No Phone, No Vehicle, No English, and No Citizenship: The Vulnerability of Mexican Immigrants in the United States

Karen M. Douglas and Rogelio Saenz

Immigrants have historically occupied the bottom rungs of American society. Indeed, they have toiled for low wages in jobs that are shunned by many Americans. Commonly isolated from the mainstream population and from the opportunity structure of American society, immigrants have also experienced significant discrimination and violation of their human rights. A particularly vulnerable segment of immigrants—Mexicans (the largest segment of immigrants)—are the focus of this chapter. In particular, we examine four hypotheses based on the relationship between the lack of basic human and related forms of capital (telephone, automobile, English fluency, and citizenship status) and labor market conditions (employment and hourly wages). Data from the 2000 5% Public Use Microdata Sample are used to conduct the analysis. The results provide support for the hypotheses. The results illustrate the costs that the most vulnerable segment of Mexican immigrants pays in the labor market for their lack of resources. These findings are placed within the context of the significant shifts that have occurred in employer-employee relations in which employers increasingly seek workers with few resources and connections.

In general, the past three decades have witnessed significant shifts in employer-employee relations in the United States with employers increasingly seeking workers with few resources and connections. The shifts in the patterns of the American economy are part of a larger globalization process that has also witnessed the increasing transfer of societal risks (health insurance, financial risk, and so on) previously born in larger portions by both government and/or employers onto individuals, rendering everyone more
vulnerable to risk although not proportionately so. Those who are the least socially advantaged are placed in more precarious situations because their marginality increases their risk for exploitation, discrimination, and abuse of human rights. Further, these shifts in the American economy—which in various sectors has witnessed both the outsourcing of jobs abroad and the replacement of native workers with immigrants—coincides with a steady erosion of basic human rights for U.S. citizens in general and further marginalizing the conditions (and rights) of noncitizens.

As detailed by Sjoberg, Gill, and Williams (2001), there are ongoing and long-standing debates regarding the nature of human rights, including one such divide between "ethicists" and "rights" orientations, the former emphasizing duties and the performance of duties in the acquisition of rights and the latter assuming basic human rights at the outset before the performance of duties (civic, social, and so on). For our purposes here, we accept Sjoberg et al.'s conceptualization of rights as something that humans possess simply because of their human status and their definition of human rights as "social claims made by individuals (or groups) upon organized power arrangements for purposes of enhancing human dignity" (42).

While there has been an erosion of human rights in general in the United States, the vulnerability and marginalization of Mexican immigrants have been exacerbated by the rabid xenophobia and anti-immigrant hysteria and Mexican bashing of the early part of the twenty-first century fomented by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Minutemen, Friends of the Border Patrol, America in Danger, and Secured Borders U.S.A., to name a few. Mexican immigrants have historically occupied the bottom rungs of American society, where they have toiled for low wages in jobs that are shunned by many Americans. Because many lack basic resources that most U.S. citizens take for granted, they are at increased risk of exploitation, discrimination, and the violation of their human rights. Mexican immigrants who lack such basic resources are particularly vulnerable and isolated from the opportunity structures of American society.

This chapter examines the costs that Mexican immigrants who lack selected basic resources bear in the labor market. In particular, we examine the relationship between the lack of four basic resources (telephone, vehicle, English-language proficiency, and U.S. naturalization status) and employment status and hourly wages among Mexican immigrants. As expected, our results show that workers with the fewest human and other forms of capital investments fare the worst in the labor market.

We follow with a discussion about the vulnerabilities of Mexican immigrants to employer exploitation as a result of several transformations, including changes in the structure of existing immigration law that increased the desirability among U.S. employers for immigrant labor; the restructuring of the American workplace over the past several decades that has seen an increase in the use of private contractors, part-time employees, and somewhat stagnant wages (and, in some sectors, declining wages); and the resultant wholesale replacement of primarily domestic workers (and, in many cases, African American workers) with Latino immigrants. We end on an urgent note pointing to recent and alarming trends that have continued the erosion of human rights in general and the exploitation of the most vulnerable segments of society—with seemingly little public attention and much less public outcry.

