Learning to Labor Like a Hard-working Foreigner*

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Abstract

Foreign workers are often extolled for their superior work ethic, a presumably essential trait which characterizes them prior to working in host countries. The trope of the hard-working foreigner appears in both popular and scholarly accounts. In contrast, we consider hard work as a learned disposition, and ask, how do foreigners learn to embrace working hard at low-wage jobs? Based on a qualitative longitudinal study of foreign student workers in temporary service jobs, we examine hard work as a process of acculturation to the American workplace. Using ethnographic data on three seasons in a tourism-dependent location, we show that, over the course of their seasonal employment, students shift from consumers seeking a cultural experience to economically motivated hard workers: industrious, managing multiple jobs, and uninterested in leisure. While their employers see foreign students as possessing a superior work ethic, we argue that their work habits result in part from prevailing labor conditions in the work setting and beyond, including high living costs, restricted leisure time, and precarious pay and hours. In the course of becoming marginalized, these students become hard-working foreigners. Our findings inform debates on foreign labor by unpacking and partly challenging notions of culturally specific work ethics.

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Foreign workers are often extolled as hard-working, a cultural construct that fuses American individualism with belief in opportunity. This cultural trope, which has deep roots in the history of the American labor market, has been mainly explained by foreigners' economic motives prior to arriving in the United States. This article examines one case of low-wage foreign labor—international student workers in temporary job placements—to understand how foreigners acclimate to conflicting conceptualization of such work as, on the one hand, an American consumer experience, and, on the other, economic opportunity. In doing so, we offer a novel and added explanation for this trope's emergence and reproduction, namely the social conditions that foreigners face in and out of their jobs, as well as shed light on the experiences of marginalized workers in the United States.

The U.S. government grants foreign college students five-month J-1 visas to participate in a program known as Summer Work and Travel (SWT). SWT brings nearly 100,000 foreign university students to the United States annually. Managed by the Department of State, it is considered a public diplomacy program to foster "cultural exchange" (22 C.F.R §62.32) and promote international ties and mutual awareness across countries. It was created in 1961 as an "opportunity to experience American life during the summer while offsetting travel costs with incidental employment" (Bowman 2019, 105). In practice, however, the program also provides cheap and exploitable workers who accept precarious conditions as part of their visa terms, while framing undesirable work as culturally enriching (Medige and Bowman 2012; Stewart 2014). For four months students work in pre-arranged jobs, often to fill peak-season labor shortages in tourist economies. They fill low-wage positions, typically at restaurants, hotels, retail stores, and resorts (such as at Disney Resorts, Stop & Shop, and CVS).[1] After fulfilling their obligation, they are allowed to travel in the United States for up to a month before returning home.

This paper draws on an ethnography and 78 interviews with SWT workers as well as their employers, brokers, and American co-workers, collected over three summers within the seasonal tourist economy of a Northeast location we call Egg Island. We show that, over the course of their employment, SWT workers learn to become hard-working: that is, industrious, managing multiple jobs, and uninterested in leisure. As the summer progresses, their orientation to the labor market shifts from that of consumers seeking a cultural experience to that of economically motivated workers. While their employers tend to see them as possessing a superior work ethic even before they arrive, we argue that their work orientation is also a result of conditions on the island, where necessities and leisure activities are expensive, housing is substandard, and jobs are precarious in terms of both pay and hours. Through the process of being marginalized, these students gradually *become* hard-working foreigners. Moreover, these workers in turn begin depicting themselves as hard-working, setting the stage for a dynamic perpetuation of the hard-working foreigner trope. Overall, our study's findings unpack and partially challenge the notion of culturally specific foreign work ethics while spotlighting a process of cultural marginalization faced by these workers.

In addition, our study contributes to literature on labor in organizations in several ways. First, we draw attention to how labor and living conditions can shape people's motivations and relations to their work; thus, we delineate the critical role of the labor process in explaining how foreigners come to epitomize the hard-worker trope. Second, we challenge the assumption that most foreign workers are hard-working even before their arrival. Without discounting economic necessities that push many foreigners to take and keep low-wage jobs, and therefore to work harder than native-born workers in the same occupations, we add a novel explanation for how the trope of a disposition toward hard work gets perpetuated: the socialization process that foreigners

experience at work, and their embrace in turn of the trope that they have come to epitomize. Finally, we contribute to the labor literature by documenting the lived experience of relatively skilled (in our study, university-educated) yet marginalized temporary foreign U.S. workers, a population often overlooked despite its growth.[2]

