

AN EXAMINATION OF HOMELESS MEN, DAY LABOR  
AND THE UNIVERSITY WEST COMMUNITY

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Anthropology  
University of South Florida

December 1998

Major Professor: Susan D. Greenbaum, Ph.D.

...my living and supportive wife, Elaine, and my magnificent  
children, Lisa and David, who have made my life rich in many unexpected

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This is dedicated to my loving and supportive wife, Eloisa, and my magnificent children, Cody and Garrett who have made my life rich in many unexpected ways.

## Acknowledgments

I am unable to enumerate the many people who deserve appreciation for the simple kindnesses and courtesies they extended, and so I wish to express a general thank you for that which is often taken for granted. I must particularly extend my gratitude to Mark Amen, for his encouragement and understanding, and Robin Jones for her support and inquisitiveness. It almost goes without saying, but too frequently is never said, so I would also like to thank the members of my committee: Susan Greenbaum for her encouraging me to examine the University Community in the first place; Lorena Madrigal for keeping me moving and sharing her disdain of repetition; and Alvin Wolfe, for always having his door open and taking the time to listen to whomever walks in.



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An Abstract

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Date Approved: 10/19/98



This thesis examines the issues and problems that exist for homeless men in the University West Area community of Hillsborough County, Florida, a neighborhood where over one quarter of the available housing is vacant (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Considerable resources have been committed to the development of this area by the county, the state, and a Federal Weed and Seed grant, yet the homeless population has either been overlooked or neglected.

This study was designed around four primary concerns, (1) to identify the homeless population; (2) to understand their relationship with the community; (3) to examine their means of subsistence in this area; and (4) to examine how labor pools are used as a "link" to "regular" work. The ethnographic techniques of participant observation and interview were used to answer research questions in regard to concerns (1), (2), (3), and (4). These questions were, (a) to what extent is the stereotype of "bum" valid or invalid; (b) to what extent is this population attached to this community; (c) to what extent do they choose this lifestyle; (d) what is the relationship of day labor agencies to this population and the community.

By examining the complex problems and relationships, this thesis attempts to give a voice to a particularly powerless and neglected segment in a developing community. This study could serve as a reference and initial guide in the planning of services in the University West Area community, by interested actors such as the Homeless Coalition and the USF Community Initiative.

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10/19/98

## **Chapter One: Introduction and Project Background**

### **Introduction**

This thesis examines the issues facing homeless men in the University West Area community of Hillsborough County, Florida, a neighborhood where over one quarter of the housing is vacant (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1990). Considerable resources have been committed to the development of this area by the county, the state and a Federal Weed and Seed grant, and yet the homeless population has either been overlooked or neglected.

This thesis challenges the notion of homeless persons in the University West Area as aberrant transients. Although this population lives a marginal existence, they are a viable part of the community contributing to the local economy and dedicating their labor to public and private projects within the community and surrounding area. Their marginality reflects local, national and global socioeconomic trends. As residents within the community, they deserve to be included in the planning and development processes which could facilitate their access to services and help them break out of a cycle of poverty. This study was conducted using methods of participant observation and interviews in the University West Area and at the ten labor pools that are in operation in this community.



## Project Background

In the spring of 1998, I had an internship with the recently formed Community Initiative in USF's College of Arts and Sciences. The initial focus of activities for this program was the University West Area, a low income neighborhood located adjacent to the University of South Florida.

My thesis research examined issues and problems related to homeless men who reside in and around the University West neighborhood. This area is one of the most densely populated areas in Hillsborough County and has one of the highest levels of poverty (US Census Bureau, 1990; Gouldman 1994; Lavelly, Blackman and Mann, 1995; FCD and R, 1997; Lewis, 1997). According to Tim Kelly (1998), this area has one of the highest concentrations of caseloads in Hillsborough County for Florida's recent welfare reform initiative, Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency Initiative (WAGES) -- an initiative targeting people who have been on the welfare roles for more than four years, which will replace benefits and entitlements with case management to help clients find jobs. The University West neighborhood has been the focus of considerable community development activity since the early nineties (Gouldman 1994; Lavelly, Blackman and Mann, 1995; Lewis, 1997) and yet the existence of homeless people in the area has been neglected in favor of other priorities, such as crime, and improving the quality of housing (Gouldman 1994; Lavelly, Blackman and Mann, 1995; FCD and R, 1997; Lewis, 1997). The omission of homeless persons in development efforts (whether conscious or not) suggests a general consensus on the part of those planning these efforts that by ignoring these people, they will go away. However, the homeless have not gone away and there is nothing to indicate that they will. If comprehensive solutions are to be found, there is a need to understand circumstances and the problems in this community.



As these will be discussed more fully later, the University West Area is replete with low-income housing characterized by apartment complexes of marginal and substandard quality, many of which are owed by absentee or corporate landlords (Gouldman 1994; Lavelly, Blackman and Mann, 1995; FCD and R, 1997; Lewis, 1997). Four-fifths of the population live in rental properties (US Census Bureau, 1990). Historically, this population has been characterized by the City of Tampa's leaders and residents as a transient population. This has been rebuked by research done by Stephen Gouldman (1994), Lavelly, Blackman and Mann (1995) and Harold Lewis (1997) who all indicate that resident movement is within the community, as people seek more affordable rentals amidst the many competing rental properties. Redevelopment efforts are not, at present, changing this pattern. At this time, properties being renovated are rental properties which are being upgraded and owners are raising rents beyond the means of low-income persons.

In tandem with the complex issue of housing, the majority of the jobs in the area available to residents are low-paying, service industry jobs (secondary labor market jobs), many of which provide little opportunity for advancement, and few provide benefits such as health care (Lewis, 1997). The level of unemployment is high compared to other areas in Hillsborough County (U.S. Census, 1990). Many of the problems residents face are consumer debt, substance abuse, and crime (Lewis, 1997), the problems of distressed urban workers (Howell, 1972:263-264).

Labor pools put between 1000 and 1200 people to work, at least six days per week, in the University West Area. It is primarily men who work in these day labor agencies, and approximately seventy-three percent of them are either homeless or living in a transitory housing situation such as a weekly room or with friends. The vast majority, around 80%, of these men reside in the University West Area Community. Over ninety percent of the people I interviewed did not



receive any form of entitlements or benefits, generally stating that the benefits are more trouble than they are worth. Two members of the Homeless Coalition, both with several years of experience working with the local welfare system, stated that if one is male, not elderly and not disabled physically or mentally, then he generally is not entitled to benefits and is expected to work whether or not he has any skills (Pietsch and Joyce, personal communication, 1998).

In my thesis I describe who these men are and how they participate and subsist in the community. I also examine the operation of labor pools, which act as a form of corporate broker for this marginalized group, providing subsistence as well as access to "regular" employment. Prior to the Florida's Labor Pool Act in 1994, which is a Florida statute which attempts to protect day laborers from abuse, some labor pools around the state sought to increase profits by exploiting laborers with practices such as charging them for the use of tools essential to do their work. I did not find this to be the case in the University West Area community. At present, their level of exploitation is no worse than that of the "regular" labor market. Labor pools can be viewed as merely a part of the growing service economy which characterizes the post-industrial state of the nation as a whole. My goal was not to present any solutions to the problems which exist for day laborers, but rather I sought to contextualize the problems that these men face within the community, with the hope that future planning and development in this area will be better informed and more responsive to their needs. The rest of this chapter outlines my thesis.

Chapter Two is a literature review. It begins with a discussion of the use of ethnography as a tool for capturing information that sheds light not only on the individuals of a population, but on the context and circumstances in which they live. Ethnographic works which examine homeless persons, tramps, and people on skid row are reviewed. Also addressed is the literature pertaining to labor



pools and employment in the secondary sector of the labor market. Labor pools are contextualized as part of the growing service industry economy that characterizes the nation at this time. The chapter concludes with a discussion of documents and studies relevant to the University West Area community.

Chapter Three outlines my methods and procedures. It details my choice of participant observation as a method of study for this area and describes the varying degrees of participation and observation I used. This section also details my data collection from both laborers and labor pool agencies. Appendices A, B, and C all pertain to this chapter.

Chapter Four begins with details of the geography, history, infrastructure, and social characteristics of the University West Area Community. It also includes a discussion of problems in the area, resources available to residents, and methods of coping with those problems that various people who live there have available to them.

Chapter Five begins with the general background of day labor agencies. A general history of labor pools in the University West Area is then discussed and it examines information gathered about day labor and the labor pools from interviews conducted at these agencies. It places day laborers and labor pool agencies in the context of the University West Community.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, is an ethnographic description and discussion of my work with day laborers. It provides biographical information and attempts to illustrate their needs from their own perspective. It concludes by emphasizing the need to recognize the issues and problems which plague homeless men in the University West Area.

## **Chapter Two: The Anthropological Perspective and Literature Review**

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the advocacy model of anthropology. Literature relating to ethnography as a method used by anthropologists to confront stereotypes and to explore issues of urban poverty is reviewed, and literature relating to labor pools is discussed as are qualities of a service industry economy. This chapter concludes with a review of documents and literature relevant to the University Area Community, .

Erve Chambers (1985:21) states that, "(a)dvocacy anthropology seeks to redress (the) imbalance in different approaches to problem solving by furthering the perspectives of the less powerful." My approach to this thesis reflects this rationale. In examining the complex problems and relationships of homeless and near homeless men, I am trying to give a voice to a particularly powerless and neglected segment in a developing community.

Michael Agar stated that what he found valuable about using ethnography to study drug users and sellers was the "humanizing of stereotypes"(1980:10). There are a number of stereotypes associated with labor pools and the people who use them. Ethnography was therefore the method of study I chose to use. The insider's, or emic, perspective is essential to gaining an understanding of phenomena in order to be able to present it in a form which is acceptable and intelligible to all interested parties, insiders and outsiders alike. For example, in an attempt to gain some understanding of homeless persons, Harry Murray (1984) used the method of participant observer at a homeless shelter. He discovered that due to the struggle for daily necessities, people who lived on the



street rarely used long term, linear planning for events in their lives. Instead, he found that the lives of people on the streets were organized around the daily cycles of institutions such as shelters and soup kitchens, as well as monthly cycles, such as dates for receiving welfare checks. He associates these cycles with being important "for the goal of survival," whereas linear time is used for planning events that are for more than mere survival (160).

In examining labor pools, I found it important to keep in mind that they are not isolates, but are a part of the University West Area community and the City of Tampa. Eames and Goode suggest (1977:243) that a holistic study of a "micro-unit" requires that "the whole city systematically (be) used as context." (1977:243). This is relevant to a problem solving situation, as one of the first steps in solving any problem is identifying the problem or problems. This is what this project sets out to accomplish, namely the identification of the problems faced by homeless men in the University West Area Community, using labor pools to gain access to a specific segment of the population as well as a means of acquiring knowledge about their subsistence. This examination is specific to this area, and it may or may not be representative of the situation of homeless men elsewhere. As Arensberg pointed out in 1961, there are anomalies in all communities, as communities, like individuals, vary in regard to territory, cohesiveness, history, and character, however, " (a) community chosen for study as a sample or a field of a societal problem need not reflect with complete fidelity the proportion of the classes in the over-all society..." as its members have relations with the greater whole which are in themselves revealing of the greater social context(1961:257). In short, ethnography works as a tool which illuminates the humanity of a group or population as well as illustrates the broader social context in which this group or population lives.



Howell's work, subtitled Portraits of Blue Collar Families (1973) focuses on the working poor, individuals who are similar to men in this study. Howell found seven general characteristics in the lives of the "hard living" that stand out from the lives of "settled families" (1973:263): 1) heavy drinking, 2) marital instability, 3) toughness, an abundance of profanity, tough behavior and frequent discussions of violence, 4) political alienation, 5) rootlessness, 6) present-time orientation, surviving from day to day with little thought about the future, 7) a strong sense of individualism, meaning they described themselves as loners, enjoyed working alone, and were rarely active in community groups. Howell does not state that these are domains exclusive to "hard living," but that these domains are more pronounced among the hard living.

Elliot Liebow, in Tally's Corner (1967), examines the lives of African-American men who socialize on a particular street corner in Washington D.C.. He documents the difficulties these men experience in their lives due to the economic instability associated with intermittent employment in low-paying labor-intensive jobs, and long periods of unemployment, and how this can affect intimacy and geographic mobility. The relevance to this work is clear, as day labor is low-paying, labor intensive, transitory work very similar to what the men were doing in 1967.

James Spradley's work, subtitled An Ethnography of Urban Nomads(1970), examines the culture of "tramps" in Seattle. Specifically, he examined the dynamic between alcoholism and systemic forces, such as being homeless and getting arrested for vagrancy as a result, and illustrated how this contributes to perpetuating the culture of tramps, in particular the constant disruption to an individual's attempts to establish socially acceptable routines. Spradley's work is relevant in that the men who work in the labor pools have characteristics similar to those men he referred to as "working stiffs." These were

transient men who worked for their subsistence. Working stiffs share traits that also describe many members of University West Area labor pools. A large number are either homeless, or highly transient in residence. They are frequently arrested on minor charges relating to vagrancy and drunkenness, and have a reputation for consuming a lot of alcohol.