COMMENTS FROM THE LITERATURE

Social scientists have compiled evidence showing the degree to which persons who make greater investments in the acquisition of human capital and related forms of capital (e.g., social capital and technology) reap more favorable labor market outcomes (see Becker 1993; Saenz 2000; Stolzenberg and Tienda 1997). For example, communication (e.g., telephone and access to the Internet and e-mail) and transportation technologies allow people to tap a variety of information and social networks that facilitate more favorable labor market outcomes. Access to the Internet has been shown to be useful to unemployed workers, especially those in rural areas (McQuaid, Lindsay, and Greig 2004).

In addition, research has demonstrated the importance of the availability of personal transformation for the attainment of more favorable labor market outcomes. For example, research has shown that African Americans have longer commutes to their places of employment compared to whites, with the automobile essential for linking African Americans to jobs in more distant suburban areas (Johnston-Anumonwo 2001). Similarly, immigrants tend to commute longer distances than do their native-born counterparts (Preston, McLafferty, and Liu 1998). Moreover, in their study of the employment patterns of former welfare recipients, Crew and Eyerman (2001) observe that a vehicle is important not only for securing employment but especially for keeping a job two years later. Longer commutes place workers, especially those with limited socioeconomic resources, at risk of low wages, costly job searches, and unemployment (Preston et al. 1998).

There is also a well-developed body of scholarship that shows the relationships between more traditional forms of human capital and labor market outcomes. Two forms of human capital that are especially relevant to immigrants include English fluency and naturalization status. Research has observed linkages between English proficiency and labor market outcomes (Enchautegui 1992). For instance, research demonstrates that immigrants with greater English fluency tend to be more successful in locating employment (Waldinger 1996). In addition, Davila and Mora (2001) found that
Latinos would have higher hourly wages if they had higher levels of English proficiency, all else being equal. Furthermore, Stolzenberg and Tienda (1997) discovered that penalties for the lack of English fluency among minority-group members are greater for those with low levels of education.

Research has also suggested that naturalization status has an impact on labor market outcomes. For example, Aguilera (2004) observes that citizenship status became a more important predictor of labor market wages after the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986).

These more traditional social and cultural capital studies have been supplemented with a more recent literature that suggests that for a sizable sector of the labor force—characterized by immigrant labor—social and cultural capital do little to advance their workplace experiences. In contrast, with much of the social capital literature, which focuses on the positive outcomes of a person's social capital. Cranford (2005) argues for the need to "decouple the concepts of "social capital" and "social networks" (380). In particular, decentralized employment relations in which firms outsource (subcontract) many of their recruitment, training, and management functions have resulted in exploitative relations for immigrants regardless of whether their network ties are weak or strong. Further, as Cranford illustrates, social capital need not always result in better working conditions, negotiating position, or any positive aspects at all. "In some contexts immigrants may be piling up at the bottom rather than moving upward" (382).

On the basis of the literature, we develop four hypotheses linking the presence or absence of basic human and related forms of capital to labor market outcomes:

1. Mexican immigrants who lack a phone in their households are more likely to be unemployed and to have lower hourly wages than their peers who have a phone in their households.
2. Mexican immigrants who lack an automobile in their households are more likely to be unemployed and to have lower hourly wages than their counterparts who have an automobile in their households.
3. Mexican immigrants who lack English fluency are more likely to be unemployed and to have lower hourly wages than their peers who are fluent in English.
4. Mexican immigrants who are not naturalized citizens are more likely to be unemployed and to have lower hourly wages than their counterparts who are naturalized citizens.

METHODS

Data from the 2000 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) are used to conduct the analysis. The PUMS represents an ideal data source on the demographic and socioeconomic patterns of specific racial and ethnic groups, including immigrants, because of its large sample size, approximately 14.1 million persons. The primary sample used in this analysis consists of foreign-born persons of Mexican origin. The first part of the analysis is based on 224,181 foreign-born Mexicans sixteen years of age and older who were part of the civilian labor force (i.e., they were either employed or unemployed but actively seeking employment in the civilian sector of the economy) at the time of the census in 2000. The second part of the analysis is based on 195,234 foreign-born Mexicans sixteen years of age and older who had earnings in 1999 and who worked at least 1,040 hours that year (i.e., roughly equivalent to full-time employment over half the year or half-time employment for the entire year) (see Saenz and Morales 2005). The restriction related to hours worked during the year ensures that the analysis is limited to workers who are significantly attached to the labor market.

