failing. I stayed so that my kids could grow up, so that they could understand the situation a bit more, so they could defend themselves, and it pained me a lot

to leave them so young. That's why I endured ten more years like that, but its agony to live like that when there is no love, when the love is gone.

After his divorce Don Cheto was single for about a year and a half before meeting and marrying his second wife Isabel. At the time, he was still running his auto-detailing business in Fresno, *“pero con el problema economica que hubo pues yo perdi mi trabajo, perdi mi negocio, perdi todo. Alli fue donde podias decir que yo calli del cielo a la tierra. Dure seis meses sin trabajar, mi dinero se fue, terrenos que tuve tuve que venderlos, dure un año y miedo vendiendo ollas para una compania que se llama Royal Prestige pero llego el momento que ya no daba eso tampoco. De alli me vine aqui al condado de orange en el 2008 y llegue sin dinero, sin nada, tenia solamente 200 dolares ya y andaba pues ya desesperado. Estaba recién casado, tenia un hijo recién nacido y pues me lo estaba yendo muy defícil, muy defícil. Y pues ya iba con rumbo a Mexico a ver que otras oportunidades habia por alla y exactamente el ocho de Agosto aplique en un restaurant que se llama Arctic Taco y tambien en una gasolinera que se llama Refil Mobile. Era como un martes cuando aplique, y como ya estabamos muy desesperados mi esposa y yo comentamos que si para el viernes no me hablaban ibamos a ir a Tijuana porque ya no teniamos dinero para comer ni para nada. Pues, afortunadamente me hablaron el jueves de los dos lados. Eso fue una buena senal para quedarnos aqui. Ya fui a la entrevista de Arctic Taco y me dijieron que me presentaba a trabajar el lunes. Igual me presente al entrevista aqui en la gasolinera y me empezaron a trainer el lunes tambien. Trabajaba de dia en el resaurante y de noche aqui y era terriblemente pesado para mi porque nunca en mi vida habia trabajado en la noche. Sufri mucho como unos tres meses porque no me podia adaptar a no dormir, a dormir ratitos, y hasta la fecha pues sigo el mismo ritmo, podiamos decir, pero ya me acostumbre y duermo lo que duermo pero aqui estoy. No me enfermo, no se como. Unos dicen que me pongo*

la droga pero nunca en mi vida lo he puesto a la droga y aqui estoy trabajando.” (But with the economic problems that occurred I lost my job, I lost my business, I lost everything. That’s where we could say that I fell from heaven to earth. I went six months without working, my money went, land that I bought I had to sell, I went a year and half selling pots and pans for a company called Royal Prestige, but the moment came when that wasn’t enough either. From there I came to Orange County in 2008, and I arrived broke, with nothing, I only had two hundred dollars and well I was real desperate. I was recently married, I had a son that had just been born, and it was going real difficult for me, real difficult. I was already heading to Mexico to see what opportunities there were over there, and exactly the eighth of August I applied in a restaurant called Arctic Taco and also at a gas station called Refill Mobile. It was like a Tuesday when I applied, but since we were real desperate my wife and I said that if nobody called me by Friday we were going to head to Tijuana because we no longer had any money to eat or anything. Well, fortunately they called me on Thursday from both places. That was a good signal for us to stay here. I went to the interview at Arctic Taco and they told me to show up to work on Monday. The same, I came to the interview here at the gas station and they told me to show up for training on Monday too. I worked in the day at the restaurant and at night here, and it was real hard for me because I’d never worked at night before. I suffered a lot for like three months because I couldn’t adapt to not sleeping, to sleeping only in spurts, but to this day I follow the same routine, we could say, but I’ve adapted and I sleep what I sleep but here I am. I don’t get sick, I don’t know how. Some say I take drugs, but I’ve never taken drugs in my life and here I am working).