Spradley (1970) indicated in his work that the persistent disruption to the lives of "tramps" tended to orient them to a day-to-day time frame for life's activities. As mentioned, Harry Murray (1984) also describes a pattern of present-time orientation in the lives of homeless people. Homeless, however, does not necessarily mean unable to work, or not working. Singer (1985) examined the social networks of skid row men and in his interviews found the majority had been blue collar labor or construction workers, who indicated they had grown up in the middle class (1985: 138). In their present circumstances, they commonly used day labor as a source of income. A day's work for a day's pay certainly conforms to the concept of a present-time orientation. Singer's study indicated that the majority of the men reported that they maintained contact with selected, usually female, family members (1985: 138), and that although they had acquaintances with whom they would drink, they did not consider them friends, would not introduce them to family members and feared being robbed by them (1985: 138). Although Singer does not make this point, it is not unreasonable to describe these men as "loners," particularly if one considers trust to be an important variable in a social relationship. If a man must consistently be concerned that the other people he is with are going to steal from him or otherwise take advantage of him, he is in a nonsupportive social environment. For all intents and purposes, he is alone.

Davidson and Krackhardt (1977) studied work behavior of unemployed persons participating in a job training program. This study challenged the



concept of "the culture of poverty." Davidson and Krackhardt (1977:304) summarize the "culture of poverty" as a concept attributed to Oscar Lewis (1966:xliv), contending that impoverished people have patterns of behavior which they pass on to their children thereby perpetuating poverty. Davidson and Krackhardt examine participants in the program, and the program and program staff. In so doing, Davidson and Krackhardt illustrate how systemic issues, such as staff motivation, and efforts to train participants for work that is beyond secondary labor, can have a profound influence on people. This study found that by providing attention to an individual's life circumstances and providing motivational factors ( such as the ability to move up in the hierarchy of the workplace, and getting rewarded for accomplishments) people who were previously considered to have poor work habits (such as not showing up, tardiness, not completing tasks and insubordination) and therefore marginally employable, changed and became productive workers. In this particular case, the job training program was reorganized to provide training beyond the level of secondary labor, and hired motivated staff willing to take time with clients (the "hard-core" unemployed) and listen to their issues. After this change, the program had considerable success getting "hard-core" people into jobs as well as increasing job retention.

There are anecdotal references to labor pools in anthropological and sociological works as a source of income for homeless and "skid-row" persons (Valentine, 1978:19; Murray, 1985: 157; Singer, 1985:138; Snow, 1993; Wills, 1998: 14), but there has been little to no discussion of the role, or function that labor pools serve in a community. One clear function, as evidenced by the referenced works, labor pools serve as an income resource to a population with restricted access to resources. According to a survey conducted by the Jacksonville Homeless Coalition during a recent census, approximately 73

percent of the homeless persons interviewed used labor pools as a source of income (Wills, et. al., 1998). These businesses provide a space in which disenfranchised persons can gain access to employment (Lenz, 1996:5). In this way, they work as a form of "broker" to access employment. Eames and Goode point out that social networks are important for having access to the distribution of resources in a community. They found that a community lacking in influentials in the broader context of the city, requires a network of brokers for survival under conditions of "great income insecurity and instability" (1977: 131). An "influential," as Eames and Goode point out, "...is an individual who, by virtue of his position in some strategic institution in the social structure, can use the power of his position to directly help others," (1977:137). A "broker" is a person with "access to influentials...a mediator" (1977:137). To illustrate this they refer to a study by Rubinstein (1975) wherein he examined the flow of goods and services among the urban poor in Mexico City. He found that reciprocity is an adaptive response to the cultural and environmental "milieu," and that access to goods and services affects the strength or frequency of residential and kinship ties (1975:260). In the case of homeless persons, however, their social networks tend to be smaller than those of people who are not homeless (Singer, 1985; Wolfe, 1997), and kin do not tend to be in the area, or if they are, they are not in a position to be of much assistance themselves (Timmer, Eitzen, Talley, 1994). One does not, however, need to know anyone to get work through a labor pool. Labor pools, by their own report, will put anyone to work who is of legal working age and not intoxicated or belligerent. If a laborer is able to get on a regular ticket, he or she may be offered a full-time job with the company that heretofore had been contracting out his or her services.



## The Secondary Labor Market

As previously noted, the secondary labor market is characteristically comprised of jobs that require few skills, are low-paying, provide few benefits and little opportunity for mobility in the work environment. The primary labor market is comprised of jobs considered skilled, with higher pay than secondary labor jobs, having benefits, and providing workers with an opportunity for upward mobility. It is important to note that labor pools are not simply a local cottage industry limited to the margins of society, but a significant business service tied to changes in the post-industrial economy on a national and even international level. In a discussion of the rise of the secondary labor market in relation to the service sector economy, Enzo Mingione (1995:197) reviews social and employment changes in urban areas. Mingione discusses the growing service sector economy which has changed circumstances from previous decades in two ways:

"...declining manufacturing employment in medium and large concerns, and increasing diversification of service jobs. The major consequences include a direct loss of jobs, a considerable increase in female employment (particularly among married women), increased instability and heterogeneity of working itineraries, decreased full-time employment for young people and females, and increased numbers of individuals in precarious and low-paid employment."(1995:201)

MacDonald and Sirianni (1996:11) come to a similar conclusion and point out that service industries "...tend to produce two kinds of jobs: large numbers of low-skill, low-paying jobs and a smaller number of high-skill, high-income jobs with very few jobs that could be classified in the middle." They use the example of a MacDonalds fast-food where the bulk of the workforce is secondary labor, part-time with no specialized skills and therefore considered expendable, while maintaining a small core of full-time more highly paid managers, primary labor.



The overall consequences of these trends as Mingione sees it, are that people entering the job market have primarily "low quality"(1995:202) jobs that offer no means of escaping the problems of underemployment, and that these jobs are often provisional and in this way degrading, leaving a person at risk to remain on the margins of employment. Both these trends, as he frames them, contribute to changes in local communities. "The urban and suburban housing stock are increasingly characterized by schizophrenic tendencies: growing numbers of homeless alongside large numbers of empty apartments in nearby gentrified areas."(Mingione, 1995:196). As this paper will illustrate, these words describe the University West Area community.

There has been a steady increase in service industry employment since 1990 (Census Bureau, 1995B). Florida Labor Abstracts indicate that since 1995, service related industries have been the fastest growing employment opportunities in Florida. These same data reflect that the Tampa Bay area is no exception to this trend, with the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater area adding the most service jobs in 1995 (Florida Department of Labor, LMI, 1995; 1997).

The vast majority of jobs in the University West Community are secondary-sector jobs -- such as retail sales, fast food, hospitality, clerical, janitorial, and work in temporary positions and labor pools. These jobs generally require few skills and minimal specialization. They are positions which are low paying, offer little opportunity for advancement, and few or no benefits. Lewis (1997) points out that the local residents, 23 percent of which does not have a high school education or its equivalent (US Census Bureau, 1990), are competing for these secondary-sector jobs with college students who attend the University of South Florida (USF).

The contingency labor force has been on the rise since the 1980s. MacDonald and Sirianni (1996:13) report that contingency labor has tripled over



the last decade. It is estimated to comprise 20 to 25 percent of the entire workforce (Lantos, et. al., 1988; Aley, 1995; Kueter, 1997). Part-time and contingency work give a greater flexibility in working hours to employees, which may be desirable for various reasons ranging from childcare options, work-study, transition to retirement, or an increased ability to schedule one's own time off (Lantos, et. al., 1988; Kueter, 1997). However, a study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1995) reports that 60 percent of the contingency workforce would prefer to have full-time employment. This same report also shows a rise in the number of professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, adding their numbers to the contingency labor force.

The business community refers to this workforce by various terms, including, contingent, peripheral, part-time, contract labor, leased labor, marginal, just-in-time, disposable, or throwaway (Lantos, et. al., 1988; Lief, 1998). Contingency labor reduces overhead by alleviating the business of any financial responsibility toward such employees. Contingency workers are the employees of a staffing agency. For example, a contractor needing laborers to help with cleaning a construction site can pay a flat fee to a day labor agency to handle staffing. The day labor agency will provide laborers and handle issues such as workman's compensation, taxes, background checks, and drug screening of the laborers, saving the contractor the time and expense. This arrangement also eliminates recruiting costs such as advertising and employment screening. A contingent workforce is a way for business to avoid the difficulties of downsizing during lean periods, as the business simply orders fewer contingency laborers in lieu of laying off full-time staff (MacDonald and Sirianni, 1996:13). A recent study by Brian Uzzi and Zoe Barsness (1998:998) suggests that this flexibility does not come without costs, however, as their data indicated that businesses that

increased their use of contingency labor had a positive correlation with increased managerial expenses.

As previously stated, a positive aspect of contingency labor for employees is that it allows flexibility in an individual's time. On the negative side, it has been viewed "...as exploitation which deprives workers of benefits, security, upward mobility, or union affiliation," (Lantos, et. al., 1988). The potential for the abuse of contingency labor has been taken seriously by legislative authorities, and section 448.20 of the Florida statutes is titled "The Labor Pool Act," clearly describing minimal standards to which labor pools must conform (Florida Statutes:1995: 448.20).

#### Literature Relating to the University Area Community

Studies of social networks have revealed that relationships of support -- not only among kin, but among people of varied proximity, ranging from face block neighbors, to coworkers, to friends of friends -- influence the character of a community, such as neighborliness, or having a strong criminal element (Granovetter, 1973; Greenbaum, 1982; Greenbaum and Greenbaum, 1985; Bernard, Killworth, Evans and McCarty, 1988; Wellman, 1988; Killworth, et. al., 1990; Walker, Wasserman and Wellman, 1993; Wellman, 1996). Such social structural conditions also impact the sustainability of a community, such as being able to form coalitions to promote development or prevent bisection by a highway (Granovetter, 1973; Greenbaum, 1982; Greenbaum and Greenbaum, 1985; Bernard, Killworth, Evans and McCarty, 1988; Wellman, 1988; Killworth, et. al., 1990; Walker, Wasserman and Wellman, 1993; Wellman, 1996). There is a civic association in the University West Area that is concerned with the development of this locale. The civic association, however, is comprised primarily of property



owners and representatives thereof (Gouldman, 1994; Greenbaum, 1997b), while approximately 87 percent of the community is comprised of renters (US Census Bureau, 1990). However well intended the members of the civic association may be, the present coalition has had trouble organizing community initiatives at a grassroots level (Gouldman, 1994). One reason for this may be that there are a lack of renters on the board, hence a lack of proximity to the majority of the population's concerns.

The importance of a community's ties to influentials and developers' ties to a community is supported by ideas such as Granovetter's strength of weak ties hypothesis (1973) and studies such as Greenbaum's "Bridging Ties" (1982). In Granovetter's revisiting of Gan's account of the destruction of a neighborhood in the west end of Boston (1973: 1373), he asserts that it was in part due to factionalism among the community's social networks that created a lack of access to the political influentials of Boston, and therefore the neighborhood was not properly represented before the people planning development of the area. Greenbaum (1982) did not find evidence of factionalism, but similarly found a lack of access to decision makers to be a contributing factor in the bisection of another ethnic neighborhood by a highway. The ethnic identity of the neighborhood was however, preserved in this case as residents' were able to rely on their effective networks for help in relocating. In both cases, the importance of brokers can not be overstated, as the lack of connection to influential officials had devastating consequences for both neighborhoods. In this light, brokers serve an important function in providing links outside of a community to resources in the larger urban environment. Unlike these two examples, the University Area Community appears to have influentials (property owners) concerned with the development process. The difficulty in this case however, is that these influentials do not appear to have strong links to the majority of the population,



and hence, they find themselves lacking community participation. This is a dynamic relevant to this project to the extent that it illustrates how far homeless men, who are not even renters in the community, are removed from the development process.

"Never obvious and seldom discussed in Community Development literature is the question of whose felt needs are involved if those supposedly 'felt' by the subjects need developers to help make them felt." (Charles J. Erasmus, 1968: 65).

Gouldman discusses his experience with the Hillsborough Planning Commission regarding the organization of a study report about the future development of the University Area (Master's thesis, 1994). Using information from Hillsborough County's Planning and Development Department, the Sheriff's Office, USF's School of Architecture, and census data he thoroughly describes the geographic and social characteristics of the area. He reviews anthropological literature relevant to citizen participation, particularly the work of Selznick (1966) regarding the cooptation of citizen participants and the sharing of responsibility but not power (Gouldman, 1994:88 - 91). Gouldman noted very little input on the part of residents in the planning process, citing the interaction of a USF Area Task Force, comprised of community leaders and various County staff organized by Gouldman with the direction and approval of Planning Department staff (1994:101). He states, "As the project progressed, it became increasingly apparent that my acquired knowledge and skills would remain untapped as would those of area residents." (1994:100).