Dependent Variables

The analysis includes two dependent variables: unemployment and the logged hourly wage. First, unemployment is a dichotomous variable with a value of 1 assigned to those persons who are unemployed and a value of 0 to those who hold a job. Second, the logged hourly wage represents the logged form of the hourly wage, which is computed by dividing the earnings of workers in 1999 by the estimated total number of hours that they worked during the year (i.e., hours usually worked in 1999 multiplied by the number of weeks worked in 1999). We log the hourly wage in order to minimize outliers at both (lower and higher) ends of the distribution of the hourly wage. The logged form of the variable allows us to interpret the regression coefficients as the percentage difference in hourly wages between different categories of the independent variables.

Independent Variables

The analysis includes four primary independent variables that we related to the two dependent variables. First, lack of a telephone is a dummy variable with a value of 1 assigned to persons who do not have a telephone in their households and a value of 0 to those with a telephone. Second, lack of an automobile is a dummy variable with a value of 1 assigned to people who do not have an automobile in their households and a value of 0 to those who have access to a vehicle in their households. Third, lack of English fluency is a dummy variable with a value of 1 assigned to individuals who do not speak English well and a value of 0 to those who speak English well. Fourth, lack of citizenship is a dummy variable with a value of 1 assigned to persons who are not naturalized citizens and a value of 0 to
those who are naturalized citizens. In each of the four variables, the category of individuals with a value of 0 represents the reference group.

Control Variables

In order to more accurately assess the relationships between the independent and dependent variables, we introduce a series of control variables into the analysis because they tend to be related to each of the two sets of variables. The control variables for each of the two parts of the analysis (unemployment and hourly wages) include age, period of immigration to the United States, educational attainment level, marital status, disability status, metropolitan/non-metropolitan residence, and region. The second part of the analysis (hourly wages) includes four additional control variables: occupation, self-employment status; “experience” measured as age minus years of education minus 6, which is a commonly used proxy for labor force experience; and “experience” squared. Finally, because the analysis is carried out separately for females, the presence and age of children is included as a control variable for the analysis involving females. Note that this information was collected only for females age sixteen years and older in the census.

Statistical Procedures and Analytical Plan

The first part of the analysis related to unemployment is conducted through the use of logistic regression because of the categorical nature of the unemployment variable. The second part of the analysis involving the logged hourly wages is carried out through the use of ordinary least squares multiple regression because of the interval-level form of the logged hourly wage. The analysis for each part of the analysis is carried out separately for males and females to determine the extent to which the relationships between the independent and dependent variables differ or are consistent across gender groups.

RESULTS

We begin the analysis with a descriptive overview of the bivariate relationship between the four independent variables (lack of a telephone, lack of an automobile, lack of English fluency, and lack of citizenship) and the two dependent variables (unemployment and hourly wages). Across gender groups, people who lack any one of the four basic human and related forms of capital are more likely to be unemployed and to have lower hourly wages compared to those who hold such resources (table 10.1). The differences across groups are especially noticeable with respect to unemployment among females. Indeed, women who lack any of these resources are about one-half (no phone) to three-fourths (no citizenship) more likely to be unemployed compared to women who have a given resource. Among both males and females, the lack of access to an automobile and the lack of citizenship tend to be most detrimental to the securing of employment.

Among males, overall, those who lack any specific human or related form of capital have median hourly wages that are between 21 percent (no phone) and 27 percent (no citizenship) lower than those of their counterparts who have such endowments. Similar patterns exist for females with the earnings gap being between 15 percent (no phone) and 23 percent (no English or no citizenship).

We now turn our attention to the results from the multivariate analysis. The left-hand side of table 10.2 provides highlights based on odds ratios for the four independent variables drawn from the logistic regression analysis (the complete table showing the results including for the control variables is available from the authors). With only one exception, the hypotheses related to unemployment are supported. The only exception is for the lack of a telephone among males. In this case, lack of a telephone does not affect the odds of one’s employment status. Men who lack the other three resources (automobile, English fluency, and citizenship) are significantly more likely to be unemployed. In particular, those who do not have an automobile in their households are 36 percent more likely to be unemployed, those who lack citizenship are 22 percent more likely to not have a job, and those who lack English fluency are 7 percent more likely to be jobless than their respective counterparts.
Table 10.2. Multivariate Results Examining the Relationship Between the Lack of Selected Resources and Unemployment and Logged Hourly Wages among Mexican Immigrants by Sex, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COEFS</th>
<th>ODDS RATIOS</th>
<th>UNSTANDARDIZED REGRESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selected Resources and Availability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Telephone</td>
<td>1.071</td>
<td>1.351**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Automobile</td>
<td>1.356**</td>
<td>1.490**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No English Fluency</td>
<td>1.070**</td>
<td>1.284**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Citizenship</td>
<td>1.223**</td>
<td>1.317**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

NOTE: These results are based on the inclusion of the series of control variables described in the text.