The Trope of the Hard-Working Foreign Worker

Ever since industrialized countries began importing labor, employers have praised the work ethics of foreign workers. Whether in England, France, or the United States, the hard-working innate character of foreigners (who typically entered in waves, under special immigration rules) has been contrasted with the inferior disposition of local workers. This trope is particularly well rooted in the American imagination. In the past, one of the main individuals who was responsible for introducing Chinese workers into U.S. railroad construction commented in 1877 that he relied on Chinese labor because of "their aptitude and capacity for hard work," thereby "elevating [pushing to work harder] white labor" without such dispositions (Daniels 2011, 48). Similarly in the 1930s, the manager of a foreign farmworkers' camp in Florida observed that most employers "considered Bahamians, all things considered, as superior to native American workers" (Hahamovitch 1997, 175). Also today, a second-generation West Indian in Miami encounters the same narrative when white people learn where her parents had come from: "Ah, you are from Jamaica, hard-working people," she is told (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 6) and Mexican immigrants in the US are said to disproportionately include "hard-working individuals […] who elicit top levels of satisfaction among employers" (DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2010, 157).

Such comparisons recur across time periods, geographies, and nationalities. Even Frederick Taylor, in his quest to find the ideal worker, lauded what appears to be a fairly recent

or perhaps second-generation foreign newcomer—a "Pennsylvania Dutchman" with a strong German accent that Taylor calls Schmidt—for his superior work ethic, physical strength, and, it should be noted, his mental sluggishness which kept him from resisting what a smarter fellow would consider "impossibly hard work" on the shop floor (1911, 44–46).

Taylor's callous views on foreign workers as commodities beget critiques that several scholars have made of ostensibly favorable, yet ultimately exploitative typecasting. Ribas, for example, has noted that "the 'hard-working' character of foreigners and their acceptance of substandard conditions of employment are extolled as virtues that benefit the U.S. economy" and contribute "to foreign-featuring scripts that instrumentalize immigrants and impel 'national mythmaking'" (2016, 207). And the trope of the hard-working foreigners has also been used to justify native-born workers' presumably less industrious inclinations—noting, for example, that in contrast to foreigners, "Americans are not interested in going into, and working . . . incredibly hard hours" (Honig 2001, 155). Today, many employers continue to believe that foreigners are more industrious than native workers (Moss and Tilly 2001; Waldinger and Lichter 2003, 5).

Explaining Foreigners' Work Orientations

Where does the trope of the hard-working foreigner come from? Many are quick to pinpoint it as a potentially damaging cultural construct. Yet it has simultaneously been embraced, at least in part, by some scholars who see structural cross-national conditions as the source of immigrants' acceptance of low wages in host countries. In such a view, the cultural "imprint" (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013) that foreigners carry from their home countries explains their behavior.

About 17.4 percent of the current U.S. workforce, or 28.2 million workers, are foreign-born (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). Members of this group are more likely than native-born workers to be employed in service occupations; they are also less likely to work in managerial,

professional, and related occupations. While a substantial population of foreign-born workers are highly-educated professionals, the majority are concentrated in such sectors as domestic service, agriculture, food and garment manufacturing, and hotel and restaurant work (Milkman 2011). As such, many can be found in marginalized jobs, characterized by low pay, precarious working conditions, little advancement opportunity, no benefits, and generally low status (Kalleberg 2011; 2018). These jobs also typically entail actual hard work.

It is important to note that scholars and advocates alike have overwhelmingly shown how foreigners at the bottom of the labor market—in low-paid service jobs and manual labor—face a number of structural constraints that should make them more pliant and exploitable. They have often incurred debts during migration, and tend to be poorly educated, thus ineligible for better positions. As employer abuses of established laws like payment below the minimum wage, 'off the clock' work, outright wage theft, and retaliation against those who object or attempt to organize have become commonplace to all low-wage workers (Bernhardt et al. 2008; Bobo 2011), foreigners are particularly vulnerable to such abuses.

Despite the conditions faced by many low-wage foreigners in their host countries, past scholarship often assumes that they come to the United States wanting to work hard because they seek upward mobility, primarily through work (e.g., Hagan 2004; Ribas 2016). The dominant view has tended to portray low-wage foreign workers as rational actors pursuing economic incentives to improve their life chances, who embrace low-wage work that is often relatively attractive in contrast to prevailing salaries, opportunities, and conditions in their home countries (Hagan, Hernández-León, and Demonsant 2015). Foreigners' supposed income-maximization strategy is the main reason for such a move (e.g., Harris and Todaro 1970; Sjaastad 1962). Mobility is therefore viewed as an economic-survival strategy—one that justifies, ex ante, the

hard work ahead. But more recent scholarship has emphasized individuals' multiple motives (Garip 2017), and the need to examine in more depth the cultural expectations surrounding mobility, including the "receiving contexts" (p. 176).