Don Cheto had been working since he was a child. He began “*hacienda mandados*” (being a gofer) and graduated to painting houses, washing cars, making bread, cutting grass, and

selling pots and pans door-to-door, among other things. Despite all this experience, however, for him fast food proved the most difficult job of all. *“Nunca en mi vida habia trabajado en un restaurante y se me hacia tan deficl, muy deficil. El primer dia que me pusieron a trainer me pusieron con un chino, dios mio, que no hablaba espanol el ni ingles, solamente chino, y estaba sordo y yo pues apenas hablaba espanol como le iba a entender a un chino sordo, nombre. Y yo pues desesperado, miraba la pantalla alli nomas que salieron los ordenes, y que alla, que aca que alla y pues nada. No agarre nada el primer dia. El siguiente dia lo mismo cabron. Nunca en mi vida habia trabajado en un restaurante y con esa person que me pusieron a trainar pues menos. Me estaba desesperando y le comente a mi esposa que pues si no me ponian con otra persona nos ibamos a ir porque con un trabajo no lo iba hacer y resulta que me pusieron el siguiente dia con una persona que se llama Xochi de El Salvador. Nombre, con ella aprendi en ese mismo dia. Por lo que habia visto y lo que ella me enseno pues en ese mismo dia aprendi y podemos decir que en una semana logre aprender todo. En dos semanas yo ya estaba listo y al mes yo ya era rapido porque al mes ya me habian dado mi schedule de las 40 horas. Pero no, no, el peor trabajo que he tenido, no peor sino mas matado mas pesado ha sido el restaurante y aqui estan las senales cabron (he shows me his scars). Quemadas, quemadas, quemadas. Quemadas en la espalda, quemadas por donde quiera y pa mi eso ha sido el trabajo mas duro y mal pagado de todos los trabajos que he tenido.”* (Never in my life had I worked in a restaurant, and I found it real difficult, so difficult. The first day they put me to train with a person from China, good lord, that didn't speak Spanish or English only Chinese and he was deaf, and I only spoke Spanish how was I going to understand a Chinese mute. And I was desperate; I would see the screen light up when orders came in and over here, over there, over here and nothing. I didn't get anything the first day. The next day, the same thing fucker. Never in my life had I

worked in a restaurant and with the person they put me with to train even less. I was desperate and I told my wife that if they didn't put me with someone else we were going to have to leave because with one job we weren't going to be able to do it, and as it turns out the next day they put me with a person named Xochi from El Salvador. With her, I learned that same day. From everything that I'd seen and what she showed me, well in that same day I learned and we could say in a week I learned everything, in two weeks I was ready, and by a month I was already fast because by then they had already given my forty hours. But no, no, the worst job that I've had, not the worst, but most taxing, the most grueling, has been the restaurant and here are the signs. Burns, burns, burns. Burns on my back, burns everywhere, and for me that has been my most difficult job and the worst paid of all the jobs I've had).

CONCLUSION

As I hope I've made clear by now, Arctic Taco was not always the most pleasant place to work. Fast food can be very demanding and the fact that it does not pay well means many must hold second jobs. Within this context, Don Cheto's attitude was a remarkable aberration, one that impressed me even more as I began to learn more about him. Still, Don was not oblivious to the fact that he could not maintain his work schedule long, that at some point he would have to ease up, and though he was not an overly religious person this was one of the things he did pray for. *“Yo no pido riquezas, pido que dios me da mucho salud y que me ayude encontrar otro trabajo en que no me mato tanto, que gano un poco mas. Porque yo se que no voy a aguantar mucho trabajando como estoy trabajando ahorrita. Sea, yo tengo que ir levajando. Tengo que cuidarme el salud y eso es lo que pido a dios que me abre una puerta donde gano un poco mas para poder trabajar menos horas. El sabe que no debo de estar trabajando como estoy*

trabajando y yo se que el me va dar una oportunidad. No se cuando pero va llegar. Yo se que dios no me va matar asi como estoy trabajando. El tiene que dejarme hasta que mis hijos crezcan y eso es lo que pido. Bueno, si me quiere mandar un lotocito pues no hay pedo verdad (he laughs). (I don't ask for riches, I ask God that he gives me health and that he helps me find another job where I don't have to work so hard, where I can make a little bit more. Because I know that I am not going to last working how I'm working right now. That is, I have to go reducing. I have to take care of my health, and that is what I ask God for, that he opens up a door for me where I can make a little bit more so I don't have to work so many hours. He knows that I shouldn't be working like I'm working right now, and I know he's going to give me an opportunity. I don't know when, but it will arrive. I know that God is not going to let me die working like I am now. He has to leave me until my kids grow up and that's what I ask for. Of course, if he wants to send me a lotto, I got no beef with that).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, Rachel H.