All four resources are significantly related to the employment conditions of women. In this case, those who do not have a vehicle in the household are 49 percent more likely to be unemployed, those who do not have a telephone are 35 percent more likely to be jobless, those who are not citizens are 32 percent more likely to be unemployed, and those who do not speak English fluently are 28 percent more likely to be without a job. Overall, it appears that women are hurt more in finding employment if they lack the four human and related forms of capital than are men. This may reflect their less dense social networks compared to those of their immigrant male counterparts (Hagan 1994) as well as the greater limitations that gender roles place on women in securing employment (Boyd 1992).

We now examine the four hypotheses associated with the logged hourly wages. All four hypotheses are supported across gender groups (table 10.2, right-hand side). The effect of the lack of each of the four basic resources on the logged hourly wages is consistent with men who lack any of the four resources, having hourly wages that are about 9 percent lower than the wages of their counterparts who have a given resource. The relationships are also consistent across resources among women. In this case, women who lack any of the four resources have hourly wages that are about 6 percent lower than those of their counterparts who have a given resource.

Mexican Immigrant Jobs and Lack of Resources

Mexican immigrants are concentrated in jobs that tend to be designated as "Mexican immigrant jobs" and are characterized as low-wage, dead-end, and dangerous jobs where workers face tremendous levels of exploitation. It is these sectors of the economy, where Mexican immigrants are appealing to employers because of their low skills, desperate economic situation, and the presence of a large labor pool of coethnics (the reserved labor army), that can easily replace workers who demand higher wages and better working conditions. This is particularly the case among Mexican immigrants who lack the basic resources discussed previously.

Our data show that it is this specific segment of the Mexican immigrant workforce that is clustered in "Mexican immigrant jobs." We draw on the work of Waldinger (1996; see also Model 1993) to identify the occupations where Mexican immigrants are disproportionately represented relative to their presence in the overall workforce. Thus, we obtain two sex-specific percentages: 1) the percentage of workers in a given occupation who are Mexican immigrants (p₁) and 2) the percentage of all workers—regardless of occupation—who are Mexican immigrants (p₂). We then compute the ratio of the percentage of workers who are Mexican immigrants in a given industry to the percentage of all workers who are Mexican immigrants using the following formula for each sex:

\[
\text{Ratio} = \frac{p₁}{p₂}
\]

We then use two criteria to identify Mexican immigrant jobs: 1) the ratio is 1.5 or higher; and 2) there are a minimum number of workers in a given occupation (25,000 for males and 10,000 for females). This procedure results in twenty-five Mexican immigrant occupations among men and twenty-three Mexican immigrant occupations among women. More than half of all currently employed Mexican immigrant men (54.3 percent) and women (53.5 percent) worked in these occupations in 2000. Our analysis confirms that the occupations making up the "Mexican immigrant jobs" are typically those associated with Mexican immigrants, such as agriculture labor; meat, poultry, and seafood processing; construction; waiters/waitresses; cooks; maids and housekeeping cleaners; and janitors and building cleaners (see this chapter's appendix).

Workers, men and women alike, who lack any of the four basic resources examined here are concentrated in "Mexican immigrant jobs" (table 10.3). In particular, men and women are clustered in such jobs when they do not speak English or are not naturalized citizens. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between the number of basic resources lacked and the prevalence of workers employed in "Mexican immigrant jobs." Indeed, while nearly 70 percent of workers who lack all four basic resources are working in "Mexican immigrant jobs," far fewer of those who possess all four resources are toiling in such jobs (men, 33.6 percent; women, 31.8 percent).
Table 10.3. Percentage of Currently Employed Workers in Mexican Immigrant Jobs by the Availability of Selected Resources and Sex, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Resources and Availability</th>
<th>Percent Mexican Immigrant Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Telephone</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Automobile</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No English Fluency</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Fluency</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Citizenship</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Resources Lacked:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>66.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>187,113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further analyses document the vulnerable employment conditions of Mexican immigrants who lack any of the four basic resources and who make their livelihood in "Mexican immigrant jobs" (data available on request from the authors). For example, these workers tend to have the highest unemployment rates compared to three other groups of workers (lack of a given resource and working in a "Mexican immigrant job," presence of a given resource and working in a "Mexican immigrant job," and presence of a given resource and not working in a "Mexican immigrant job"). However, interestingly, the differences across the four groups of workers are relatively minor among Mexican immigrant men, as this segment of the population has relatively low unemployment rates (5.1 percent overall). Nonetheless, consistently, workers who lack any of the four basic resources and who are working in "Mexican immigrant jobs" have the lowest median hourly wages.