Harold Lewis' dissertation, written about the USF area, examined the issue of the high crime rate (Lewis, 1997). He used the method of participant observation. He accomplished this by living in the area, interviewing residents and creating a report for the area Civic Association. Lewis posits "strain" as a



plausible explanation for the high crime rate in the area (1997:5). It is not clear however, whether he had any actual conversations with convicted criminals, or attempted to learn about the social stresses of convicts. What is more relevant here is that he supported his argument by examining the employment market, and noted that the predominant opportunities are low paying service industry jobs that promise little in regard to future opportunity and personal development (1997: 41). In tandem with this, Lewis also found many residents, particularly males, to be underemployed, or unemployed, characterizing a downward mobility in this area(1997:41).

A thorough examination of the infrastructure of the University Area was published in a report by the Florida Center for Community Design and Research for Hillsborough County (1998). The executive summary of the report emphasizes that the county must make a concerted effort to coordinate and update zoning in order for serious reinvestment in infrastructure and deteriorating housing properties to occur. Also emphasized is the need for input from residents and property owners in order for this planning to occur appropriately (1998:2-4).

Other useful documents include reports generated in relation to the Federal Weed and Seed grant, such as the "Master Plan for Continuing the Effort to Make the University of South Florida a Long Term Healthy Community" (1996), the Institute for At-Risk Infants, Children, & Youth, and their Families' "University West -- USF Area, A Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile" (Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, (1995), and the Arts, Culture, and Recreation Committee's "Master Plan Report" (1997).

The "Master Plan" (1996) reiterates the lack of planning in the zoning and development of the University Area, in conjunction with the historically significant presence of a student population of apartment dwellers. This document also attests to the lack of resident involvement, and calls for more aggressive efforts



to involve community members. The suggested method for remedying this is organizing apartment complexes, crime watches, drug marches and clean-up campaigns (1996:34). The document also calls for a survey of area businesses and recommends the creation of a branch of the Chamber of Commerce and aggressive efforts on the part of the "Business and Job Committee" to expand its activity and work to encourage job growth in the area (1996:35). A "one-stop-job-shop" is planned for the area, as organized by USF's Florida Community Partnership Center, but there is not a set date for this program at this time as there is not yet a facility to house it.

The document prepared by Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann (1995) is an excellent summary of US Census and county demographic data, and includes results from surveys by the USF Area Community Civic Association (USFACCA) and USF's Florida Community Opportunity Partnership Center (FCOPC). The census data demonstrate not only the population growth of the area, but the changing demographics ranging from decreasing median income and level of education relative to the rest of Hillsborough County, to increasing levels of unemployment and poverty in the area. Survey information attests to resident concerns about drugs in the area, as well as the lack of bicycle lanes and the danger to children of fast moving traffic.

The report compiled by the Civic Association's Arts, Culture and Recreation Committee (1997) details a range of activities and the varying degrees of success those activities have had in the community. It also is a source of contacts for people who have an interest in the development of the University Area. This committee was formed in 1995 in affiliation with the Weed and Seed grant and consisted of various USF faculty and students, county officials from the Weed and Seed office, the county Parks and Recreation department, the county Sheriff's Office, local service providers such as the Boy's and Girl's Club of



Tampa Bay, the YMCA, the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI), 4-H Club, members of the Civic Association, and concerned residents. It reported that this committee, meeting monthly to date, has had a consistent attendance of twenty-one persons. It has been instrumental in establishing an after-school program in the University Area Park on 22nd Street, and helped to pilot programs such as the Interact Youth Arts Coalition and the USF College of Fine Arts / Boys and Girls Club / AmeriCorps Project. It is presently identifying curricula to be used in the recreation center being built at the University Area Park. They have held a number of public meetings on weekends and in the evenings to encourage resident attendance and participation.

This chapter reviewed studies pertaining to poverty and homeless men. Contingency labor was explained, and studies relating the rise of contingency labor to the national rise in the service sector economy were discussed. The relevance of this trend to the University West Area was established and the activities concerning the development of this community were introduced, such as the attempt to reduce crime by increasing police activity; developing the infrastructure of the community; and developing a "one-stop-job-shop." Absent from these documents, however, is any discussion of a number of issues pertinent to the lives of residents of this community, such as the creation of quality, low-income housing; support for services relating to health, mental health, or substance abuse; or homelessness. As these are issues related to problems faced by people living in poverty, their absence in development efforts reflects the dislocation of those planning the efforts from the residents in the community.

### Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The University West Area was chosen for this project because it is an urban area with many problems, such as poverty and crime. The people and agencies that involve themselves in addressing those problems welcome assistance from anyone willing to try to help. Chambers asserts that "...the work of applied anthropologists regularly involves efforts to mediate claims upon a society's resources, or to reconcile the different cultural processes which influence the ways in which people express and attempt to realize what they value."(1989:11). Working with the USF Community Initiative has offered me an opportunity to practice this assertion in regard to addressing problems that are literally right at home, confronting this neighborhood everyday, from an emic, and holistic, or anthropological perspective.

The emic perspective, or understanding the problem from the viewpoint of those experiencing the problem, is essential to the resolution of those problems. Holism is important as problems are rarely one-sided. Other disciplines, professions, or participating parties are useful for fleshing out other perspectives or generating alternate perceptions of a problem. For example, Gouldman (1994), attempted to bring the residents' views and experiences of problems in this community to the attention of planners. He also examined information from the Sheriff's Office, Census Bureau data, reports from the USF School of Architecture, and the USF Area Task Force (1994:101). Had planners been willing to seriously consider his efforts, the relationships among the various perceptions of the problems could have been defined and efforts towards



solutions to those problems, from the neighborhood to the county level could have been pursued (Gouldman 1994:101).

I strove to achieve an emic and holistic perspective on the University West Community labor pools and those who work in them in two fundamental ways. First as a participant in a rapid assessment of resources done by the University of South Florida's anthropological methods field school in 1997 (Greenbaum 1997b), and secondly during my internship as a participant observer in a variety of activities in the area.

Although I had lived on the edge of and used the services within the University West Area for two years, I never really paid much attention to it until participating in "a rapid assessment" summer field school in the area. During that time we reviewed literature relating to the area, conducted windshield surveys, interviewed key informants in the community and participated as volunteers in community projects. Dr. Greenbaum clearly informed us that the information gathered during the field school would be used for the edification of others interested in the development of the University West Area, as well as a possible publication by her, crediting our efforts. During this time I began observing the meetings of the Weed and Seed, Arts, Culture and Recreation Committee. At these meetings I was became more intimately involved with issues of infrastructure such as building a new recreation center, as well as complex social issues such as the perception of county officials that it is difficult to have resident participation in program planning. I also became acquainted with some of the parties expressing interest in the development of the University West Area, such as the Hillsborough County officials, USF representatives, a number of residents, and a state legislator. Dr. Greenbaum allowed me to review and use material collected by the other students in this field school. Although not all of the material is directly relevant to this work, it helped provide a broad perspective of the



complex events taking place in relation to the development of this area. Students interviewed informants on issues ranging from education, childcare, crime, and the activity of churches, to transportation and access to services such as health care and welfare benefits.

After the field school, I continued my activities in the area. I observed and participated in the Arts, Culture and Recreation Committee. I did my internship with the USF Community Initiative, an organization of departmental chairs from the College of Arts and Sciences interested in expanding the University's public mission by contributing intellectual capital toward solving urban problems. I helped to secure funding for an after school educational program held at the University Area Park which attempts to develop an awareness of community in "at-risk" youth, using an arts curriculum. I also developed a relationship with a local pastor attempting to establish an outreach to provide food and clothing to impoverished people in the University West Area at the apartment complex once known as Fletcher Woods. The pastor invited me to numerous planning meetings where I met members of her congregation and where neighborhood issues were discussed. Throughout my various activities in the community, I have taken jottings and notes of observations and conversations.

My initial research into day labor agencies in the area began as an ethnographic project I did for a methods course in 1998. It was at this time I did the bulk of my interviews with day laborers (although over time, separate from the methods project, I informally interviewed others). The initial site I chose for these interviews was simply the first labor pool I spotted. It was in a small strip mall on Nebraska Avenue. I introduced myself directly to the manager and received permission to speak to laborers at his establishment. Any names used in the following text, unless otherwise specified, are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of interviewees.



As a way to gain their assistance and learn more about their lives, I chose to provide laborers with transportation to work sites. I did this rather than sign up as a day laborer myself, for two reasons. First, I did not want to deprive anyone who may need a day's pay more than myself from the opportunity to obtain it. Second, simply by signing up as a day laborer does not necessarily mean I would spend the day speaking with day laborers, but more likely would spend the day working hard cleaning up a construction site and speaking with no one. My interest was in the experience, background and perceptions of others who are presently making a living working as day laborers. It was not my objective to have the experience of doing day labor. I have worked for a contractor in the past as a laborer and am fully aware of the rigors of the work. I also have worked as a leased employee when I worked as a mental health technician at a now defunct psychiatric hospital that was located in this community. I was therefore not unfamiliar with issues that the laborers brought up in conversation, and was somewhat familiar with the insecurities of temporary labor.

Without exception, when speaking with laborers or labor pool staff, I explained my project and informed them that I would be using the information in papers to complete my school work as a graduate student. I received verbal consent in all cases. I was able to tape three of the interviews, and I did obtain written consent as well as verbal, before taping.

#### Initial Data Collection with Laborers

I dressed as a laborer might dress, donning denim pants, steel toed work boots, t-shirt, flannel shirt, and jacket (the weather was cool). My rationale was that otherwise I would stand out in the waiting area as I furiously took notes, and I did not wish to further alienate people by manner of dress. The clothing, being



comfortable and appropriate to wear, allowed me to sit in the lobby and blend in better while observing.

I did not have a target number of interviews or hours of observation. In fact I have since informally interviewed and had conversations with at least ten more laborers and at least sixteen hours more observation of the primary site and the other sites in the University West Area. Originally I spent five days (a Friday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) at one site, totaling fifteen hours of related observation. I have spent approximately four hours driving laborers to work sites. I did twenty-two interviews with day laborers during the five days, four of which were semistructured, five unstructured, and thirteen informal (Bernard 1995:208-236). In regard to the semi-structured interviews, three laborers allowed me to tape the interviews; one did not, but agreed to my taking notes. I had ten basic questions (Appendix B) that were unobtrusive enough that it was almost easier to ask them in the course of a natural conversation than in an interview. These questions addressed the choice of day labor as an occupation, work history, educational interests and living accommodations.

As noted above, I have since had ten more unstructured and informal interviews with laborers, six of which were at the original site, and these are included in the thesis data. The other interviews were at three separate locations and occurred later in the day than the original twenty-two interviews. The bulk of observation of day laborers occurred during the original fifteen hours at the original site. However, I conducted observations at all sites, which included at least one interaction between day laborers and agency staff and examination of the general physical layouts of each facility, noting use of space to limit or access staff, paint, seating, whether or not there was air conditioning, windows, toilet facilities, access to amenities such as coffee or snacks, wall coverings, and general cleanliness. I also took note of the general public spaces in front of the



buildings, noticing features such as levels of debris (which generally were consistent with other nearby business establishments).

### Organization of the Data from Laborers

Three basic research questions, none of which could be put in exclusive categories, underpinned what I sought from the data. First, I wanted to confirm or invalidate the stereotype of day laborers as "bums." I believed that this could be gleaned from the interviews and observations conducted in the workplace. Second, I was interested their level of attachment to the University West Community and sought to discover where and how they lived in the community. Lastly, I sought information regarding the degree to which day laborers chose to live their lifestyle.

Data, observations, and questions were organized in a variation of the categories of Spradley's descriptive question matrix (1980:82-83). This was done to identify patterns of behavior within and specific to the labor pool environment. I organized information into two fields, which I labeled "environmental," and "cultural knowledge." The environmental field included categories of space, time, actor and feeling. Within the category of "space" were observations of the physical environment, including proxemic observations such as how people were seated while waiting for a ticket. "Time" pertains not only to the hour of the day or day of the week, but also to the duration of activities and interactions such as how long a laborer waits for a ticket. "Actor" was included as an environmental category, as an actor takes physical space and can modify the environment both physically and socially. For example, the arrival of a laborer with a vehicle can fill or empty the lobby with other laborers. An actor who is trusted by management staff may not only clean the area and move objects around, but may be



approached by other laborers to intercede on their behalf in an attempt to renegotiate a ticket. "Feeling" was a more difficult category, as a group of individuals may all feel differently about any incident at any moment in time. However, in cases where feelings were not explicitly stated, such as "I'm tired," generalizations were drawn from behaviors generally accepted in cognitive behavioral therapy to be consistent with emotions (Naster, et. al., 1988), such as anger being associated with a raised voice and pronounced physical gestures.

