

Jornaleros Engaged in a Multidimensional Struggle:  
A Critical Ethnography with Day Laborers in Las Vegas

J. Adrian Casrejon, Ph.D.

Justice Studies

Abstract

Day labor work has spread across the entire United States as part of the secondary labor market, or as Cherrie Moraga describes it- survival work. Day laborers in Las Vegas, Nevada have become a significant part of this trend in the Southwest, where the highest rate of day laborers work, and for which little community and scholarly work has been produced. The National Day Labor Survey, the most comprehensive study with day laborers, reports that the day labor market is rife with abuse and violations of worker rights. Undocumented migrant workers from Mexico and Central America comprise 75% of the labor force in this labor market. This study examines employer treatment of day laborers, and when abuse and labor law violations occur, how day laborers manage and respond to the mistreatment and law violations. Additionally, the project seeks to advocate for migrant worker rights by shedding light on other hardships associated to day labor work and on the relationship between migrant workers and employers in this unsanctioned and exploitable labor market. Lastly, this project challenges the deficit narrative that migrant workers, especially those from Mexico and Central America, are “poorly educated” and “low-skilled” and the ways that these deficiency frameworks sanction and contribute to the exploitation of this workforce while perpetuating xenophobia and discrimination. This study employs *testimonio* and ethnographic

methodologies at an informal hiring site, *la esquina*, in Southeast Las Vegas where *jornaleros* gather daily to seek work. The National Day Labor Survey, Critical Race and Latino Critical Theory, and Chicana feminist thought inform this study.