

### Labor and Youth in the Global City

My skills as a community activist, urban ethnographer, and near native Portuguese speaker make me the ideal candidate for this fellowship. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan. My dissertation focuses broadly on the way in which shifts in the global economy have increased the number of high technical jobs and decreased the availability of well paying manufacturing jobs in modern global cities. More specifically, my research analyzes the life chances of inner city youth who are confronting a growing service sector economy and have limited access to jobs requiring high educational standards. My research is guided by the following questions: How does the restructuring of national economies that are working to compete in the global market effect job opportunities for the working poor? What modes of employment are available to poor inner city youth both in the formal and informal labor market? What are the causal mechanisms that drive some poor inner city youth to work in the informal economy (e.g. selling drugs, prostitution, and robbery) while others decide to work in low wage service sector jobs (e.g. grocery stores, restaurants, and retail stores). My experience as an urban ethnographer has been among marginalized youth and undocumented Latino workers in the United States. I look forward to applying my knowledge and skills in a vibrant urban environment such as Sao Paulo, Brazil. As a result of my dissertation topic and my experience as an urban ethnographer, I am very knowledgeable of theories in the areas of urban sociology, labor, social movements, and poverty. I look forward to gaining an in-depth and practical understanding of how Brazilian community activists and scholars are approaching these issues.

I have traveled to Sao Paulo numerous times since 1997 and I am very familiar with the layout of the city. In addition, my wife is a native Brazilian from the northeast of Brazil. We met in Sao Paulo and we continue to visit her family who live in and around the *favelas* where many native northeast Brazilians live. Hence, I have a very personal connection to the language, culture, and customs of Brazil. My most recent trip to Sao Paulo was as a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellow, where I enrolled in a six week intermediate Portuguese language course. Living in Brazil, speaking Portuguese daily with my wife and daughter, and several visits to Sao Paulo, have brought my Portuguese language skills to that of a near native speaker.

I dropped out of high school at the age of 16 and joined the Marines in 1993 at age 18 to escape poverty and unemployment. My introduction to what C. Wright Mills defined as the “sociological imagination” came in 1997 when I worked as a Marine Embassy Guard at the US Consulate in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Since I grew up in a poor Mexican immigrant neighborhood, I was frustrated at the way in which the poor living in *favelas* were ignored by Sao Paulo’s wealthy. My frustrations led to curiosity. I wanted to know how and why *favelas* could even exist. How could there be so much class inequality? More importantly, was it even possible for a young man or woman living in a *favela* to experience social mobility, as I had done? For me, this was my introduction to issues of global class, race, and gender inequality. I had the appropriate questions, but I was a high school dropout, and at this point in time, I did not have the educational tools to begin to formulate answers.

In 1998 I left the military and enrolled in my first sociology course at Southwestern Community College in California. There, I learned how to articulate my thoughts in an academic setting, and critically examine the economic and social inequality I had observed in Sao Paulo. Wanting to further develop my “sociological imagination,” I transferred to the University of California, Berkeley, where I enrolled in social stratification and poverty courses. I wrote my senior honor thesis about an impoverished youth outreach center using ethnographic field methods. I later enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of Michigan and began an ethnographic project on day labor workers in Southwest Detroit.

The SSF 2008 Fellowship in Brazil, will give me the opportunity to return to Sao Paulo and begin my dissertation research on the unique challenges marginalized urban youth face in the inner-city and *favelas*. I would like to participate in this research project for three reasons: 1) To cultivate professional and personal relationships with community activists in Sao Paulo’s inner-city neighborhoods; 2) To engage in intellectual exchanges with professors from the University of Sao Paulo (USP) to advance my knowledge of urban poverty in Brazil; and 3) To develop my skills as an urban ethnographer in a different environment than the United States.

I have extensive skills working as a community activist with undocumented Latino workers in the United States. In California I helped to implement educational programs in Oakland for undocumented youth. In Michigan I have worked closely with undocumented workers in Detroit. As a community activist and ethnographer, I appreciate the value of developing working networks with local NGO’s and other community activists in Brazil. However, my intense desire to return to Sao Paulo and conduct ethnographic research is blocked by my lack of connections to people and organizations who work with Brazil’s marginalized youth. The Sociologists without Borders Summer 2008 Fellowship provides a unique opportunity for me to cultivate personal and professional relationships with both community organizations and academics that I hope will last a life time. I look forward to sharing my experience as a Latino community activist with others working in the area of urban social movements, trade unions, and homeless peoples’ movements in Brazil. In addition, forming an intellectual exchange with Professors Ruy Braga and Paulo Martins will be invaluable to my development as a young sociologist in training.

If selected to be part of this amazing research team, I will work with the project for 60 days from June 2 to July 31, 2008. The opportunity to participate in this study is vital for completing my dissertation prospectus and returning to Brazil to conduct my research.