These supplementary analyses highlight the vulnerable position of workers who lack basic resources that are commonly taken for granted and who are isolated from societal opportunity structures. It is these workers who are increasingly appealing to employers in the new era of labor relations because they can be easily manipulated, exploited, and disposed. We now provide a discussion of the restructuring of the U.S. economy, the increasing use of workers such as those who lack the human and related resources noted previously, and the precarious position of such works, especially with respect to the violation of their basic human rights.

VULNERABILITY AND SHIFTING LABOR RELATIONS

That the U.S. economy has fundamentally restructured itself has been well documented by many scholars (Bernhardt et al. 2001; Danziger and Gottschalk 1993; Rubin 1995). For example, Rubin (1995), in her description of the transformation of the American workplace, describes how the traditional relationship between employers and employees has fundamentally changed from one characterized by long-term contractual relations to more flexible arrangements coinciding with the increasing popularity of short-term, temporary employment arrangements. The 1970s saw a serious challenge to U.S. business hegemony as many domestic industries experienced increased international competition that resulted in an erosion of corporate profits and market share.

The domestic response was multipronged and included a reduction in employment levels; a lowering of wages and benefits; renegotiated and/or elimination of union contracts; increased use of nonunionized subcontractors; employment of new technologies to reduce dependence on labor; relocation, when possible, of production overseas to take advantage of lower labor costs and/or, in the United States, to locales in the more business-friendly Sunbelt states; and availing themselves to tax incentives and abatements offered by localities seeking to attract industry to their areas. Further, as we document later, it is precisely workers who lack human and related resources (e.g., phone, vehicle, English, and citizenship) to whom employers have turned to fill the positions for the relocated and restructured businesses.

More recently, academic attention has focused on the relationship of this economic restructuring to the domestic labor force, race relations, and the increased demand and use by U.S. companies for immigrant (predominantly Latino) labor. For example, Kandel and Parrado (2005) link economic restructuring of several industries to the increased presence of the Latino population in nonmetropolitan areas and to the so-called new destination areas. Economic restructuring further demarcated primary-sector employment (e.g., "good" jobs) from secondary-sector jobs, which they describe as unstable, poorly paid, "dead-end" employment. For example, the deskilling and deunionization of the meat-processing industry has resulted
in stagnant wages, high turnover rates, high injury rates, and a growing need and presence of foreign-born workers to fill these positions. According to Kandel and Parrado (2005), the transformation in the meat-processing industry was almost complete by the 1980s: "a formerly urban, unionized, and semiskilled workforce employed in production plants, supermarkets, and butcher shops in the 1950s was transformed into one with rural, mostly nonunion, and unskilled workers concentrated at the industrial processing end of the meat production chain by the end of the 1980s" (458).

According to Kandel (2006), the twenty-year period from 1980 to 2000 saw the transformation of the workforce of the meat-processing industry from white to brown. During the period, the white share of workers in this industry declined from 74 to 49 percent, while the Latino percentage increased from 9 to 29 percent. At the same time, the fraction of the foreign born among Latino meatpacking workers climbed from 50 percent in 1980 to 82 percent in 2000. As the complexion of workers darkened, overall wages declined. As Eric Schlosser (2005) points out, meatpacking paid upward of $18 per hour when it was unionized. Today, processing and packing plants are staffed by nonunion workers, primarily from Mexico and Guatemala, making approximately $6 an hour.