Past studies of workplace cultures suggest that socialization dynamics shape how people relate to their employment and learn about national cultures. We know that workplaces can promote particular arrays of behavior in very consistent and powerful ways (e.g., Trice 1993; Kunda 2009; Lamont 2000; Sasaki and Baba, 2024). For example, hotel staff members learn to believe in the objectivity of numbers when engaging in rituals of constantly quantifying their work (Mazmanian and Beckman 2018) and U.S. wildland firefighters learn American norms of masculinity from working in crews (Desmond 2007). In other words, when working in a given context over time, individuals develop a "specific habitus" above and beyond their general habitus (Bourdieu 2000). These dynamics apply to foreign workers as well. As an illustration, studies have shown that the U.S. workplace can change foreigners' gender schemas (Zentgraf 2002; Hoang and Yeoh 2011). We therefore posit that the cultural context workers operate in can also fundamentally shape foreigners' orientations to work itself.

Our study of SWT student workers traces how foreigners acculturate to marginalized seasonal U.S. service work. While temporary SWT J-1 visa holders differ from larger groups of immigrants seeking permanent livelihoods in America, such as Mexicans and others from Latin America, our case of temporary foreign workers illuminates the acculturation process in three ways. First, unlike longer-term immigrants, SWT J-1 visa holder are screened to ensure that their stays will be temporary: they are expected to return to their home countries and resume their studies rather than assimilating into U.S. society.[3] Second, SWT J-1 visa holders typically do not arrive expecting to work hard; in fact, we find many seek out work in the United States as a

summer adventure. Third, we strategically located our study on a fabled island whose natural beauty attracts workers to draw a sharp contrast to industry-heavy destinations like the Midwest (for agriculture) and the South (meat processing) that have drawn repeated waves of migrants. For these reasons, we should not expect these seasonal foreign workers to adopt a hard-worker orientation of the sort commonly associated with permanent immigrants (see Adler and Adler 2004). Even so, we find that they embrace the hard-working foreigner trope.

SITE SELECTION AND METHODS

This study relies primarily on data collected from semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations of seasonal service work on Egg Island: an ideal case to study the experience of SWT workers specifically, and the intersection of work as a consumer experience and an economic opportunity more broadly. Employers on the island recruit an average of 200 J-1 SWT students from 20 countries to work in service and tourism enterprises during the summer season (approximately mid-May to early October).[4] Participants work in jobs ranging from dishwashers and house cleaners to bussers and restaurant hosts; many come from Balkan countries. Brokers in home countries collaborate with U.S. employers to facilitate job placements. Under the direction of the U.S. State Department, brokers are responsible for screening students to ensure that their primary interest in the program is cultural exchange, not economic opportunity.

We collected interviews and ethnographic observations in several waves between 2016 and 2019, interviewing 59 SWT workers and 19 people who worked closely with them for a total of 78 interviews. The majority of SWT interviewees were between 18 and 23 years old; slightly fewer than 40 percent were from Serbia, and nearly another 30 percent were from other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Workers that identify as female were slightly overrepresented, at 58 percent (see Table 1 for more detail on our sample). Racially, most of our sample was White

(n=41), with students of color interviewed coming from Jamaica (11), Dominican Republic (4), Thailand (2), and Taiwan (1). Students who participated in our research received a $30 Amazon gift card. To contextualize these data, we interviewed employers, managers, and other workers on the island, almost all of whom were U.S. citizens or permanent residents (n=16). Finally, we also interviewed key informants who facilitated the SWT program at the State Department and broker agents located in Belgrade, Serbia, who send workers to Egg Island (n=3). All interviews were conducted in person on the island and in Belgrade, with the exception of one follow-up interview conducted via Skype.

- Insert Table 1: Demographic Summary of SWT Interviewees -

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between thirty minutes and an hour; they were conducted by the coauthors as well as by another graduate student and a trained seasonal worker. Interviews were conducted in English and Serbo-Croatian. All interviews were transcribed; those conducted in Serbo-Croatian were translated into English by the seasonal worker. We asked students about their motivations to participate in the program, the kinds of jobs they performed, and their daily routines. We also asked about their relationships and interactions with other program participants, employers, and American coworkers. Because we spoke with both first-time participants as well as "returnees"—students who had previously participated in the program—we were able to ask about perceived change over time, particularly with regard to returnees' motivations to participate in the program for a second or more times. We also conducted two rounds of data collection with SWT students in 2019, near the beginning (early June) and end (mid-September) of their work contracts, to further address themes of change.

Additionally, we collected ethnographic observations from five stays on the island, over the course of three seasons, and from an embedded graduate student (who also conducted some

of the interviews) who worked as a hostess in an island restaurant during the 2016 season while keeping daily field notes on her work experiences and interactions with co-workers. We also organized two focus groups (averaging 75 minutes each), held at a local church in summer 2019. We recruited the students who participated in these groups via snowball sampling.

To analyze our data, we met as a team several times to discuss surprises in the findings and empirical puzzles to probe. We proceeded inductively (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and then coded the data in several waves, using NVivo and initially focusing on the boundaries between consumption and work. Over time, we found that workers increasingly emphasized money and hard work over their initial expectations of a cultural exchange. This led to the inductive emergence of codes pertaining to the process of "becoming" hard-working, especially in relation to American workers. Among the codes that capture this process are those relating to how workers coped with high living costs, navigated jobs that were precarious in terms of both pay and hours, and restricted their leisure time.