"Cultural knowledge" was subdivided into two areas: individual, and relating to artifacts. Individual cultural knowledge included categories of goals and actions. Goals could be anything from desiring a good ticket to desiring to increase one's education. Actions pertain to specific acts of a laborer in the environment, for example, a laborer may smoke while waiting for a ticket, or arrive late to the labor hall. Actions were spontaneous. Cultural knowledge pertaining to artifacts, included the categories of object, activity and event. An object could be a lighter, a broom, a letter, or a car. Activities were nonspontaneous actions taking place in a structured social interaction, hence a social (rather than a material) artifact.

Actions and activities frequently were combined, for example, while waiting for tickets, an activity, laborers tended only to greet those people who arrived at the hall and greeted them first, an action. An event is similar to an activity but is planned. A group of laborers car pooling to get to a common labor site is an event. Data were also coded from the perspective of the observer, as interpretive, generative, or both. Interpretive data was information pertaining to quantities such as time or number of workers. It is descriptive information, which is useful in its own right, but it is either not applicable to or does not answer questions of "why," or "how" in regard to phenomena without being related to something else. To know that seventy-eight percent of the laborers went out on



tickets before seven a.m. tells me simply that seventy-two people were at job sites before seven a.m.. Other information and an interpretation of the relationship to the descriptive information is needed to draw any further conclusions.

Generative data were information such as feelings, or goals. Feelings can be physical or emotional (Naster, et. al., 1988) and laborers often spoke of feelings in tandem with actions and behaviors. For example, one laborer spoke of feeling fatigue which he related to his sleeping on the street in the rain during the preceding night. Goals were short and long term plans to accomplish a wide array of things such as securing a ride to a job site or attempting to get "a regular job." By coding the data as to whether it was interpretive or generative and placing it in a matrix, I was able to arrange data in a graphic manner. A predominance of information when coded and placed in the matrix is immediately visible as it fills the field to which it is applicable, while surrounding fields have less information. By entering the data into the matrix, I was able to identify patterns of lifestyle, such as those detailed in Spradley (1970), Howell (1973), Murray (1984) and Singer's (1985) work, such as rootlessness, toughness, political alienation, marital instability, heavy drinking and present-time orientation. Further, the matrix was useful for examining the laborers' involvement with the University West Area as the data illustrated characteristics of day laborers' lives, for example, income, where they live, and some of their interests, such as educational goals.

#### Interviews and Observations with Labor Pool Staff

My interviews with labor pool staff were in a sense more formal. This information was useful for confirming data from the laborers as well as for gaining



a greater perspective on laborers' role in, or relationship to the community. Again, I identified myself and stated my intent to write my thesis discussing labor pools in the University West Area. I obtained verbal consent from all parties prior to interviewing them. I interviewed various staff at all ten agencies in the area, a total of sixteen people (ten semi-structured, two unstructured, and four informal interviews (Bernard 1995:208-236)). I spent approximately twelve hours interviewing and four hours examining sites while arranging or waiting to interview people. I often had informal interviews with laborers hoping to get a late ticket at this time as well. In the semi-structured interviews I asked all ten agencies the same twenty-three questions from an interview guide I carried (see Appendix C). These questions essentially sought background information of each agency, current level of activity as measured by daily tickets and number of laborers going to work, and staff perceptions of laborers.

I entered these data into CDC EZ-Text to facilitate organizing and coding the data. CDC EZ-Text was designed specifically for managing semistructured data sets and took little time to learn to use (Carey, Wenzel, Reilly, Sheridan, and Steinberg, 1998:14). This software is distributed by the Center for Disease Control at their website ([http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/hiv\\_aids/software/ez-text.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/hiv_aids/software/ez-text.htm)), and is available for download at no charge. Data were coded in regard to categories of time (such as when things took place or duration), space (location and interior space), money (references to payment or cost), individual behavior (things individuals did), and corporate behavior (things relating to company policy and procedure), and forms of labor (the type of work people did). This allowed me to organize descriptive data found in the answers to my questions, such as numbers of tickets, as well as to be able to quickly reference generative, qualitative data, such as discussions about advantages and disadvantages of labor pools.



## **Chapter Four: The Community Setting, Residents, and Resources**

The context of this study is the eight mile square area to the immediate west, north and encompassing the University of South Florida, known to Tampa residents as "Suitcase City." This chapter will describe the geographic boundaries of this area, social characteristics, general level of employment and available job opportunities, available services, and specific problems confronting this community.

### **Geography**

The University Area Community, known pejoratively as "Suitcase City," (Greenbaum, 1997) has been geographically defined in a number of ways by various planning interests (see Gouldman 1994; Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995; Kunde, 1996; Lewis, 1997). The broadest definition begins at I-275 to the west, the Hillsborough River in the east, and from Burrell Lake at its northern most point, to Fowler Avenue in the south (Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995: 4). This is an area of approximately ten square miles, and is divided into eight census tracts: 110.03, 109.00, 108.03, 108.04, 108.05, 108.06, 108.07, and 108.08 (figure 1, next page). The present research concentrated on a more specific area within these bounds, approximately eight square miles, if the University of South Florida campus is included. This consists of I-275 in the west, the USF campus and golf course in the east, Bearss Avenue in the north, and Fowler Avenue in the South. This area delineated by census tracts 108.03,

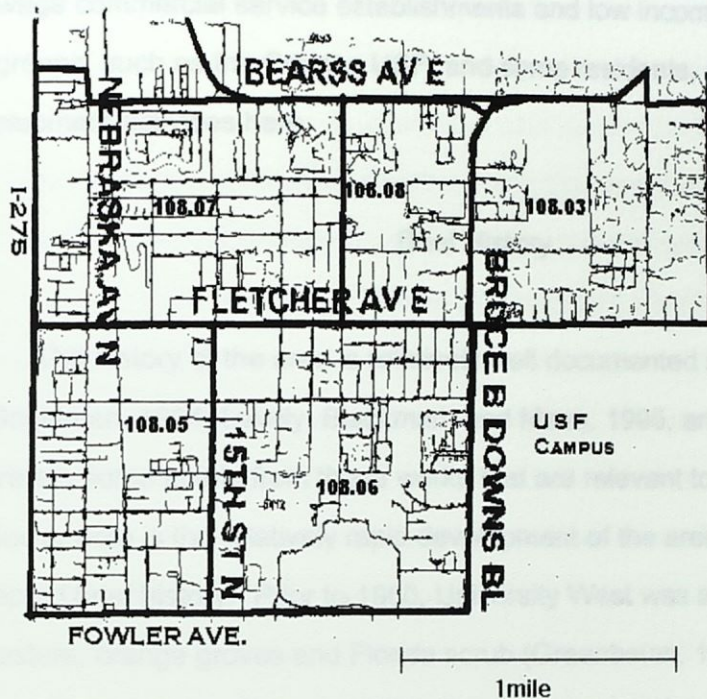


Figure 1  
 University West Community  
 (Map courtesy of the Tampa Aids Network)



108.05, 108.06, 108.07, and 108.08 is called University West (Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995:3). This selection was done as this area has a concentration of low wage commercial service establishments and low income housing and there are groups, such as the County, USF, and some residents, participating in development activities here.

### Brief History

The history of the area is relatively well documented in earlier works such as Gouldman, 1994, Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995, and in Lewis, 1997. There are some points from these works that are relevant to discussion here. Of particular note is the relatively rapid development of the area given its generally accepted brief history. Prior to 1960, University West was a rural area consisting of pasture, orange groves and Florida scrub (Greenbaum, 1997; Lewis, 1997; Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995). The University of South Florida at this time was envisioned as a commuter school, and as such, made minimal accommodations for housing its students, encouraging the unplanned development of apartment complexes in the surrounding area. Numerous multilevel dwellings cropped up (Gouldman, 1994; Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995; Lewis, 1997). An abundance of housing soon spurred competition to attract residents, which kept the cost of housing low (Lewis, 1997). Affordable housing is, of course, not only attractive to students.

There has been a great increase in population. In 1960, the USF Area had 1,743; by 1970, there were 7,879 people; and this number increased to 21,774 by 1980 (Lavelly, Blackman and Mann, 1995:8). At the same time, however, the relative proportion of residents who are students has been in steady decline (Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995; Lewis, 1997). High crime rates in the area



are blamed as the causal factor deterring students' from choosing the University West as a place to live (Lavelly, Blackman, and Mann, 1995; Lewis, 1997). Hindering the situation further, the area is part of unincorporated Hillsborough County, and there has been a lack of a zoning plan. It could be that the growth outpaced the county's ability to organize a zoning plan for the area, accounting for the hodgepodge zoning that predominates the area (Gouldman, 1994). It is also the case that the primary source of employment to arise in the area, are service jobs (Lewis, 1997:41). This is not to say that all service jobs are low paying subservient positions of limited future development potential. As Lewis notes (1997:27) engineers, legal, medical staff and management positions are also a part of the service industry. In the case of this community, however, many of these jobs are not professional positions and can be staffed with unskilled labor. The competition for these jobs is difficult for unskilled residents as it includes USF students seeking income to pay for the continuation of their education (Lewis, 1997).

### Infrastructure

Gouldman (1994) and The Florida Center for Community Design and Research (FCCD&R) (1997) covered infrastructure rather thoroughly. Although the Weed and Seed Program and some private business activity (such as major apartment renovations, as in the case of the Ashely Oaks on 22nd Street) have made improvements, adding sidewalks and street lamps in some areas, it is still the case that these amenities are lacking in most parts of the area. As noted by the FCCD&R report, and the USF Anthropology field school students confirmed, the area between 15th and 22nd streets has high speed local traffic and large



numbers of children (FCCD&R 1997: 51), and streets like Fletcher and Fowler Avenues have very few areas to cross safely.

There are around two-hundred undeveloped lots of various sizes in the University West Area, characterized by thick semi-tropical underbrush and trees. These lots are littered with items such as beer bottles, newspapers, sofas, engine parts and old tires. After a heavy rain, standing water is unavoidable. Drainage in the area is poor. This was vividly demonstrated during the particularly heavy rains during the winter of 1997\98, when a Subway sandwich shop on Fletcher Avenue had to surround itself with sandbags to keep the standing water, which had submerged the parkinglot, out of the building. The area has infrastructure of comparable quality to that of a decaying inner-city neighborhood; as well as vacant lots and deteriorating buildings that can be found in both environments (Lewis, 1997).

### Social Characteristics

The eight square miles that comprise the University West area have a population of over 27,000, making it one of the most densely populated parts of Hillsborough County (FCCD and R, 1997:6). According to 1990 census information, 28 percent of the population over 16 and eligible to work is either unemployed or not in the work-force (US Census, 1990); 19 percent of the population lives at or below the official US poverty level (US Census, 1990). Vacancies account for 27.5 percent of the total available housing in the area. Of the 10,894 occupied units, 87 percent are renter occupied ( US Census, 1990). There are not a lot of property owners living in this area.

The area has one of the highest crime rates in Hillsborough County (HCSO, 1996; 1997). Property crimes lead the list, with larceny contributing to



over 50 percent of the total crimes in the area. This is followed by burglary at around 14 percent, drug related crimes nearly 10 percent, aggravated assault at around 9 percent, motor vehicle theft at approximately 8 percent, robbery near 5 percent, and forced sex and murder both at less than 1 percent (HCSO, 1996, 1997). The crime rate has contributed to its reputation as being a somewhat hostile living environment (Lewis, 1997). 1990 census data indicates the ethnic composition to be 64.7 percent "white," 20.3 percent "black," 10.4 percent "of Hispanic origin," and 4.7 percent other ethnicities. Lewis (1997:38) disagrees with these numbers somewhat, stating that a census he conducted found no group to be over 50 percent. His survey concurred with census data, however regarding unemployment figures, and he found it particularly notable that 60 percent of the unemployed were males, and that an added 16 percent of the population were "underemployed." Unfortunately, regarding this last point, he does not use economic figures, but uses the evidence of two provider households, wherein both husband and wife are supporting the family. This is misleading because there are many two provider households throughout the U.S. in which both husband and wife work. Although their standard of living may be threatened if one or the other stops working, the household is not in danger of going into poverty. What is important about Lewis' point is, that in the case of the University West Area, two incomes are needed for 16 percent of the population to maintain a household income above poverty levels. Despite the ethnic diversity of the area, there do not appear to be any ethnic or "racial" tensions at this time in the area.

