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Event Reflection

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**Harvest of Shame**

A very disturbing realization of technology majors at the Claremont Colleges is how little a student from the upper class needs to physically and mentally accomplish to reap massive monetary benefits. Migrant farm workers interviewed in the film *Food Chains* *earn* forty-two dollars a day: a software engineer with just a BA with ten courses can *make* between once or twice that per hour. This film gracefully flies in the face of horrible classmates coworkers I have had bleating about meritocracy and the American Dream. Ignoring the difference and disparity between what money is made and what money is earned obscures the realities of wage labor markets in the United States, and this tension is a surprising link between divorce law in post revolutionary Iran and labor law in Immokalee, Florida.

A capitalist market is a material function of what can be valued. In terms of labor, this market depends not only on supply and demand but also on conceptions of what people can be paid for, how much they are paid, and who is responsible for ensuring they receive their earned wages. This philosophical and social enumeration of labor compensation dictates reality for workers

For example a culture is created where it is unthinkable to pay farm worker’s a living wage, because their only qualification is their desperation. This desperation arises from a multitude of interconnected factors. One worker, Angel Chavez, was forced to immigrate to the United States after NAFTA induced untenable economic conditions on his family farm in Mexico. Farm workers in Napa Valley are desperate because of homelessness- affordable housing does not exist in the county. The qualification of desperation creates a situation where these workers do not make what they earn in contributions to society. Furthermore, when supermarkets hold a virtual monopoly on agricultural prices, farmers have very few options in pricing. Thus they are forced to pay their workers less. This is a problem of no one being responsible for making sure the people who enabled the food’s existence are compensated for they earn.

As it is not customary to imagine migrant workers living with a living wage, it is also contrarian to imagine a woman compensated for her housework hours within a failed marriage. Like the laborers, earnings are devalued because of the worker’s status within family and society. Once again, customs create the conditions under which a fair wage labor market cannot exist, preventing compensation and insurance of compensation.

Solutions to these problems come from, in the example of farm workers, unity, conversation, and civic action. The Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers originated on tomato farms and has successfully petitioned for and won pay raises, anti-sexual harassment laws, and more job security by facing the problem at the level of supermarket price dictators rather than myopically punishing farmers. The solution for women working in the home internationally also requires strategic work and analysis to assess the true economic and social grounding for their predicament.