FINDINGS

Perceptions of Foreigners as Hard-Working

SWT students make an ideal stopgap for seasonal shortages in the U.S. labor market: as college students (whose school term usually begins in October), they have schedules compatible with the entire summer tourist season. American students, by contrast, often return to school in late August, possibly abandoning jobs at still-busy hotels and restaurants. This scheduling issue is one reason why Egg Island employers recruit SWT workers. However, we found that another key reason employers seek out these workers is because they perceive foreigners' work ethic to be superior, specifically in comparison to that of American workers.

Managers consistently described foreigners as highly committed to their work in terms of both reliability and effort. Unlike their American counterparts, SWT participants have a reputation among managers as "never being late" for their shifts. As one manager shared in noting the differences between SWT and American hires: "The kids who are here in the J-1 program typically do not call in sick . . . Work is really a priority for them, which is nice to have as an employer" (Manager 1). Another manager concurred: "They're never late, you know? I mean it's like . . . we couldn't run our country without them right now" (Manager 2). In fact, one employer reported that she increasingly relies on foreigners because her business opens at 5:30 a.m. and "most of the American[s] want to work the nighttime so they can go to the beach all day" (Manager 4).[5]

Managers compared SWT students favorably to Americans in terms of not only punctuality, but also effort on the job: the foreigners are "hard" workers, willing to take on any task or position. One manager even described SWT students as having a "work ethic the old-school way . . . that old-school 'Yes, sir' work ethic … All of it surpasses the Americans now, unfortunately" (Manager 2). Another manager reported that Americans tend not to apply for certain positions because they are considered "hard," whereas foreign employees will do so because they are "hard workers . . . pleasers. They always want to please" (Manager 5). One manager we interviewed even had country-specific preferences premised on this perception: "We had fantastic luck with . . . [the] Czech Republic. Unbelievable workers! Same with the Serbians and Croatians and Macedonians. They just want to work" (Manager 4).

Though some managers attributed their decisions to hire foreigners for certain roles to simply "need[ing] a warm body that's willing to be there" (Manager 6), most filled "dirty, low-paying jobs" with those students because Americans would not take them. As one manager

explained: "Because I can't hire an American to be a dishwasher… to be my bathroom cleaners. They won't do it… None of these American college kids—they won't do it. . . I could not run my business without [the J-1s]" (Manager 2).

Employers often assumed that SWT students would accept "bad" jobs because they came for purposes of economic gain.[6] As one manager put it: "You know, when a student comes here and he can make in one week what his father and mother combined make in a month—you know, it's situations like that" (Manager 2). Another manager, asked why she thought an SWT student from Serbia worked so much, answered: "To make the money. . . There's like so much more than he could make in Serbia" (Manager 3). In short, SWT participants were said to work hard because of the assumption that they had come primarily to earn as much money as they can during the short summer season.

American workers, by contrast, were considered riskier hires, unreliable and prone to partying. One manager told us that foreign workers came to Egg Island to "make money and travel," whereas Americans came to "make money and party" (Manager 7). As in the restaurant and hotel industries more broadly, alcohol and drug use are prevalent, and several overdoses are reported each year. And while many SWT participants may partake in party culture on the island, employers tended to associate American workers in particular with excessive partying and drug use. As one employer summarized, "Americans come here with baggage. They're either drunks, druggies, or a lot of them that can't hold a job, you know, for whatever reason" (Manager 2).

American workers themselves made similar distinctions about their work ethic and motivations in comparison to foreigners. In interviews with 10 of them during the 2019 season, Americans described foreign students as constantly working, which made it difficult to develop meaningful relationships with them. One American noted how hard it was to meet up with a

Macedonian friend (the only SWT worker she called a friend) "because she's always so busy . . . so busy with work" (US 1, Intern). Another American worker reported having only a "working relationship" with "international workers" because he had few opportunities to interact with them outside of work, adding that employment on Egg Island is a "money-making experience" for them (US 2, Cook). Americans also cited money as an important motivation but they did not necessarily describe it as the main goal of their summers. Instead, one clarified, "Money comes and goes. I always say, 'make memories.' It is the time to make memories" (US 4, Bartender). For American workers, making memories often took the form of partying. One American even told us he was considered "weird" because he was one of the few who did *not* enjoy partying. One foreigner's comment is also noteworthy: "One more thing that I've noticed here is that [Serbian] people work more and party less than in Serbia" (SWT 1, Serbian, Host). In her view, Serbian and other foreigners seemed to *become* hard-working once in America.