The homeless population lives in the various vacant buildings and wooded lots in the area. I estimate there are around 108 homeless people in the area on any given day. This estimate is based on the number of homeless men using labor pools, and the proportion of homeless people reported to use labor pools as



a source of income. I arrived at this figure by taking the average number of homeless people in the labor pools that reported living in the University West Area, and extrapolated from information provided by a census taken by the Jacksonville Homeless Coalition (Wills, et. al., 1998) as to the percentage of homeless people who report using labor pools as a source of income. This figure was confirmed somewhat by the Hillsborough County Sheriff's office, which reported a census of approximately one-hundred such persons in the area last year (Pietsch, personal communication 1998). Residents, and members of the Homeless Coalition suspect these figures are underestimates. "Some people don't want to be seen," (Pietsch, 1998) and so may avoid the police. My own figure is based on sample sizes, not on face to face contacts. Speaking with homeless men in the labor pools and residents of the area, I learned of at least three main camps in the woods, one of which was reported to have over twenty persons and the other two to have seven to ten persons. Homeless men I spoke with reported that they generally avoid these camps, preferring to sleep alone and hidden. Some of the vacant buildings also show signs of habitation such as cables running from an apartment to a power pole, sleeping areas, and piles of clothing.

The issues of crime, poverty, and poor infrastructure found in this area made the University West Area one of two areas in Hillsborough County eligible for a federal Weed and Seed grant in 1993. The push for this grant came from a neighborhood association, headed by Florida State Representative Victor Crist and comprised primarily of University Area property owners, including representatives from apartment complexes owned by out-of-state/absentee landlords (Greenbaum, 1997b). The Weed and Seed grant was to encourage the development of the area, first by ridding the area of criminal elements, and then by creating programs which address issues proactively, the idea being that this



will prevent the return and future development of criminal activities. Local law enforcement stepped up activity in the area, adding a substation, bicycle patrols and raids on area business and apartment complexes believed to be participating in illegal activities. These efforts have been aggressive. Fletcher Woods, a complex with a couple hundred rental units, which had the reputation of having a large amount of criminal activity, is now vacant and has a new name while undergoing renovations. The Captain of Special Operations for the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in the University West Area informed me that his unit was very active at this complex, conducting raids and sting operations on drug dealers. Pastor Roundtree, who had a small outreach office in the complex, which supplied some food and clothing for people in need, reported witnessing at least one raid involving over fifty officers sweeping the complex. She reports that she was later asked to move her outreach as the new owner of the complex intends to renovate. She stated that he informed her that he did not want the problems former owners had (which he related to low income tenants at the complex) and therefore that it is his intent to increase rents to outprice low income tenants.

During the USF Anthropology field school one female student, ("white," a mother, and clearly in her thirties) conducting a windshield survey was pulled over and told she fit the profile of someone looking for drugs. Another student, interviewing a prostitute from the area was told that she would be safe anywhere if she carries a camera because she will be thought of as police. And, in a separate incident confirming this, two students, taking photographs of the area for a presentation were confronted by a pawn shop owner who thought they were police preparing to conduct a raid on his shop. It is safe to say, there has been active "weeding" in the area.



To date, the county does have a community organizer in the area who has been attempting to involve a number of apartment complexes in activities, and succeeded in organizing a drug march in May of 1998. There was no media coverage of the event despite a press release. There were about fifty residents in attendance overall (people would come and go), primarily children and mothers (there were only four men, including myself, who were not policemen).

Over the course of the year of this study, I attended various planning meetings relating to the University West Area including, Weed and Seed's Arts, Culture and Recreation Committee, several of the Church of Preparation's meetings to attempt to establish an Outreach Center in the area, meetings of the College of Arts and Sciences Community Initiative, an anti-drug march, a public forum regarding USF's establishing a charter school, and meetings with the Hillsborough County Homeless Coalition. With the exception of the Homeless Coalition, there was no discussion of Labor Pools in planning meetings about the University West Area unless I mentioned them. When I did bring up the topic at the Arts, Culture and Recreation Committee meeting, the Hillsborough County Parks representative co-chairing the meeting informed me that she was aware that some day laborers were working on the building of the new recreation center located in the University Area Park on 22nd Street, near Bearss. She also informed me that she was aware of the County using day labor in road projects through her discussions with other County officials. She reports that in the case of road projects, day laborers are notorious for walking off a job. I was not able to confirm this with other sources in the county.

Labor pools have not gone unaffected by these activities. All offices reported either during interviews or in conversations with this writer that after the police conduct a "sweep" along Nebraska Avenue, the number of laborers picked up (usually on charges such as having an alcoholic beverage in an open



container, vagrancy, and trespassing) is significant enough to cause the labor offices difficulty in having enough people to go out on jobs. The manager of site 1 reported that his laborers tend to get picked up on minor charges enough that he now has an informant in the Orient Street jail who calls and gives a report regarding who is not going to show up for work. Major sweeps do not happen with any regular frequency, but clearly, the aggressive efforts of the police, however well intended, are disruptive not only to the lives of laborers but to labor pools and their clients.

Seed activities have primarily concentrated on infrastructure up to this time. Sidewalks and streetlamps are being placed in the area. A park was created on 22nd Street near Bearss Avenue which includes new basketball courts, children's climbing type equipment, and under construction is a recreation center which will include not only weight training, boxing, gym facilities, but classrooms for head start programs, evening courses, a stage for community presentations, computers, and the list continues to grow. An active community garden was established, and until recently had a waiting list for would-be gardeners. A county "Safe Haven," known also as the Neighborhood Resource Center was established, where residents can have access to services such as consumer credit counseling, job training, and G.E.D. classes. A charter school was planned to open in the fall of 1997 as it was part of the "Master Plan" to have a neighborhood school.

### Problems and Context

I began with a description of this community for the purpose of illustrating many of the problems without having to go into a great deal of explanation here. The issues are varied and complex. The competition between apartment developments contributed to attracting people in need of affordable housing,



which in turn, contributed to a rapid rise in population. The inability of urban planning (or lack of planning) to keep pace with the rising population of the area has contributed to a poor infrastructure, giving a relatively new urban area (less than thirty years old) the appearance of an inner-city area in decay (Lewis, 1997). It is important to reiterate that there has been a proliferation of low paying service jobs in the area such as in fast food, convenience stores, supermarkets, discount and drug stores, hair salons, janitorial work for hospitals and the University, and labor pools, for which University students and area residents compete (Lewis, 1997). The area has a higher than average pedestrian commuter population (FCCD and R, 1997:6), which suggests that a large number of people walk to work. Given the proliferation of low rents and minimum wage and low paying jobs in the area, it is not surprising to find that over 20% of the working households in the University West Area earn less than \$20,000 annually (US Census, 1990).

Various entities have of late been expressing interest in developing the area and addressing these problems. These include: Weed and Seed participants of Hillsborough County staff, State Representative Victor Crist, and the USF Area Community Civic Association (USFACCA); the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department; as well as the University of South Florida's Florida Center for Community Design and Research, Florida Community Partnership Center, the University Collaborative, the College of Arts and Science's Community Initiative, the College of Fine Arts AmeriCorps project, the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, and the College of Education. Private interests include members of the hospitality industry, such as Busch Gardens and Best Western; and finally, a small number of residents, many of whom are property owners (Gouldman, 1994). Lacking from this group are representatives of low-income and especially homeless persons. This is not to say that none of these entities is concerned with the issues of poverty and homelessness, but simply to point out that such



persons have lacked a voice in regard to issues which may concern them. For example, there has not been a discussion of the lack of shelters in the area, or of using the vacant housing in the area in a project to assist homeless persons, despite the fact that all these groups are cognizant of large numbers of people living in vacant lots.

Looking at assets available to people in the community, there are a large number of commercial establishments along Fowler, Fletcher, Bearss, and Nebraska. These include the University Mall, motels of varying cost, laundromats, beauty parlors, furniture stores, fast food, moderate and fine dining establishments, "adult entertainment," supermarkets, gas stations, car repair, employment specialists, day labor agencies, public storage, an animal hospital, insurance companies, and the list could continue. The University is available, allowing public access to its library and hosting various events at moderate prices throughout the year. There are several medical facilities (including six hospitals) and dental offices. However, there is no indigent care walk-in clinic. The park on 22nd Street has an active after school program and invites activities from outside agencies, such as Interact: a Youth Arts Coalition, funded by contributions from the Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Department (HCP&R) and USF's University Collaborative. This is a program for early teens which uses art and communication skills to explore and express personal and community development issues. The Arts, Culture and Recreation Committee report that there are 58 churches actively involved in the area, one of which operates a soup kitchen at least once a week. The report does not mention, however, that 76 percent of these churches are located outside the University West Area.

In regard to social services, the Neighborhood Resource Center is the only provider in the area. Staff at this agency provide G.E.D. classes, credit counseling, some job training (with the intent to have a "one-stop job shop" in the



future, involving a collaboration with USF) and referrals to appropriate providers for medical and mental health.

Issues of poverty are more than a lack of income; they also include issues of human need. (US Census, 1993; PICCED, 1998). With this in mind, the University West area is certainly an impoverished area. Census information indicates that the income levels of one fifth of the population are below that considered sufficient to nourish oneself on a daily basis, let alone provide for decent, affordable housing. Affordable housing is another issue. Fletcher Woods is not the only complex in the area renovating "to attract higher paying tenants" (quote from manager of apartment complex to student in field school, Greenbaum, 1997b). At least three others, with rental units numbering in the hundreds have been reported by residents to be doing this.

The levels of crime and perceived levels of violence are such that people are willing to tolerate aggressive, intrusive police activity. The issue of a neighborhood school is of importance, not so much because children do not have access to a good education (in fact, many elementary aged children are bussed to Tampa Palms, which is considered by school board authorities to be one of the best elementary schools in Tampa) but because of transportation issues for parents. There are unable to participate in PTA activities because there is no bus service to the school. This is a problem which can be most vividly illustrated by simply recounting an experience I had at Tampa Palms when angry parents were speaking with the principal about issues of over-crowded classrooms. "Why do we have bus loads of Suitcase City kids here? Getting rid of them would cut down our class sizes," stated one angry Tampa Palms mother. Her statement was dismissed by school staff. This incident vividly illustrates how a lack of representation has the potential to adversely affect one's access to resources. People's lack of adequate transportation in this area place them at a



disadvantage for access to resources. This disadvantage can, in turn be interpreted as a lack of participation, which also has limiting effects upon access as well. Lewis (1997) points out that many families (16 percent), in the area have both husband and wife working to provide income, and attributes this to "underemployment" caused by a job market that has an abundance of low paying service jobs which provide little opportunity for advancement. For families with children, this raises the issue of daycare and afterschool care. There are only five licensed child care facilities and only a few private licensed homes in the University West Area (Ott, 1997:6). USF has a Head Start program on the west side of its campus, and a daycare center, the Educational Research Center for Child Development (ERCCD), available to residents on the east. Any residents doing shift work, or working hours other than the usual daylight, Monday through Friday job, must make other arrangements. For example, in one household I met, the father works nights and takes care of the children when they come home from school while their mother is working in the afternoon. University West is not an area of "easy living."

Lewis (1997) argues that "strain," a state of anomie brought on by an inability to meet needs or expectations, has created an environment which has allowed crime to proliferate in this area. Considering that over fifty percent of the felonious crimes committed in this area are crimes of larceny, a property crime, and therefore a potentially income producing crime for the thief, Lewis' argument is somewhat substantiated. However, despite the high levels of unemployment, the majority of the population are law abiding citizens.

Although the unemployment rate for the area is generally high, the vast majority of people (over 70 percent) of working age do work. Lewis (1997) found in his research that much of the poor population in this community could be classified as "working poor." Services are the largest industry in Florida (Florida



Department of Labor and Security, 1995). In 1996, personal and business services accounted for 512,255 jobs, 51 percent of which were in personnel supply services (Floyd, Irwin and Evans, 1997). In 1997, business services had the fastest growth rate over the year with much of this growth being attributed to leased employment (Florida Department of Labor and Security, 1997). Day laborers are low-wage, leased employment. The number of day laborers in any given area is difficult to ascertain because the number of laborers working changes from day to day, and they are generally a constituency that is uncounted, as many are homeless or in transition. Without an address one cannot register to vote. Without a professional organization or union, there is no representation outside of agencies such as OSHA or the EEO to supervise the work environment.

There are 55 labor pools in Hillsborough county that are employment size-class C (100-200) and above. Ten, or almost 20 percent, of these are located in the University West area. The agencies in the University West Area report that they put on average  $100 \pm 20$  laborers per day, six days per week. That translates to approximately 1000 people using day labor as a source of income on a daily basis. This is 6 percent of the area population between the ages of 16 to 70. The wages vary, as laborers take home anywhere from \$40 to \$70 per day depending on the particular job. At an average wage of \$42 per day, working five days per week, annual earnings total \$10,920. Long and Martini (1997) report that average annual earnings equivalent to 50% of the median earnings of full-time salaried workers is necessary to escape conditions of poverty. The 50% of median income for full-time workers in the Tampa Bay area in 1996 was  $13,963.50 \pm \$115$  (Bureau of Census, 1997). It would be an error to presume that the labor pools are responsible for creating this population of working poor. Rather, it was this population that attracted labor pools to the area in the first

place. It would also be an error to view the labor pools as simply exploiting this population. Although labor pools are lucrative businesses, in this community they have filled a niche which public agencies have been either slow to provide for, or have neglected. These businesses will be described in the following chapter.