Like Kandel and Parrado (2005), Casanova and McDaniel (2005) document how the restructuring of the forest service industry in Alabama has reshaped the industry along the lines of a dual labor market, creating primary- and secondary-sector jobs. Core-sector unionized jobs have transferred to the periphery. Like the meat-processing industry, secondary-sector forest service jobs are characterized as seasonal, low paid, and dangerous (Casanova and McDaniel 2005; McDaniel and Casanova 2003). Similarly, the forestry service industry has experienced difficulty in recruiting native workers to these low-paying, dangerous, and dead-end jobs. Here too, the industry has turned to foreign labor, particularly temporary guest workers from Mexico and Central America, to meet their needs. Unlike for domestic workers where a job brings both income and status, temporary guest workers "have no interest in improving their status or standing in the host society, and the jobs offer potential for substantially more cash income than opportunities at home" (Casanova and McDaniel 2005, 53–54), making them ideal for the jobs.

As Casanova and McDaniel (2005) document, historically many of the jobs in the timber services industry, including those defined as secondary-sector jobs such as tree planting, herbicide application, and thinning were performed by native male workers earning decent wages. Indeed, rather than engage in a race to the bottom in a no-win competition against each other in terms of the fees charged to industry for performance of these tasks, native laborers instead formed cooperatives. However, using tactics similar to those that companies employed in their importation of African Ameri-

can labor as scabs to break union strikes, industrial landowners recruited undocumented migrants to weaken the stronghold of these cooperatives. As a result of their success, forest management workers today earn less than they did doing the same work during the 1980s.

Despite heavy subsidization and recruiting of the timber service industry in Alabama, rural development has never materialized. Instead, according to Casanova and McDaniel (2005),

"Timber dependency" has helped maintain racially based social inequities and segmented labor markets, inadequately funded public schools, and inequitable land concentrations that can be traced back to slave-based agriculture in the pre-Civil era. The shift to guest workers to fill jobs previously performed by local workers represents a continuing marginalization of local labor, and evidence that the linchpin of local economic activity is effectively divorced from the lives of people in rural Alabama. (31)

Similar themes are documented by David Griffith (2006). He reinforces the cases previously documented, including the displacement of domestic workers by foreign workers, illustrating this trend in three industrial sectors: blue crab processing and the replacement of African American female workers with Mexican female employees, North Carolina and Virginia tobacco and the erosion of African American labor with primarily Mexican laborers legalized under the SAW provision of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and the New York apple-harvesting industry, which has similarly overseen the wholesale replacement of African American crews with Mexican crews.

Schlosser (2004) details some historical transformations to California's agricultural industry, concentrating heaviest on the strawberry industry. By now, the refrain should be familiar. Like the industries already described, California farmworkers (and farmworkers throughout the United States) have seen their real wages drop more than half since the 1980s. This drop in earnings has coincided with the increased use of sharecroppers (subcontractors who assume responsibility for hiring and overseeing workers to plant, tend, and harvest the crop) to minimize these costs for growers. According to Schlosser (2004), "By relying on poor migrants from Mexico, California growers established a wage structure that discouraged American citizens from seeking farmwork. The wages offered at harvest were too low to sustain a family in the United States" (95). He continues.

Farm labor is more physically demanding and less financially rewarding than almost any other kind of work. A migrant who finds a job in a factory can triple his or her income. As a result, the whole system now depends upon a steady supply of illegal immigrants to keep farm wages low and to replace migrants who have either retired to Mexico or found better jobs in California. (96)
Cranford (2005) documents a similar story but for the janitorial industry in Los Angeles. Like the meat-processing, blue crab, tobacco, and timber industries, the janitorial industry has restructured itself 1) from a direct relationship between an employer and employee to indirect subcontracting relationships and 2) from union to nonunion workers. And, similar to several of the industries already described, displaced janitorial workers were largely African Americans, their replacements being almost exclusively Latino (Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Mexicans). Deunionization has resulted in a decline in janitorial wages for both union and nonunion employees. For example, in the three-year period from 1983 to 1986, average hourly wages of janitors fell from $10 to $7 (Cranford 2005). Cranford also illustrates multiple ways in which Latino janitorial workers are exploited, including 1) violations of labor laws, 2) limited rights as a result of their undocumented status, and 3) a division of labor enforced by the worker’s supervisor, often a family member or close friend.

Janitorial services, agricultural industry, seafood processing, and the timber industry are a few of the industries that have grown increasingly reliant on the use of subcontractors in many of its operations. Indeed, according to Cranford (2005), “Immigrant workers were recruited into this job because they were more easily exploited” (395).