2005. "Oye Compadre! The Chef Needs a Dishwasher: Yucatecan Men in the Dallas Restaurant Economy," *Urban Anthropology*, vol 34(2-3), pp. 217-246

Alba, Francisco

1978. "Mexico's International Migration as a Manifestation of Its Development Pattern." *International Migration Review* 12 (Winter 1978):502-551.

Alcantara, Cynthia Hewitt de

1976. *La Modernizacion de la Agricultura Mexicana, 1940-1970*. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno.

Applebaum, Herbert

1992. *The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*. Albany: State University of New York Press

Arendt, Hannah

1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aristotle

1980. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Loeb Library Edition, translated by William, D. Ross.
London: William Heinemann, Ltd.

Arizpe, Lourdes

1978. *Migracion etnicismo y cambio economico: (un estudio sobre migrantes campesinos a la ciudad de Mexico)*. Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, Centro de Estudios Sociologicos.

Ashcraft, Richard

1980. *Locke's Two Treatises of Government*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Avineri, Shlomo

1973. "Labor, Alienation and Social Classes." In *The Legacy of Hegel*, edited by J. J.

O'Malley, K. W. Algozin, H. P. Kainz, and L. C. Rice. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Austin, M. M. and P. Vidal-Naquet

1977. *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Baum, Gregory

1982. *The Priority of Labor: A Commentary on Labor exercens, encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II*. New York: Paulist Press

Baxter, Richard

1925 (1673). *Chapters from a Christian Directory*, edited by Jeanette Tawney. London: G. Bell & Sons.

Bernstein, Jared, Chauna Brocht, and Maggie Spade-Aguilar

2000. *How Much is Enough?: Basic Family budgets for Working Families*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.

Bertrand, Russell

1967. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

The Bible

1962. *Old and New Testament*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co.

Bluestone, Barry and Bennett Harrison

1982. *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*. New York: Basic Books.

Boorstin, Daniel J.

1965. *The Americans: The National Experience*. New York: Vintage Books.

Butterfield, Roger

1957. *The American Past: A History of the United States from Concord to the Nuclear Age*.
New York: Simon and Schuster.

Budd, John

2011. *The Thought of Work*. Ithaca, New York: ILR Press.

Calvin, John

1964. *A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by Hugh T. Kerr.
Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

Campbell, Joan

1989. *Joy in Work, German Work: The National Debate, 1800-1945*. Princeton, N.J.:
Princeton University Press.

Carter, Susan

2006. *Historical Statistics of the US: Millennial Edition*, series Ca9.

Castles, Stephen

1989. *Migrant Workers and the Transformation of Western Societies*. Ithaca, New York:
Center for International Studies, Cornell University.

Carcopino, Jerome

1940. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Cassirer, Ernst

1968 (1932). *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chavez, Leo R.

1992. *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Chayanov, Aleksandr Vasilevich, Basile H. Kerblay, R. E. F. Smith, and Daniel Thorner.

1966. *The Theory of Peasant Economy*. Homewood, IL: R. D. Irwin.

Cicero

1938. *De Officiis*. Loeb Library Edition, translated by Walter Miller. London: William Heinemann, Ltd.

Collier, George A. and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello

2005. *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas*. Oakland, Calif.: Food First Books.

Coutin, Susan Bibler

2007. *Nations of Emigrants: Shifting Boundaries of Citizenship in El Salvador and the United States*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

De Man, Hendri

1929. *Joy in Work*, translated by Eden Paul and Cedar Paul. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Dewalt, Kathleen Musante

1983. *Nutritional Strategies and Agricultural Change in a Mexican Community*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press.

Dewey, Kathryn G.

1981. "Nutritional Consequences of the Transformation from Subsistence to Commercial Agriculture in Tabasco, Mexico," in *Human Ecology*, Vol. 9, No. 2.

Dover, K. J.

1974. *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*. Berkeley, Calif.:

University of California Press.