This chapter introduces the general background of day labor agencies before entering into a discussion of some of the history of day labor agencies in Hillsborough County and the University West Area. It closes with an examination of information gathered from interviews conducted with day labor agencies in the University West Area.

#### A General Background of Labor Pools

Day labor agencies, or labor pools, are a form of contingency labor involving the contracting or subcontracting of laborers. They are classified in labor and economic census data as a business service industry, with their service or product being labor. Driving past such establishments on the street, one is apt to notice that many have a sign near the front door proclaiming, "Day's Work for A Day's Pay." The work can be any form of labor ranging from unskilled - such as lifting and lating debris in the cleaning of construction work sites, digging ditches, and sorting produce, to skilled work, such as carpentry, masonry or serving food and cashiering at a banquet. A day can range from four to ten hours. The pay can be as low as minimum wage for unskilled jobs, and as high as seventeen dollars an hour for skilled labor. The success of these businesses depends upon maintaining both a large labor pool and a consistent demand for labor. These businesses range from local companies to billion dollar multinational corporations. An example of how successful such a company can



## **Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion of Labor Pools, the Business**

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be illustrated by examining the Dunn and Bradstreet Business Rankings for 1998. Examining business services (Dunn and Bradstreet 1998:194), one can see American Express Company ranked at number one with over sixteen billion dollars in sales; Microsoft Corporation at number four with over eleven billion dollars in sales; and Manpower Incorporated (a multinational temporary labor agency and the largest single employer in the United States (MacDonald and Sirianni, 1996:13)) ranked at number seven with over six billion dollars in sales. Staff at Ready Staffing Incorporated, a national company, having twenty-seven offices in the eastern United States, reports sales of over one million dollars per week (Cairel 1998, personal communication). Clearly, there is a demand for temporary labor.

Contracts for leased labor are called, "tickets." Tickets require laborers. As the number of tickets and the specifications of the number of laborers required for each ticket varies from day to day, labor pools require variable numbers of laborers to send to job sites. Either variable can affect the other. If there are not enough laborers to meet the work orders, then the labor pool can lose a client the potential future tickets. If there are not enough tickets to send laborers to work on, then laborers leave and sign up with a different labor agency. This can have more subtle consequences as well, as local agencies report that businesses often make consistent use of a specific day labor office, in effect becoming "regular customers." Regular customers tend to prefer temporary laborers that they have worked with in the past. Reasons stated for this include reducing training hours as the laborer is familiar with the work site, and knowing what quality of work will be obtained from the laborer. When a regular customer does not receive the laborer known to work site staff, it is often the case that the manager, or owner of the labor pool receives a phone call and must placate the customer with assurances regarding the quality of the new laborer's work, and often apologizes



with an explanation/reminder that the customer is using a temporary labor agency and that the laborer is under no obligation to come into the agency on any given day. A contract can be lost in this situation. It is an illustration both of the temporary agency's need to have access to a large population of laborers who are willing to work anywhere, as well as how expectations regarding the quality of labor can be established.

#### A General History and Discussion of Labor Pools in the University West Area

Interviews were conducted with the ten labor agencies in the University West Area (figure 2, next page). The first office (coincidentally labeled site 1) was located in a small strip mall on Nebraska Avenue. This was a national franchise office, specializing in industrial work, and it first opened its doors in 1984. Staff at the agency report that the site was chosen because of the area's reputation for having a large transient population. Staff at the University West Area day labor offices report that transients tend to need the immediate money which comes from daily work, and because some transients have no skills and others have skills, they are a flexible and diverse population, ideal for staffing a daily labor agency. Another agency, originally located at site 4 on Fletcher Avenue, this one locally owned, followed in 1986. It was eventually bought by another Tampa man, who eventually developed it into a two tiered agency and moved the office to sites 2 and 3 on Fletcher Avenue. One office handles daily construction related labor, and the other, weekly-pay, leased, skilled labor. This agency has expanded by purchasing another day labor company that had offices throughout three southeastern states.

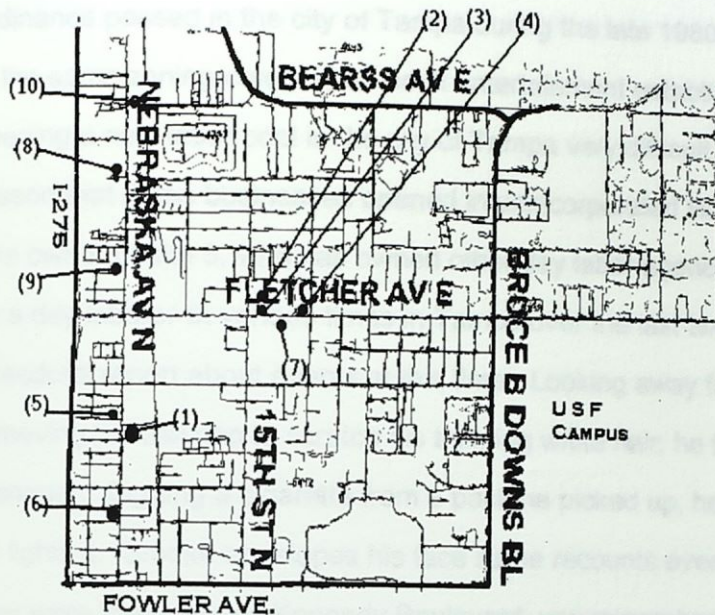


Figure 2  
 Labor Pool Sites  
 (Map courtesy of Tampa Aids Network)



The remaining seven agencies, sites 4 - 10, opened in the 1990s. They report that the reason they selected this neighborhood is in part due to a zoning ordinance passed in the city of Tampa during the late 1980s that rates labor pools in the same zoning category as adult entertainment establishments. This makes opening a new labor pool in the city of Tampa very difficult. It is, in part, for this reason that these businesses opened in unincorporated Hillsborough county. The owner of site 5, who has owned other day labor agencies as well as worked as a day laborer at various times in Tampa over the last twenty years, gave an anecdotal report about events at this time. Looking away from his computer, removing his ball cap to scratch his thinning white hair, he turned his gaze to his manager. Digging a cigarette from a pack he picked up, he begins speaking as he lights it. Smoke envelopes his face as he recounts events, "It was back when they were 'cleaning up' Kennedy Boulevard, you remember that." He went on to say that essentially the city council believed that labor pools were attracting derelicts and criminals to the area, plaguing it with petty crimes. He informed me that along with the alleged derelicts there were a number of small businesses in the area, such as independently owned groceries, depended, in-part, upon the commerce of the laborers to remain open. "Now you don't see anything down there, it's dead."

The manager of site 7, reporting that he has been in the business for over ten years, also recalled this period. He reported that at that time there was a labor hall in Tampa (which is still operating, but now has another name) that had a "bunk house." He states that this is not uncommon at labor pools in Texas, but is rarely seen in Florida. Apparently there were a number of "incidents" at the Tampa bunk house which caught the attention of the papers and city council members. The St. Petersburg Times (Koff, 1987) reported on one particularly



notable incident, which was not caused by the boarders of the rooming house but acquaintances seeking cold beer. Three men in a car reportedly were attempting to trade warm beer for cold beer, and when denied, they fired a shotgun at the men on the porch. The four men on the porch were injured. Other than this incident, the paper did not directly attribute criminal activity in the community to day laborers or the rooming house. However, the manager of site 7 believes that the zoning ordinance was primarily initiated in response to incidents related to day laborers and the rooming house. In 1988, an ordinance was passed to rezone labor pools and bloodbanks in the city of Tampa. The manager of site 7 stated that he found it somewhat ironic that the first labor pool opened in Tampa was in the 1960s by a man who is now reportedly a millionaire and considered in social circles to be one of the Tampa elite.

Michele Ogilvie, Senior Planner at the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission confirmed that the city officials did intend to lessen the number of labor pools in Tampa, drafting Chapter 27, 272 of the zoning code in 1988 (Ogilvie 1998:personal communication). This ordinance restricts temporary agencies and blood donor clinics to light industrial areas and calls for a public hearing prior to authorizing such establishments. She also reported that less than three percent of Tampa is zoned as light industrial area.

Ironically, city and county agencies use not only temporary clerical staff in conjunction with full-time city and county staff on a daily basis, but subcontracted day laborers for construction projects. Temporary staff are used frequently enough to have their own pay code in the database used to maintain a record of purchases for the city and county (Speth 1998:personal communication). Construction projects, such as the new stadium in Tampa and the recently built courthouse, provide tickets in the form of subcontracted labor on a daily basis to day labor agencies throughout Hillsborough county. Although labor agencies are



not at liberty to divulge the names of their clients (not because of confidentiality issues, but because of competition issues as agencies do not wish to be underbid by competitors for labor services), laborers freely discuss the projects they have been working on. Contractors frequently subcontract labor for a number of reasons, none the least of which is that they often require flexible staffing to complete a project, sometimes needing more or less staff to meet deadlines or costs. The advantage of temporary staff, unlike regular full-time staff, is that there is no need to lay anyone off. A contractor simply has an agency supply the number of laborers he may need to complete a project, and no more.

In the University West Area, there are nine day labor agencies and one leased staffing, weekly pay office. Two of these agencies are branches or franchises of multinational companies with offices in Europe, Canada, and Mexico as well as throughout the United States. Four agencies have offices nationwide, two have them statewide, and two are owned and operated locally. An aggregation of permanent staff at these agencies totals around 35 people. Twenty-five percent of these are residents of the University West Area. Offices are open for an average of 6.4 days per week in a range of 5 to 7 days. The general hours of operation average out to be 16.8 hours per day in a range of 13 to 24 hours.

Overall there seems to be a relatively friendly competition between offices as evidenced by several of the offices sharing supplies for laborers such as brooms and shovels, as well as occasionally sharing laborers. These offices report that if they have more laborers than tickets then it behooves them to send the laborers to another office that requires more workers as laborers have their need to work met and will give the first office a degree of loyalty as a result. Unless the person was intoxicated or appeared otherwise impaired, all agencies reported that they would attempt to place anyone who had the desire to work into



some form of employment. This is to a certain extent, part of their business. It was also the case however, that staff at all of the agencies reported feeling an emotional satisfaction in seeing a laborer obtain a higher paying full-time position. They all concurred that it is a positive event for a day laborer to leave day labor for something more permanent.

Numbers regarding laborers are difficult to obtain, given the transitory nature of the jobs. Offices report a variation of plus or minus twenty laborers on any given day, creating an aggregate variation of plus or minus two-hundred. The mean number of workers going out on tickets per office is 97.2, with a standard deviation of 50, in a range of 35 to 200 workers per day. The aggregate daily workforce from all ten offices is therefore 960 to 1070 (see Table 1).

	Average # of day laborers $\pm$ 20 per day	Percentage from the University West Area
Site 1	100	70%
Site 2	150	65%
Site 3	65	65%
Site 4	80	80%
Site 5	40	100%
Site 6	200	60%
Site 7	100	90%
Site 8	50	90%
Site 9	110	90%
Site 10	65	85%
Total	960	79.50%

Table 1

When the percentage of laborers from each office that is from the University West Area is averaged out, a figure of 79.5% is derived for the percentage of laborers residing in the University West Area. Given that the University West Area has a population of approximately 12,560 people considered to be in its labor force (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990), it appears that approximately 8% of the labor force is using labor pools as a source of income.



Agencies report that just as the numbers of laborers fluctuates, so too do the number of daily tickets. The range is reported to be 35 to 200 tickets per day, with a mean number of  $75.6 \pm 10$ . Aggregate figures are therefore  $756 \pm 100$  tickets transacted daily. The mean number of hours worked by a laborer is 7.9 in a range of 6-9 at all ten offices.

Several offices reported that the average ticket grosses \$9.00 per hour. With these figures we can estimate a conservative figure for the gross daily business sales coming into the University West Area for these agencies. We do this by multiplying the average ticket,  $\$9 \times 7.9 \text{ hours} \times 972 \pm 200 \text{ laborers}$ , which equals  $\$69,109.20 \pm 14,220$  of business sales on a daily basis. This figure is bolstered by the report from three offices that they had gross business sales ranging from over one million to over four million dollars last year. Agencies report that overhead ranges from twenty to thirty percent of gross wages. These include expenses such as rent, salaries, taxes and workman's compensation insurance. Wages for laborers can vary according to relevant work experience. One office reported that the daily wages his office pays out tend to average about \$6.50 per hour. Starting wages can vary from the minimum wage of \$5.15 to \$5.50, but presently they tend toward the \$5.50, as there is generally more work than there are laborers. "I spend half my day apologizing to businesses for not being able to completely fill tickets," said one manager, "so I try to pay them a little more with the hope that the word gets out and I can get a few more laborers." Eight out of the ten offices reported that they offered some form of incentive to attract laborers, ranging from an increase in wages, as just mentioned, to free coffee, weekly door prizes like bicycles or work boots, or a canteen with inexpensive sundries.