Foreign Workers as Cultural Consumers

Surprisingly, the trope of the hard-working, money-seeking SWT students runs counter to their initial screening and recruitment. When potential participants first encounter the program, they learn that employment in America is an opportunity for cultural enrichment and travel. Commonly, one's friends, family members, or classmates previously participated in the program and share stories of memorable experiences in "beautiful places" like Cape Cod, South Florida, or Lake Michigan. One worker, like many others, recalled, "There was a friend of mine back home who told me about [SWT]. And, you know, she said I can go to America and have a good time" (SWT 2, Jamaican, Dishwasher).

The touristic and consumerist framing of this experience is reinforced when workers are recruited by brokers in their home countries, some of which have names like "American

Adventure" and "Experience." Students pay agencies a fee ranging from $1,600 to $4,600 to participate in this "cultural enrichment" program. The agency, working in conjunction with a U.S. host agency, uses this fee to facilitate visa processing and placements in minimum-wage positions. For our interviewees, this fee averaged $3,000 and included the cost of air travel. These upfront costs are significant, and most participants incur considerable debt to enroll in the program. Almost all interviewees borrowed money from personal networks to cover these costs.

Throughout the recruitment, agencies infuse the financial transaction with meanings beyond an economic logic. In turn, students beginning the SWT "experience" come to expect the process to be about more than money. As one first-time SWT worker explained his decision to participate: "[SWT is] about good company, different cultures, . . . meet[ing] all the people from other cultures. Mostly about that" (SWT 3, Bosnian, Housekeeper). In Belgrade, for example, where one of the co-authors observed the recruitment process, students meet with agency representatives for one-on-one interviews. These interviews serve to assess students' suitability for work in the restaurants, hotels, and bars of Egg Island and other destinations. Interviews last no more than ten minutes, during which the agent provides students with a questionnaire regarding motivations for coming to America. It asks: "Write 1 – 6 which of the following in order are most important to you" and offers the options *money, travel, culture, housing, work experience,* and *English*.

Of primary concern to the broker is to screen out applicants who appear, in her words, "too hungry." Too strong of an interest in money is considered a "warning flag" that an applicant might participate for the wrong reason, or overstay their visa.[7] As the person explained: "I say 'No, that's not what we're about.' I'll turn them down, because it's about cultural exchange, the experience" (Broker A). The owner of another agency called Journey, Inc., whose URL uses the

domain .edu, explained that his organization is an *educational* enterprise designed to advance the future careers of Serbian students (Broker B).

Echoing this appeal to the non-economic aspects of work, the State Department is also clear that this is *not* a guest-worker program. At its annual community meeting with Egg Island employers, which we observed, the department representative was adamant: "This not about labor. We view this as a cultural-exchange program. I know workers use it for income, but that's a side effect" (Rep A, State Department). The representative asserted that the aim of the program is "person-to-person exchange, people meeting people," and that foreigners participate not just to spend the summer working but to "experience life here." This message is repeated often. When students arrive on Egg Island, they must attend a State Department orientation session during which they are encouraged to think of themselves not as low-wage earners but as future professionals: "We see you as future leaders, doctors and lawyers. We don't see you as housekeepers and servers. You're the future politicians, future doctors, of your country" (Rep B, State Department).

Students initially echo these sentiments, treating the program and their low-status service jobs as an important opportunity to enrich their cosmopolitan capital (Igarashi and Saito 2014). Nearly all we interviewed at the beginning of the summer season declared that they had enrolled in the program to improve their English, meet new people, and learn about different cultures. For instance, one Serbian worker, Sonia, described her delight at learning that she had been placed in a job as a grocery-store clerk where she could practice her English. She was quick to add, however, that the job itself was not decisively important: "Any job is a good job, because this is like a one-time life opportunity. When it happens, you take it!" she noted enthusiastically. Other students expressed how they were particularly happy about their placement on Egg Island, where

they could meet students from all over the world and learn about other cultures [Focus Group]. As these sentiments illustrate, students initially approached their opportunity to participate in the program as a once-in-a-lifetime chance: a rewarding *cultural* experience, even if the work itself might not be.

Many students also told us, early in the summer, that SWT served as a means to visit and vacation in America. Several shared elaborate travel plans, such as to "New York, Chicago, and Boston" or "Miami, the Grand Canyon, San Francisco, and Los Angeles," at the end of their stays. Even the few workers who did *not* intend to travel extensively at the end of summer and who expressed an initial desire to "make money" (most of whom had previously participated in the program) also spoke about their goal to enjoy "beautiful" Egg Island [Focus Group]. Thus, while employers construct foreigners as "hard workers" motivated by economic gain, such typecasting misses students' primary initial expectations that their time on the island will yield far more than a paycheck. In fact, upon arrival, these students are a far cry from the hard-working foreigners that employers extol.