Duby, Georges

1980. *The Three Orders, Feudal Society Imagined*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dunn, John

1969. *The Political Thought of John Locke*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University

Press.

Engels, Frederick

1958. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. New York: Macmillan.

1978 (1880). "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific." In *Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert

C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton and Co.

Finley, Moses I.

1959. "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor?" *Historia* 8: 145-164.

1986. *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*. New York: Pelican Books

Firth, Raymond

1972. *The Organization of Work among the New Zealand Maori*. Wellington, New Zealand:

Shearer.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott

1953. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner's.

Franklin, Benjamin

1987. *Writings*. New York: The Library of America.

Galarza, Ernesto

1964. *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960*. Charlotte; Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin.

Gamio, Manuel

1931. *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life-Story: Autobiographic Documents*. Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago Press.

1971. *Mexican Immigration to the United States; A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment*. New York, Dover Publications.

Gay, Peter

1996. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*. New York, Knopf.

Gellner, Ernest

1988. *Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Geoghegan, Arthur T.

1945. *The Attitude toward Labor in Early Christianity and Ancient Culture*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.

Gilson, Etienne

1948 (1929). *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. New York: Dorset Press.

Gomberg-Munoz, Ruth

2010. "Willing to Work: Agency and Vulnerability in an Undocumented Immigrant Network," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 112, issue 2, p. 295-307.

Gonzalez, Gilbert G. and Raul Fernandez

2002. "Empire and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Migration from Mexico to the United States," *Pacific Historical Review*, 71, pp. 19-57.

Gunewardena, Nandini, and Ann Kingsolver

2007. *The Gender of Globalization: Women Navigating Cultural and Economic Marginalities*. Santa Fe, N.M.: School for Advanced Research Press.

Hart, John Mason

1997. *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming process of the Mexican Revolution*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press.

Herrnstein, Richard J., and Charles Murray

1994. *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. New York: Free Press.

Hesiod

1983. "Works and Days." "Theogony," "Shield," translated by A N. Athanassakis. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Heyman, Josiah

1998. "State Effects on Labor Exploitation: The INS and Undocumented Immigrants at the Mexico-United States Border." *Critique of Anthropology* 18 (2):157-180.

Hobsbawn, Eric

1964. *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. New York: Macmillan.

1969. *Industry and Empire*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.

Holmes, Seth

2007. ““Oaxacans Like to Work Bent Over””: The Naturalization of Social Suffering among Berry Farm Workers,” in *International Migration*, volume 45, issue 3, pp. 39-68.

Kearney, Michael

2004. *Changing Fields of Anthropology: From Local to Global*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kim, Esther

2009. ““Mama’s Family’”: Fictive Kinship and Undocumented Immigrant Restaurant Workers,” in *Ethnography*, volume 10, number. 4, pp. 497-513.

Kranzberg, Melvin, and Joseph Gies

1975. *By the Sweat of Thy Brow*. New York: G. P. Putnam.

Kuczynski, Jurgen

1967. *The Rise of the Working Class*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.

Kurland, Philip B., and Ralph Lerner

1987. *The Founders’ Constitution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lamprecht, Sterling P.

1962 (1918). *The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Locke*. New York: Russell and Russell.

Laslett, Peter

1965. *The World We Have Lost: England before the Industrial Age*. New York: Scribners and Sons.

1967. *Translation of John Locke’s Two Treatises of Government*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Levitan, Sar A., and Clifford M. Johnson

1982. *Second Thoughts on Work*. Kalamazoo, Mich.: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Livingstone, David N., and Charles W. J. Withers

1999. *Geography and Enlightenment*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Locke, John

1967 (1690). *Two Treatises of Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Introduction and Analysis by Peter Laslett

Lomnitz, Larissa

1975. *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown*. New York: Academic Press.

Malinowski, Bronislaw

1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co.

Manent, Pierre

1996. *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*. Princeton University Press.

Massey, Douglas S., Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, and J. E. Taylor.

1993. "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal." *Population and Development Review* 19.3 (1993): 431-66.

Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone

2002. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Integration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Marcuse, Herbert

1964. *One-Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Marx, Karl

1844, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan,
Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988.

