



The migration of young Mexicans to the United States: undocumented students in Los Angeles, California.

Photo: Mixtec migrants, workers of agricultural farms. David Bacon

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Summary: The article considers the working conditions of young undocumented Mexicans who have been admitted to California State University, Los Angeles. In addition to being students and workers, some of them have joined campus organizations that support undocumented students. Young people are a great productive and transformational force in our society, and that is why it is necessary to reflect on their reality.

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Introduction

It is clear that one of the social groups most widely affected by the 2007 crisis was youth. They had the highest unemployment rates between 2008 and 2009, according to the World Labor Organization (WLO). Furthermore, young people who do manage to enter the labour market are more susceptible to working longer hours, in informal or unsafe jobs, with the lowest wages and benefits. They are also the most robust workers who can endure extended shifts, cope more easily with mild diseases without missing work or going to a doctor and adapt to different activities. For all of these reasons, they are seen as attractive workers for multitasking and flexibility. The combination of their being both flexible labour on the one hand and highly productive on the other makes them a very attractive match for the labour markets of developed economies.

In 2014, I carried out field work in which I interviewed young undocumented Mexicans who were studying at California State University, Los Angeles. Since they were also workers, I learned about their working conditions as well about their organizational and mutual aid strategies. It must be highlighted that the situation of the young people who make it into the education system is very different from those who do not, and that there are also big difference between working in the city or the in countryside. In this article, I focus on city youth, since they are the ones involved in formal education.

Young Mexicans in Los Angeles, California.

Most of the young people working in the US are employed by the tertiary sector in highly flexibilized activities like food preparation, sales and services such as gardening, housecleaning, babysitting and caregiving. Students who work devote twenty hours a week to their labour activities, plus another twenty to a second job on the weekend, in addition to their regular school hours. Consequently, the higher their workload, the more they neglect self-care such as sleeping and eating well. Because of their age range (15-29), they ought to be sleeping between seven and nine hours a night, and never less than six. But on average, the people I interviewed only slept four hours a night. Another problem is that they often do not eat well either since lunch hours usually correspond to their travel time.

In terms of salaries, these young undocumented Mexicans earn the minimum wage and none of them have fringe benefits like medical care, paid vacation time, or Christmas bonuses. Furthermore, the work they do is highly risky since they lift heavy weights, work in warehouses or do other activities that can hurt their backs. They also work in kitchens, where they are surrounded by hazards such as stoves, ovens, sharp knives and wet floors.

Most of the people interviewed had been included in the DACA (*Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals*) program created by former president Barack Obama through a presidential decree. Under it, the state deferred its deportation priorities

so that undocumented youth who did not have legal residency in the US, but who met certain criteria, would not be immediately deported, but rather they would be given a work permit and a driver's license.

Young undocumented migrant students, along with the offspring of immigrants, started the fight in 2001 and began lobbying for the bill known as the *DREAM Act*. The acronym stands for *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors*, thus the name *dreamers*.

After many years of struggle and of having the Congress deny its passing, Barack Obama approved DACA through decree, which was one step towards the very much needed recognition of their rights. True, their deportation was deferred, and work permits and driving licenses were granted – very necessary for a city like LA, with such extensive urban development - but it did not pave the way to citizenship or to real recognition of their rights as workers. DACA was not a handout; it was the result of a long struggle.

Conclusions

DACA, the program that is now at risk with the coming to power of Donald Trump, was achieved thanks to the young *dreamers* movement. They are, and will continue to be, a great transformational force.

Donald Trump has threatened not to renew the dreamers ability to stay in the US through DACA. However, I believe that the terror Mr. Trump

is stirring up is really meant to further control immigrant labour, to further cheapen it and to make it even more precarious. It is my opinion that the DACA youth are qualified labour and very necessary for the US labour market. In order to control this labour force and prevent it from achieving its rights, they are being intimidated with the very real danger of deportation. That is why it is urgent to organize and show solidarity towards young migrants and to make sure they don't lose ground in the fight to be acknowledged as a necessary labour force that is deserving of labour rights.