Living and Working on Egg Island: Encountering Structural Precarity

As SWT participants begin to settle in on Egg Island, many begin to rethink the possibilities of their "cultural experience" in America. All student interviewees, including those who have participated in the program before, shared their initial shock at the island's cost of living and housing conditions. Many struggled to accrue enough working hours to pay their bills, and they began viewing leisure time as a liability. Within a few weeks, their summer plans were shaded by a very different set of concerns. One recalled his initial impressions: "You're with people who are 20-year-olds; you're on an island. It's all great. That's the first month. You don't understand anything." Then, he continued, "you realize, especially on this island, that everything is really

expensive. When you're making money and you're eating at some restaurant and then you don't have money for toilet paper!" (SWT 20, Serbian, Front Desk/Bar-back).

Living and housing costs

The costs of basic amenities, such as food and toiletries, are significantly higher on Egg Island than on the mainland, and almost always exceeded students' expectations: "My employer said before I came, he said, 'Bring things that you need, as much as you can. Because this is expensive.' I don't know that it would be *this* expensive" (SWT 5, Thai, Cashier). Another exclaimed: "For my first two weeks here, I think we spent probably close to $300 on just food. . . And we weren't shopping [or eating] out; we were just buying food!" (Focus Group). A third student observed: "Most people who sign up for this program . . . have a wrong idea about how things will work out once they come here, [including] how much money they will have to spend on food and such. I mean, nobody tells you that you'll have to spend $5 on bread here" (SWT 21, Serbian, Snack Bar/General Resort Worker). Fresh-baked bread in Belgrade, Serbia, in contrast, costs $.50 a loaf.

Housing arrangements were also an unwelcome surprise. Rooms are often substandard, with unsanitary conditions like mold, overcrowded bathrooms, and, in one case, no indoor bathroom. Almost all participants we spoke with said they lacked kitchen access and shared a bathroom with six or more people. Beyond its physical shortcomings, housing was problematic for additional reasons. Unlike their American counterparts (with substantially better housing), SWT participants require housing to legally remain on the program and on the island. However, their housing is tied to the employer listed on their job contract that they receive as part of their program "acceptance package" prior to coming to the island. Many students expressed fear that their visas, and thus their time in the U.S., might be revoked if they complained about their

housing. As one student reported, the "[home-country] agency told me not to take my chances with the lady from the American agency. They said that I shouldn't rock the boat, because the lady can easily choose not to allow me to work at the chosen spot" (SWT 6, Serbian, Cashier). In a separate case, another student explained:

> I did some research on the State Department website. And I found out that, if it is that your sponsor [i.e., the U.S. agency] chooses to terminate your program, you have to leave the country. You're not even allowed the 30-day period that you were given to travel the country… And I was just like, "You know what? I'm just going to suck it up" (SWT 7, Jamaican, Housekeeper).

This predicament—students' inability to remedy poor housing because of its link to their job placements and legal status—was common knowledge among managers. In fact, some noted that their colleagues leverage this connection between housing and visas. According to an American who now manages a small business on the island, "If anybody complains [about their housing], they get fired and sent back—the people that come on the J-1 visas. . . So all the businesses know they can get away with it, which is really bad" (Manager 7).

Moreover, students must pay for housing on the island. So while they are at risk of accumulating debt from rent, visa expenses, and living costs for their "cultural experience," their employers stand to profit doubly, from their labor power and their rent payments. Rent, typically $50–150 per week, is often directly deducted from their paychecks. SWT students were not always told in advance how these payments would be handled; thus, few had budgeted for what would become a stressful expense and many felt almost trapped. As one shared in frustration:

> The agency didn't warn me that my employer might ask me to come up with the money not only for the week I arrived on the island, but for one week ahead and for the deposit. We have to pay a week in advance for our housing. It added up to $350 and it was to be paid all at once (SWT 8, Serbian, Chair Rentals).

Working hours and leisure time

The vagaries of the tourist season—which can begin slowly because of weather or the timing of school vacations—often surprise participants, who find themselves dealing with fluctuating hours and schedules that fall short of those specified in their contracts: “The first week we had only 20 hours. It's nothing; it's for housing and for taxes. I think that's all. I calculated that we have about $10 for one week. It's nothing, you know (SWT 9, Serbian, Busser/Dishwasher). This lack of guaranteed hours complicates students’ ability to meet their unexpected cost-of-living expenses and rent obligations, let alone the costs of participating in the program in the first place. As one student lamented: “We weren’t getting enough hours. And it reached to a point where each of us were getting two days off and we were only making, like, four or five hours a day. Adding, “after spending so much money to come here, no one wants to be having all that time off” (SWT 7, Jamaican, Housekeeper).

Time off from work to “experience” American culture on expensive Egg Island rapidly became a source of anxiety. One student explained the challenges that hours and even days off posed: “When it's your day off, that is at least $30 you need to spend, at least!” (SWT 10, Serbian, Housekeeper/Maintenance). Most students still lacked the financial means to cover such costs. But time spent at work was also challenging, in ways that few had anticipated, given their employers’ expectations. In some cases, students were surprised by the tasks themselves, which were exhausting as physical labor. Several described their work as housekeepers: “Nothing is difficult. But…we need to do everything quickly. For example, to make a room [clean] in 25 minutes. . . we cannot do that. They want a lot of things for a short time” (Focus Group).