1906. *Capital*. Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House

Marx, Karl, Frederich Engels, and Lewis Feuer

1959. *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*. Anchor Books
Doubleday and Company, Inc.

McLellan, David

2006. *Karl Marx: A Biography* (fourth edition), Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan Mayo,
Elton

1933. *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Meek, Ronald L.

1973. *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Moss, Philip, and Chris Tilly

2001. *Stories Employers Tell: Race, Skill, and Hiring in America*. New York: Russell Sage
Foundation.

Mosse, Clause

1969. *The Ancient World at Work*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Ngai, Mae

2004. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton,
NJ: Princeton University Press.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

1999. *Employment Outlook*

Ong, Aihwa

1987. *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Outram, Dorinda.

2006. *Panorama of the Enlightenment*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum

Paules, Greta Foff.

1991. *Dishing It Out: Power and Resistance among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Plass, Ewald M.

1959. *What Luther Says*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

Plato

1968. *The Republic*, translated with notes and interpretive essay by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Piore, Michael

1979. *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor Industrial Societies*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pope John Paul II

1982. "Laborem Exercens." In *The Priority of Labor*, edited by Gregory Baum. New York: Paulist Press

Portes, Alejandro, and John Walton

1981. *Labor, class, and the International System*. New York: Academic Press.

Richards, Audrey I, and Henrietta Moore

1961 (1939). *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe*. London: Oxford University Press

Rodgers, Daniel T.

1978. *The Work Ethic in Industrial America: 1850-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rouse, Roger

1992. "The Making of a Transnational Community: Migration, Development, and Cultural Change in the Dominican Republic." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 94, pp. 225-226

Sassen, Saskia

1988. *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press

1991. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press.

1998. *Globalization and its Discontents*. New York: New Press

Sassen-Koob, Saskia

1981. "Towards a Conceptualization of Immigrant Labor," in *Social Problems*, vol. 29, no. 1.

Schwalbe, Michael

1988. "Sources of Self-Esteem in Work." In *Work and Occupations* 15:1, February:24-35.

Smith, Adam

1937 (1776). *Wealth of Nations*. Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House.

1961 (1776). *Wealth of Nations*, edited by Edwin Cannan. London: Methuen.

Smith-Nonini, Sandy

2007. "Sticking to the Union: Anthropologists and "Union Maids" in San Francisco. In *The Gender of Globalization: Women Navigating Cultural and Economic Marginalization*, ed. Nandini Gunewardena and Ann Kingsolver, pp. 197-214. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press

Spittler, G.

2001. *Work: Anthropological Aspects*. Amsterdam: Elsevier

Tawney, R. H.

1947. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York: Penguin Books.

Taylor, Frederick W.

1947. *Scientific Management*. New York: Harper & Row.

Thompson, E. P.

1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Victor Gollanz.

Tilgher, Adriano

1930. *Work: What It Has Meant to Men through the Ages*. New York: Random House.

Veblen, Thorstein

1914. *The Instinct of Workmanship*. New York: The Macmillan Co.

1934 (1899). *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House.

Waldinger, Roger David, and Michael I. Lichter

2003. *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*.

Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Wallerstein, Immanuel

1974. *The Modern World-System*. New York: Academic Press.

Weber, Max

1950. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons, with a forward by R. H. Tawney. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons

Wiedemann, Thomas

1981. *Greek and Roman Slavery*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Willen, Sarah S.

2007. "Toward a Critical Phenomenology of "Illegality": State Power, Criminalization, and Abjectivity among Undocumented Migrant Workers in Tel Aviv, Isreal." *International Migration*, vol 45(3), pp. 8-38.

Willis, Paul E.

1977. *Learning to Labor*. London: Saxon House

Wood, Neal

1984. *John Locke and Agrarian Capitalism*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Zlolski, Christian

2003. "Labor Control and Resistance of Mexican Immigrant Janitors in Silicon Valley.

Human Organization 62 (1):39-49

2006. *Janitors, Street Vendors, and Activists: The Lives of Mexican Immigrants in Silicon Valley*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Zorbaugh, Harvey Warren

1929. *Gold Coast and Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side*. Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago Press.