Twenty percent of the agencies reported that they had health insurance available to laborers, thirty percent reported that they have been attempting to



find an insurer that will work out a policy to make available to laborers, and fifty percent said they don't offer any benefits other than "a guarantee of daily work," in other words, no benefits. Sixty percent of the offices said they offer at least some basic work safety training as well as occasional training specific to skilled jobs. In the case of specialized training, the expense is either split between the labor agency and the contractor, or billed to the contractor entirely. The laborer is never expected to foot this expense.

Laborers are not charged for equipment unless it is lost or broken. Any agency charging for equipment essential to a laborer's completing a job risks being in violation of the Florida Statutes, Labor Pool Act of 1994. This same act limits the working day to a ten hour maximum, entitling the laborer to overtime for any work over ten hours in a day.

Seven out of the ten offices sold bag lunches ranging in price from \$2.50 to \$3.00. The Labor Pool Act also specifies that laborers cannot be forced to buy a lunch and that lunches, if sold cannot charge more than the actual cost of providing the lunch (Labor Pool Act, 1994:448.24 (4)). As the same catering company supplies all the lunches, it is unclear why there is a variation in cost. It is however, the practice of one company, which coincidentally has the least expensive lunch, to sell some items at below cost, as the loss provides some profit in tax benefit and alleviates paperwork regarding the sale of retail merchandise. Six out of the ten offices provide transportation to and from the job sites for laborers at a cost ranging from \$1.00 to \$1.50 each way. Three provide rides at no cost. The weekly pay office requires that employees are able make their own accommodations to get to work, but will give a temp a ride at no cost if it is an emergency/short term problem. One way bus tickets, sold for \$1.25 are generally available for purchase at all the offices.



Agencies generally urge laborers working a regular ticket to arrive an hour early to the hall. Agencies report that this gives them a reasonable amount of time to reassign the ticket in case the original laborer does not show up. They believe this gives them adequate time to arrange a ride to the work site in case a laborer does not have transportation. Laborers are not paid for this time, although the laborers I spoke with did not cite this as an issue or a problem. Offices reported that the time a laborer waits to collect his or her check at the end of the day varies depending on how crowded the office is. This also seems to vary from office to office. The longest wait reported was thirty minutes, and that came from the office with the highest number of reported tickets. The shortest was less than one minute, which was from one of the smaller offices. The mean time of all the offices was ten minutes. None of the offices paid in cash, and none of the offices offered check cashing services. There was a general consensus among managers that the sooner they could get people paid and on their way, the better.

The owner of site 5 spoke briefly with me about laborers walking off job sites, as this is a situation which he has had to resolve in the past. He emphasized that this can be a complex situation. In some cases, the laborer may be asked to do something unreasonably difficult, dangerous, or simply be tired of being verbally abused. He gave the example of one site he visited where his employees had walked off the job. He found that the contractor was attempting to get the laborers to dig a ditch without shovels. As a result he terminated his agreement with the contractor. In other cases he has found abuse on the part of the laborer and had to terminate the laborer. He stated that this situation generally is a case where a laborer shows up at a site, decides he or she does not want to work there (for any number of subjective reasons corresponding to



the work not meeting his or her expectations) and simply leaves the site. A report that a laborer walked off a job always requires some investigation.

During an anti-drug march I attended, a resident informed me that she occasionally worked in labor pools. She was at that time considering making some extra income with the labor pools as she had been told that a certain tomato crop was in and a local supermarket would be generating tickets to sort the tomatoes. Sorting tomatoes is considered a good ticket for a laborer because it is indoors and takes little effort. She also informed me that on one of her tickets she helped put together gift baskets for the Martha Stewart catalogue. She reported that she only found one of the agencies in the area to be unpleasant to work for as she felt that the staff were disrespectful and rude. She said that she wouldn't work there again.

Along both Nebraska and Fletcher Avenues, there are a number of businesses that report and are reported to be frequently patronized by day laborers. There are at least seven well known fast food establishments in the area. Laborers report they prefer the ones which have 99 cent hamburgers or serve coffee and are open all night. Two motels in the area reportedly provide weekly laborer rates. I spoke to the manager of one of these establishments who confirmed that he gave day laborers a break in the rates if they stay a week at a time. The daily rate is \$25, but laborers do not have to pay for Sundays. In this case, a day laborer, working an average day, 7.9 hours, at \$6.50 per hour, is spending approximately 49 percent of his income on housing alone. Five of the ten labor pool offices in the University West Area are closed on Sundays. He reports that he is the cheapest motel in the area, and that although the bungalows appear to have had finer days, needing paint and being encroached upon by vegetation, he never has a vacancy for a full day. There is a trailer park further north on Nebraska that has weekly apartment rentals starting at \$65. One



of the labor agencies reports that he consistently has employees who live in that park. There are numerous establishments that provide check cashing services along Nebraska and Fletcher. These include gas station/convenience stores, a liquor store and at least two of the several pawn shops. One of the owner's of labor pool with the greatest reported number of daily workers estimated that five percent of its day laborers have bank accounts. Conversations with laborers revealed that they also use storage facilities, including the ones located on Nebraska, to store personal items of value.

Laborers and staff at labor pool agencies reported negative interactions in regard to the businesses they serve. Laborers, although certainly desiring to have a higher income, did not expect to get it from working in the labor pools. Both laborers and labor pool managers reported that occasionally it was also the case that the regular staff at a job site attempt to assign laborers details that they themselves do not wish to do because of the potential danger. Laborers are encouraged by managers at day labor agencies to report to them if they find themselves in this situation. All of the labor pool offices kept records of various clients that commit such abuses and reportedly refuse to contract with these clients. Unfortunately, the labor pool agencies have not consolidated their lists so there is nothing preventing such a client agency from negotiating a new contract with another agency. Labor pool agencies also reported having difficulty obtaining payment from some clients. These clients were similarly kept on a list at each agency. There was no information shared as to the number of times these sorts of incidents occur. Difficulty in collection of payment for services does occur frequently enough that one agency, a multinational company, has a policy of obtaining a contact person with a subcontractor's contractor, e.g., in the case of a construction company doing work for the County, a County representative would be made a contact. This is done so in the event a subcontractor does not



pay, the contractor will be leveraged to pay the labor pool office for services rendered.

Labor pools are not social service agencies. They are business service agencies, organized to make a financial profit, like most business are. Their product is a service, the provision of people to do labor. Labor pools have taken advantage of a niche. In the University West Area, these agencies act as a form of broker (Eames and Goode, 1977:137) linking disenfranchised people, such as the homeless and recently released exconvicts, with jobs as general and skilled laborers or in the hospitality business.

The existence of recent regulatory legislation indicates that at one time at least some agencies were taking advantage of people to the extent that legal intervention was necessary. All the agencies in the University West Area appeared to be in compliance with the regulations at this time, although it is unlikely they would have simply told me if they were not. Two of the ten agencies made general accusations against one office in the area. It is claimed that these two offices have noticed that they gain laborers from the accused office at the end of the week, laborers who claim to have worked forty hours and would have been entitled to overtime had they been sent on a ticket -- the implication being that they were purposely denied a ticket to avoid paying overtime. I did not hear this complaint from laborers. It easily could be true, but it does not appear to be common practice. Agencies inform laborers in writing and verbally when they are hired and throughout their employment with the agency -- about wages/pay rates, about costs such as transportation, about the difficulty of the work, and of any stipulations regarding being hired full-time by a client agency. For example, some require workers to continue to work for the day labor agency on a regular ticket with the client for six weeks before allowing the client to hire a laborer as their own employee. Managers inspect job sites, and query workers regarding issues



of safety. This is, of course, to their own advantage as well as the laborer's, because the cost of a workman's compensation case due to injury on a job-site, to which the day labor agency would be held accountable, can be very expensive. As previously mentioned, six of the ten offices regularly offer some form of safety training to the laborers.

In sum, day labor agencies offer a legal source of income to almost any able bodied person who walks into their offices. Presently, in the University West Area, agencies do not appear to be exploiting staff any more than an employee at a "regular job," can be exploited. This possibly due to legislation which mandates fines for abuses of employees. At best, although the wages are less than one would find at a comparable "regular job," day labor offices offer disenfranchised persons, such as homeless men, a legal daily income and the potential to obtain contacts which can provide them with "regular work."

## Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion of Day Laborers

"I came to Tampa from Alabama to be a beach bum...no one told me it wasn't near the beach...so now I'm a labor pool bum..." Ron, Laborer at site 1, 1998.

Speaking in broad terms, the men working in the labor pools can generally be said to share some of the characteristics of Spradley's (1970) "Working Stiff" tramps. These include a penchant for alcohol, frequent arrests, rootlessness, and a present time orientation. Unlike Spradley's "urban nomads," however, they are not a separate culture unto themselves within the University West Area community. They are people who have become disenfranchised for any number of reasons, ranging from personal tragedy, to never having acquired the knowledge and skills needed to maintain regular work. Therefore they find themselves struggling to cope with poverty.

The bulk of the interviews I conducted began on a Friday in March at site 1. On my first day I arrived at the site at five a.m. It was thirty-eight degrees outside. Four men were standing outside the door to the labor hall, sipping from styrofoam cups of coffee, puffing cigarettes and occasionally waving their arms and shuffling their feet to fight the chill. They were dressed in layers of clothing, light cotton or denim jackets, and flannel shirts over t-shirts. All of them were wearing jeans with assorted stains, and heavy shoes. All were appropriately dressed for construction or janitorial work. No one appeared intoxicated, and I found this to be consistently true at these early hours throughout my observations.



Two of the men, Will and Nate, are Euro-American, and were talking to an African American, named Bill. All three men are over forty, with Nate being the oldest at sixty-three. Juan, a Hispanic man, the youngest of the group, is over thirty-five years old. He was somewhat disheveled in appearance, with unkempt hair and was somewhat malodorous in his soiled, layered clothing. He stood alone by the door, casually watching the parking lot, watching the people, then watching the parking lot again. Both Juan and Will slept on the street over night. Will told me that by the time he was able to get off work yesterday and get a ride, he couldn't get downtown to a shelter before seven p.m., when the shelters close. Juan did not want to talk about it.

Nate has been living in the University West Area for seven years. He shares an apartment with four other men, but says he does not have any friends. He does not attend church and does not have a membership in any organizations, reporting that he prefers to "keep to (himself)." "Being around other people," he said, "just gets you into trouble." While driving to his work site, he asked me to stop at a convenience store to buy tobacco. I noticed that when he returned from the store and entered my car that his face paled and he grimaced. I asked him if he was in pain. "It'll pass," he replied. He reported that it was a back injury but did not go into detail other than to say that it was an old injury and the pain simply comes and goes. He does not have medical insurance of any sort.

Nate is a high school graduate. He spoke about having taken an aptitude test at one time in his life, and he tested at the equivalent of a person with a four year college degree. "We're not all dummies just because we work in labor pools." He had managed an electronic repair and service shop in the midwest before moving to Florida to help his father with his business. It was a move he thought would help him escape his problems with substance abuse, "a



geographic cure." Distance, however, did not help him and he found himself on probation for possession of cocaine shortly after his father's death. He ended up spending time in prison for a violation of probation. The violation was because he had been arrested for a murder charge for which he was acquitted, and although he had been acquitted, in Florida it is still considered a violation of probation to be arrested in the first place, whether or not one is found guilty of the crime. After spending a couple years in prison, his business had fallen by the wayside and he found it hard to find regular work with a felony conviction behind him. That is how he came to labor pools.

Will has two years of college studying engineering and was self-employed in California as a tool-maker. His life became complicated when he became injured and shortly thereafter caught charges for driving under the influence. He was uncomfortable giving details. He shared that he came to Florida hoping to get a new start and get his life back on track. He reported that he has been living on the street in the University West Area and in downtown shelters for the last seven months. Like Nate, he prefers to keep to himself and stated that he did not have any friends. He had recently accepted a full-time position with one of the contractors for which he had been doing day labor, and was presently doing day labor to supplement his income. He hoped to save enough money in the near future to get an apartment and a car. Two and half months later I met Will again at site 1. He reported that he was attempting to get his regular job back as he had spent the last sixty days in jail on an open container charge. He was confident that he would get the job and was helping the manager at site 1 in the interim.

Bill has been living in a trailer park near Nebraska Avenue for ten years. He used to have a steady job working at a local restaurant. It was lost in a fire



and Bill needed an income quickly. "I needed money fast and this is a legal way to get it."