Such demands can be viewed as typical of the service industry, and American and SWT workers alike acknowledged that the restaurant business in particular can be “brutal” (US 3, Supervisor). Gradually and through their job, SWT students began to recognize and describe

themselves as the "cheap labor" that works "the hardest jobs, jobs that no one else wants to do" (SWT 11, Montenegro, Line Cook)—a significant departure from their initial self-definition framing as potential consumers of American culture. As one observed:

> Dishwashing, it's a difficult job. You need hot water, You might get slightly burned sometimes. And Americans are a bit more easy-going, you know. They like easier things in life. A job where they're probably sitting down at a desk and getting high pay not doing much. I don't think they [J1s] really want to, but you know, some don't really have that choice. They end up doing it […] like I said about some jobs Americans won't do, J1s come and they'll do those jobs. (SWT 2, Jamaican, Dishwasher)

Many Americans concurred that their bosses hire J-1s for positions that "we Americans" will not take, and have significant leverage over these employees. Like for housing conditions, both Americans and J-1s concluded that complaining about working conditions was not an option for foreign workers. In fact, when one SWT student and several co-workers wrote to their sponsor about poor working conditions, they were fired; the agency did little to remedy their situations. As she explained:

> Like, I'm not illegal here; I supposedly have rights. You cannot come here and tell me I'm going to be deported just because I did something you don't like. So it's not fair. That disappointed me a lot. Like the first thing they tell you, "You're going legal. There is nothing bad about you being here..." But they treated us like you crossed the border walking …which is not cool. (SWT 4, Dominican Republic, Moped Worker).

How state-linked agencies and employers alike dealt with students' complaints attests to the ways in which the social constructions of migrants and illegality manifested as a form of control, even for "legal" workers (Flores and Schachter 2018; Gómez Cervantes 2021). For SWT students, this is a contradiction to what they originally expected from their U.S. experience, and a "disappointing" feeling of being lumped together with legally precarious immigrants.

From Consumers to Producers: Becoming Hard Workers

Once the students recognize and adjust to the social conditions on Egg Island, they begin to develop a very different narrative about their experience and time in the U.S.: transforming from expectations of consumers to producers, from cultural-exchange participants—a term that denotes equality between partners—to the "hard-working" foreigner their employers expect.

Over the course of the summer, they focus their attention away from touristic possibilities and onto their work tasks. Many students we interviewed sharply abbreviated, and in some cases abandoned, their original end-of-summer travel plans. This occurred because the conditions they encountered—high living costs, housing contingency, and precarious work schedules—made it difficult for them *not* to focus their energy and time on their jobs. They began to realize that making money was something they should and would need to prioritize, not merely to travel or pay back their debts, but also to live and make ends meet on the island. The meaning of money started to shift (Zelizer 1994; Bandelj, Wherry, and Zelizer 2017). Initially viewed as a means to experience cultural consumption, money was reframed as a necessity and a scarcity, which students hoard.

The same was true for time: students increasingly framed their hours and days in the U.S. as a finite resource to be used strategically and maximized, especially in the workplace setting. They subsequently sought opportunities to work harder, strategized ways to earn more money, and guarded against the potentially financial losses of leisure time. In adopting these practices, SWT participants tended to conclude, further, that money is to be *saved*; most returned home with a net profit ranging from one to five thousand dollars. In short, their often-grueling daily job routines, and the amount of money they could accrue in the finite time of the summer season, became *the* experience to be consumed.

Hustling for working hours

Early on in their placements, SWT participants began describing how their fluctuating schedules made them feel as if they had to demonstrate their worth to their employers—to show how they benefited the business—in order to maintain their hours and in some cases to earn more. After a week in her job, one housekeeper described her employer's scrutiny of her work: "Since yesterday they said they were going to time us to see how long we're staying in each room. So the man [her employer] gave me 20 minutes yesterday. And I was finished before he came. And when he inspected the room, he was like 'Wow. Perfect'" (SWT 12, Jamaican, Housekeeper). Another student told us early in the summer:

> Sometimes there is nothing to do, and we have, like— because the guy that works there, he's a little bit strict, and he doesn't like to see you not doing anything. And he sends you back home [when] there is nothing to do. So you have to clean and clean and clean. But it's already clean. So. But he's the owner. I know he doesn't want to waste his money on people that is just, like, lazing around. But you know, it's the same thing everywhere (SWT 4, Dominican Republic, Moped Worker).