As industries have transferred many of their jobs from the core to the periphery, charges of worker exploitation have begun to resound. For example, Hemmelgarn (2006) documents that in the recent past, the nation’s largest meat producer and processor, Tyson Foods, has done the following:

- Been sued for violating child labor laws, smuggling illegal immigrants, and worker injuries, and environmental abuses
- Pled guilty to twenty felony violations of the Clean Water Act for discharges from its poultry processing plant near Sedalia
- Had thirty-one of its facilities classified by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 2004 as workplaces with the highest injury and illness rates in the United States
- Been cited for five willful and twelve serious violations after an inspection at the company’s facility in Texarkana, Arkansas, in which an employee died
- Been rated the eighth-worst polluter by the Political Economy Research Institute
- Provided many workers with far less than a living wage (www.columbiatribune.com/2006/Sep/20060906Life001.asp)

The literature cited here along with a recently published report by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2007) on the near slavelike conditions in which U.S. guest workers (a significant number of whom are Mexican) are employed paints a bleak cycle of entrapment, low wages, and little opportunity for advancement. This chapter only briefly touches on the still-growing volume of social science literature documenting these abuses. Yet employers, citing labor shortages despite high levels of unemployment in certain sectors, clamor for increased guest-worker quotas. It is these kinds of work conditions and abuses to basic human rights that workers lacking basic human and related resources (e.g., phone, vehicle, English, and citizenship) often encounter.

**CONCLUSION**

The restructuring of the U.S. economy has had significant consequences for American workers, both documented and undocumented. “The gilded age” is how *New York Times* editorialist Bob Herbert (2007) describes the wealth imbalance of the current era in the United States, also characterized by increasing rates of workers without health insurance or other company benefits, stagnant or declining wages, and rising poverty levels. The wealth and income inequalities have become so extreme as to challenge individual explanations of poverty and misfortune. However, an equally irrational explanation for the worsening plight of many American workers has emerged. Immigrants in general and Mexican immigrants more particularly are scapegoated as the cause for declining worker wages and job losses, again ignoring the governmental and corporate partnership that can be more directly implicated in the changing American workplace than can Mexican immigrants.

Mexicans represent the largest immigrant group in the United States today. Not unlike other Latino immigrants, Mexican immigrants often toil for low wages in jobs that many Americans, for a variety of reasons (including those delineated earlier), do not want. The consequences of the restructuring of selected industries in the American labor market (and confirmed by our own analysis presented here) show that those who lack basic resources are especially vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and the abuse of human rights. The vulnerability and exploitation that Latino workers face is reflected in a chilling statistic related to on-the-job deaths. A *USA Today* news report (Hopkins 2003) documented 6,800 Latino worker deaths (the largest segment of whom were Mexican immigrants) between 1992 and 2001—representing an increase in the workplace fatality rate of 15 percent—this during the same time period that also saw the workplace fatality rate decline by 15 percent for all other workers. The *USA Today* report explains these opposing trends as resulting from many Latino workers’ lack of
English skills and the coercion to take any job regardless of bodily risk (www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2003-03-12-hispanic-workers_x.htm)—precisely the kind of Mexican immigrant workers described in our empirical analysis in this chapter. The report continues.

They died, in part, because they took some of the nation's most dangerous, thus hard-to-fill, jobs in construction and factories, government data show. They were often too scared of losing jobs to press for safer working conditions, advocates say. There weren't enough government inspectors to help ensure their safety, and lax penalties failed to discourage safety-law violators. Although lawmakers, regulators and prosecutors are stepping up efforts to reverse the trend, labor advocates worry it may take a major disaster—such as the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that killed 146 immigrants, later spurring workplace reform—before real change is made.

And yet another shift in strategy by employers to seek out the cheapest sources of labor has emerged in the post-9/11 era. This era has seen a heightened border security and an increasing hostility toward Mexican immigrants. News reports document an increase in workplace raids by federal immigration officials, and communities are passing local ordinances (Farmers Branch and Friendswood, Texas, and Hazelton and Altoona, Pennsylvania, are just four examples that readily come to mind) intended to snuff out and deport undocumented immigrants. Courts have thus far ruled these measures unconstitutional, but they nevertheless reflect the hostile sentiment that many in the United States have toward Mexican immigrants. Facing acute labor shortages in this new environment, some employers are turning their gaze to even more vulnerable populations. For example, farmers in Colorado have begun to contract with the state for prisoners to work in agricultural fields. In true slavelike conditions, prisoners who work in this program will be paid sixty cents per day for their labor (Riccardi 2007). This is a trend that human rights advocates will need to contest and closely monitor.