Juan loaded and unloaded trucks for a local moving company for several years until he had to work with a new driver. "He wouldn't do anything...I was doing all the work, he just drove...so I quit. Now I'm working in the labor pools."

Day laborers come from a wide variety of backgrounds. At site 1, I met three Cuban balseros (people who fled Cuba by rafting across the Florida Straits), recently arrived and looking for a place to live, as well as people who have lived in the University Area for their entire lives. They have a variety of work experience and skills which range from occasional reports of having been business owners living a comfortable life, to people who were born in poverty and have spent their lives struggling to survive. The ethnicity that predominated these offices tended to reflect the ethnicity of the neighborhoods nearest the site locations (US Bureau of the Census 1990), with offices on Nebraska having a majority approximately 60 percent, Euro-American, and offices on Fletcher, nearer to the University, having approximately 60 percent African-American. This observation was further validated by labor pool staff. Out of thirty laborers interviewed at one site, the ages ranged from 17 to 63. Under half (42%) of the laborers were between the ages of 17 to 35. One in five reported that they did not have a high school education or its equivalent, and 100% of these were less than twenty-five years old. This is significant when one considers information from the census bureau indicating that young workers are more prone to lower wages and that a lack of education decreases job mobility (McNeil and Bernstein, 1994; Posey and Bernstein, 1995; Ryscavage, Masumura, and Bernstein, 1995). Three percent did not speak English.

One fifth reported that they slept either on the street or in a shelter the night before. Those who slept in the street (10%) stayed near the labor pools on



Nebraska Avenue. As previously noted, all shelters are located in the city of Tampa; there are none in the University West Area.

Ron, a thirty-five year old Euro-American spent one night under the awning of a labor pool office in an attempt to get out of the rain. "I was in the woods over there when the rain started to come down," he said as he pointed across Nebraska Avenue, "so I figured I'd get some cover here, but I'll be damned if I didn't get wetter with the wind blowing my blanket way off over my head and the rain splashing on the cement... I think it may have been worse."

If one includes those living in weekly room rentals as in a transitory living situation, then the number swells to over 73% of the laborers living in transitory shelter, ranging from camps in the woods to weekly room and trailer rentals.

In my observations, I found 20% of the laborers were female. This figure is corroborated by managerial staff at site 1. I also noticed that women tended to show up later than men to report to work. Male laborers told me that generally women are single mothers who have to arrange childcare of some sort and that is why they are late. Over time I had conversations with ten women who confirmed this, although none of whom were themselves in this situation.

During a week of observation at site 1, I did not observe one laborer to be drunk or otherwise intoxicated when showing up for work between the hours of five and seven A.M.. This was not the case however as the day progressed. At least at site 1, the bulk of the day's tickets are assigned between the hours of five and seven A.M.. Laborers who appeared at labor halls intoxicated were sent away consistently. The consumption of alcohol seems generally accepted after work or if one does not get a ticket to go out on. All sites had at least one discarded empty alcohol container, such as a beer bottle, within twenty-five feet of the front of the establishment. At one agency, I observed two empty bottles in the bathroom. It is not clear however, how the consumption of alcohol compares



in this population to blue collar patterns of alcohol consumption, or even to that of university students. In conversations with thirty laborers, ninety-five percent did not consider themselves "drunks," and resented that people at construction sites often referred to day labor agencies as "the rent a drunk office."

Jack is an African-American male in his early forties, a military veteran receiving a pension, who worked in the VA Hospital as a lab technician prior to going to prison on domestic violence charges. He claims that he came home from work one evening and found his former best friend in bed with his former wife, "...and just snapped." Because of his charges, he was told he could not return to his job at the VA. He's looking for regular work. "I'm done with my pity party. I put a daughter through college, I don't want her to see me as a labor pool man."

In casual conversations, men tended to reminisce about past successes, whereas women tended to be more focused on present circumstances. Neither males or females stated that they wanted full-time work as a goal, but were interested in getting out of labor pool work. All laborers have stories about undergoing some form of abuse on a worksite. Frequently they felt that they were treated with less respect than regular employees, and staff at labor pool agencies concurred with this opinion. There were a number of anecdotes about people who prefer to work in labor pools over regular jobs, because they like the flexibility, but none of the people I interviewed, or spoke with in casual conversation, claimed to be such a person. During my observations on site, I noticed an average of four people per day filling out job applications for positions as day laborers. Younger laborers expressed interest in getting G.E.D.s, and older laborers spoke of a desire to increase skills in areas ranging from math to masonry and machinery. Laborers often wore worn clothing and some were



occasionally somewhat dirty and malodorous prior to going to work, but the work of general labor tends to be dirty and hard work.

During conversations, laborers generally stated that they did not make enough money to stop living day to day. They refer to this as "the labor pool trap." In this situation, laborers report that they are unable to make enough money to be able to take a full-time job. Quite simply put, to take a full-time job generally means waiting two weeks for the first paycheck. As many laborers live in apartments for which they pay by the week and have other expenses of living to contend with daily, laborers find themselves dependent upon daily money. The validity of this situation as an absolute trap is questionable. An employer, if unwilling to loan an employee money up front which can later be taken from the check, could start a person at work a week closer to the end of a pay period so that the laborer could earn money in one week or less. This would negate having to wait two weeks. However, no one, laborers or labor pool staff, reported that this occurs. It is the laborers' perceptions of feeling trapped that is important as it reflects a sense of powerlessness over the situation, "caught in a trap," unable to overcome his or her circumstances. "I need a miracle from God," one woman told me, "I'm the oldest I have ever been and the worst off I have ever been." She said the same thing many others said, "It's a vicious cycle... You make \$5.50 per hour, pay \$3.00 for a lunch, take out taxes and you pay \$25-30 per day for a room and you're broke."

As a whole, this group is a population predominantly of men (80%), who are either homeless or living in a transitional housing situation. They tend not to participate in local groups, such as churches or social clubs, preferring to "keep to (themselves), which suggests a rootlessness. They are characterized as hard-living individuals; their language is peppered with words generally considered profane, and it is not uncommon for them to have criminal records or to be



arrested on charges such as vagrancy or having an open container of alcohol. They appear disheveled and have difficulty obtaining "regular work." Despite this characterization, day laborers work an average 32 to 40 hours per week. They report to the labor pool office between five and seven a.m., to go to work sites where they do hard labor for low wages. Few of these men receive benefits or entitlements of any sort, as they are "able bodied men;" "not looking for handouts;" or the benefits are, "more trouble than they're worth." Day laborers participate in the local economy, purchasing goods and services as well as contributing to its growth with their labor, and yet they live on the margins of the community. They express feelings of frustration as they attempt to earn enough money to meet day to day expenses. Unable to escape a present-time orientation, day laborers feel trapped in a situation of poverty.

### Conclusion

The observations and interviews of laborers and labor pools in the University West Area reveal that there is a relatively large marginalized population, that consistently have been ignored or overlooked by social service providers. They live in the woods, in vacant housing, on the street and in apartments they must rent by the week because they do not have enough money for a security deposit. This is striking in a "target area" that is replete with development activities from local, state, and Federal interests. This population, clearly in a condition of poverty, has had no representation or voice in activities regarding the future of this community.

The historical trends regarding the development of the University West Area suggest that there has been relatively affordable housing attracting not only students but persons of limited income (Gouldman, 1994; Lavelly, Blackman, and



Mann, 1995; Lewis, 1997). Add to this the historical evidence reported by labor pool staff regarding the efforts of the City of Tampa to "clean up" areas such as Kennedy Boulevard, supported by the Zoning Act of 1988, as well as the problem that homeless shelters, all located in Tampa, have been operating at maximum bed capacity since they began operation (Homeless Coalition, personal communication, 1998), and it appears that this marginal population moved from the City of Tampa to the University West Area.

It is beyond the scope of this project to answer why this population living on the margins of the city while building it, has been ignored or avoided. This study was designed to (1) identify this population; (2) to understand their relationship with the community; (3) their means of subsistence; and (4) their link to "regular" work. By pursuing these four questions, I draw out a discussion of the issues homeless men in this community face. This is particularly timely in the face of Florida's forthcoming Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency Initiative (WAGES). WAGES is a "welfare reform" initiative the state of Florida is beginning in October. This program is intended to help welfare recipients to reenter the workforce by stopping their entitlements, and substituting aggressive case management to assist clients with finding work (WAGES webpage, 1998). The underlying assumption is that hard work will lift welfare recipients from poverty. Day laborers contradict this assumption. Hard work alone is not enough to escape poverty.

This project addresses the issues and problems facing homeless men in the University West Area community. By contextualizing who they are, how they are linked to the community, and what they have been doing there, I hope this study will serve as a reference and initial guide in the planning of services, by interested actors such as the Homeless Coalition and the USF Community Initiative.



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## Appendix A

I began my initial interviews with the following equipment:

- My car, a Honda Civic Sedan, and a full tank of gas.
- A Sony Microcassette tape recorder, Motorola cell phone, AA batteries.
- Two stenographic note pads for jottings and other notes.
- A regular sheet (8 1/2 x 11) note pad.
- Several Informant Consents Forms.
- Ball point and felt tip pen (writing a regular notebook requiring constant use flow, such as jottings while driving).
- Loose leaf binder with graph paper, agendas, writing paper, and notes to hold my documents.
- A Swiss Army Knife.
- A small flashlight, AA batteries (the sun is not up at 8 a.m. in March).
- Thermos full of hot coffee, extra styrofoam cups (for notes), napkins (for spills).
- Business cards which identified me as being affiliated with USF and the Community Initiative.

## Appendices



## Appendix A

I began my initial interviews with the following equipment:

- My car, a Honda Civic Sedan; and a full tank of gas.
- A Sony Microcassette tape recorder; Memorex c60 tapes; AA batteries.
- Two stenographic note pads for jottings and other notes.
- A regular sized (8.5X11) note pad.
- Several Informed Consent Forms.
- Ball point and felt tipped pens (felt tipped for writing in irregular situations requiring constant ink flow, such as jotting while driving).
- Loose leaf binder with graph paper, separators, writing paper, and sleeves to hold any documents.
- A Swiss Army Knife.
- A small flashlight; AA batteries (the sun is not up at 5 a.m. in March).
- Thermos full of hot coffee; extra styrofoam cups (for riders); napkins (for spills).
- Business cards which identified me as being affiliated with USF and the Community Initiative.



## Appendix B

### General questions asked of day laborers.

- Why are you doing day labor instead of a full-time job?
  - How long have you lived in the University West Area?
  - Do you have your own place, such as an apartment, to stay?
  - In what way do you believe education to be important?
  - Would you like to increase your education?
  - What are your favorite things about this area?
  - What are your least favorite things about this area?
  - How do you feel about the neighborhood overall?
  - Do you have a favorite place to relax outside of what you call home?
  - Do you belong to any clubs, groups or church?
- Do you have a high level of office staff turn-over (~30% per year)? Temporary staff turn-over (~50% per year)?
- What is the average number of tickets that run out of your office daily?
- What is the range of activities a laborer can expect on a ticket from this office?
- How many days does the average ticket last?
- Are you open seven days per week?
- What shifts (day, evening, night) are run out of the office?
- What is the average number of hours laborers work on a ticket?
- How much time do laborers spend waiting for a ticket here (at the labor hall)?
- And, how much time do they spend waiting to get paid at the end of the day?

## Appendix C

### Interview guide for day labor agencies.

- How big is this agency? This office?
- Is it locally, state, nationally or internationally owned?
- When did this agency come to the University West Area?
- Are there other branches in the Tampa Bay area?
- What made the University West Area a desirable place to locate your business?
- Is your office staff from the University West Area?
- What percentage of your temporary workforce is from the University West Area?
- How many active temporary employees do you estimate are working for you on a regular / daily basis?
- Do you have a high level of office staff turn-over (+30% per year)? Temporary staff turn-over (+30% per year)?
- What is the average number of tickets that run out of your office daily?
- What is the range of activities a labor can expect on a ticket from this office?
- How many days does the average ticket last?
- Are you open seven days per week?
- What shifts (day, evening, night) are run out of this office?
- What is the average number of hours laborers work on a ticket?
- How much time do laborers spend waiting for a ticket here (at the labor hall)?  
And, how much time do they spend waiting to get paid at the end of the day?



- Does your agency offer any training to temporary employees?
- Does your agency provide or offer benefits, such as health or vacation time to employees?
- Do you provide equipment or transportation for employees? Is there any charge?
- Do you provide lunch? Cost?
- What is your policy if a laborer is offered a full-time position while on a ticket?
- How does an area business arrange a contract with your agency?
- What are the benefits or advantages for a business that uses your agency?
- What are the disadvantages for a business using this type of agency?
- What makes this a good business/what are the advantages for the community?
- What are the disadvantages?