Illustrated most dramatically by passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 (also known as welfare reform) is the fundamental shift in the United States away from basic human rights toward the notion that rights are engendered only through the performance of certain duties. For U.S. citizens, entitlement to welfare assistance is now tied to the performance of work-related activities. However, legal immigrants, working or not, are ineligible for federal assistance. With few safety nets, they are especially vulnerable to the vagaries of the labor market more broadly and to their employers more specifically. This shift away from entitlements is part of the shifting risk from employer to employee and away from government that has disproportionately impacted those whose rights were only negligibly recognized in the United States during the best of times.

Sjoberg et al. (2001) posit that in light of globalization and a general decline in the power of nation-states and a concomitant increase in the power of large-scale corporations and transnational organizations, a human rights perspective must be one that holds large-scale corporations accountable for human rights abuses. "Human rights principles cannot be advanced if we simply hold individuals accountable and leave intact powerful organizations that shape them," argue Sjoberg et al. (2001, 38), for individuals act as agents for organized power. In other words, holding one individual (or even two or three for that matter) responsible for the litany of human rights abuses uncovered at Tyson will do nothing to redress the corporate culture that allowed these types of abuses to flourish. Instead, Tyson and all other corporate entities have a moral obligation to respect the dignity and safety of all human beings—regardless of the human and related resources they possess—and not just to the protection of their bottom line. Only when human rights are more broadly conceptualized in this light can we begin to hope to right the serious wrongs wrought by the divorce of corporate accountability from the social and moral order that corporations mold and shape and on which they depend.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX: LIST OF OCCUPATIONS COMPRISING "MEXICAN IMMIGRANT JOBS" BY SEX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>402</td>
<td>Cooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>403</td>
<td>Food Preparation Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>411</td>
<td>Waiters and Waitresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>413</td>
<td>Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants, Bartender Helpers, and Miscellaneous Food Preparation and Serving-Related Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>414</td>
<td>Dishwashers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>422</td>
<td>Janitors and Building Cleaners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>425</td>
<td>Grounds Miscellaneous Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>605</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Agricultural Workers, including Animal Breeders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>622</td>
<td>Brickmasons, Blockmasons, and Stonemasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>623</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>624</td>
<td>Carpet, Floor, and Tile Installers and Finishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>626</td>
<td>Construction Laborers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>633</td>
<td>Drywall Installers, Ceiling Tile Installers, and Tapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>642</td>
<td>Painters, Construction, and Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>651</td>
<td>Roofers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>775</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>781</td>
<td>Butchers and Other Meat, Poultry, and Fish Processing Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>814</td>
<td>Welding, Soldering, and Brazing Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>822</td>
<td>Other Metal Workers and Plastic Workers, including Milling, Planing, and Machine Tool Operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>832</td>
<td>Sewing Machine Operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>880</td>
<td>Packing and Filing Machine Operators and Tenders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adriana, a young women laborer working six days a week in a foreign-owned maquiladora (export processing plant) making turn signals for the automobiles that you and I drive, risked being stalked and murdered by sexual predators (see Bowden 1996). One day, Adriana did not come home from work; she had been kidnapped, raped, and murdered. Her body was found at Chamizal Park, which links Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. This binational park on both sides of the Rio Grande represents globalization forces that shaped her work and to some degree even her death.

Since 1993, over 440 young women have been strangled, mutilated, dismembered, raped, stabbed, torched, disfigured, murdered, and disposed of in the desert of Ciudad Juárez. Not counted in those homicide estimates are the young women who are still missing in this same region. A report by the Special Commissioner to Eradicate and Prevent Violence against Women in Chihuahua reported that the statistics of missing women vary between 70 and 400, the Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (Commission for National Human Rights) claims there are 4,587 reports of missing women, and La Fiscalía Mixta (Fiscal Mixed), a specially formed state and federal prosecution office assigned to investigate feminicides, has recognized only forty cases (Comisión Para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia Contra Las Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez 2006). These inaccuracies in numbers reflect the decades-long impunity and cover-up of the hundreds of murders and disappearances by state authorities.

Esther Chávez Cano, one of the main activists of this cause, calls this struggle feminicidio, or femicide (Wright 2001). Diana E. H. Russell first