Students thus felt obligated early in the season to perform the role of the hard-working employee, even when there was no work to be done, in order to maintain their jobs and maximize the hours allotted to them. Even so, such performances were rarely enough to earn them the hours needed to cover costs. A student realized this after only a few days on the island:

> The program fee was $1,300 and the plane ticket was 640 euros. In total, with all of the taxes and paperwork, it cost me between 2,500 and 3,000 euros. It cost me even more emotionally. By my second day on the Island I was in a deep depression [...]. My only expectation for the original job was to be able to cover my expenses for this program and pay my mother back [...] Based upon my original contract, I should have been able to fulfill this need. (SWT 25, Serbian, Deli)

In the face of these constraints, most participants soon sought a second job, or even a third. This makeshift solution resulted in overwork, widely reported by SWT participants. All

but one of our foreign interviewees held at least two jobs by the end of the summer season. Students framed their new jobs—in which "you don't get a feel you are in America when you *just* work, work, work" (SWT 3, Bosnian, Housekeeper)—as an economic necessity, and they drew lessons of the difficulty of living in America: "you have to be constantly working" just in order to survive since life was "expensive" (SWT 13, Jamaican, Housekeeper). By the end of the summer, SWT participants were even taking *pride* in the overwork they experienced as a result of holding these multiple jobs; a point of distinction they increasingly articulated as reflective of their hard-working dispositions that is discussed at the end of our findings.

Students also had to involve their bosses directly in their pursuit of additional work from other employers, resulting in difficult discussions of scheduling.[8] One manager described himself as supportive of second jobs ("I want them to be able to work, save. That's what they're here for. It really is the bottom line" [Manager 2]), but workers consistently reported that other managers manipulated their schedules to prevent them from seeking work elsewhere. "He's changing, changing, changing schedule," one student said of her employer. "Like we didn't have a set schedule until probably the second week of July" (SWT 14, Jamaican, Cashier). Other employers were well aware of these scheduling issues. As one mid-level manager told us, "My boss has said they're the reliable ones [J-1s whose primary employer was Business A] because their schedule's not going to go crazy. But everywhere else, it changes so much that it's just not even worth training" (Manager 7).

Such disruptive scheduling practices prevented some students from negotiating with their bosses to secure the extra employment they needed to cover their costs:

> They kind of make us feel like, you know, we're scared that we will do something wrong. And then when they say that—so I don't want to rely on one place . . . so I really want a second job. So because I think if I have a second job, if one day, just in case—and it

> actually already happened—I get so mad at them and then I want to quit. Then if I don't have a second job, I only have first job, I will be like, "Oh, should I . . . ?" But I really feel uncomfortable, but, "Oh, should I tell them or should I . . . ?" I will be more afraid (SWT 15, Thai, Cashier/Food Prep).

Recasting leisure as wasteful and work hours as desirable

Hand in hand with the scramble to work ever more hours to cover living and housing costs, leisure time gradually came to be considered doubly burdensome for its economic wastefulness and for its social costs. By the late months of summer (known as the high season), the prospect of having free time to travel faded away: "[At the season's beginning], you're like 'Whoa, I'm going to speed up my game; I want to see New York, I want to see San Francisco.' Then you start working, working, working. Everyone starts being overwhelmed. They want to do more; then they don't have time for hanging out" (SWT 20, Serbian, Front Desk/Bar-back). When everyone else was working, off hours came to signify boredom and loneliness. Many foreigners found themselves working "20 hours in a row, then have five hours of sleep and then 20 hours again," interrupting work only "to go home to change the clothes and go on another job." In this scenario, leisure came to be seen as costly in terms of derailed earning opportunities.

A second job thus came to be viewed as a way for workers to "fill their free time"—the time they had initially hoped to enjoy while in America. Spending more time in the workplace was gradually reframed as highly desirable: it became an opportunity to earn more, sometimes to secure food such as for the workers in restaurants, and simultaneously to meet and interact with peers. SWT participants shared information about the perks of certain jobs, notably whether or not the employer provided food during workers' shifts. Free food was consistently mentioned as a deciding factor in the job search. In one focus group, students explained how and why they were seeking second jobs: "More money, money. . . . Well, depending, because in our case we

also want, let's say, a restaurant that can give the food" (Focus Group). Employers were aware of this priority; one described compensating for low wages by feeding employees (Manager 2).

Making new friends at work could also be a remedy to the food issue. An SWT student at a deli told us that she added extra meat to sandwiches for her SWT co-workers in an effort to ensure that the meal would last them an entire day. Others reported pairing up with friends they had met through work to reduce food costs by buying groceries collectively from Peapod and Amazon and having them delivered directly to the island. Thus, the practices that SWT participants gradually adopted to navigate conditions on the island and in their workplaces often made them appear to be satisfied, hard-working foreigners seeking economic opportunities—the trope that employers had assumed that they *already* embodied when they arrived.

Embracing the Trope of Hard Work

It is particularly notable that SWT students came to identify with the hard-working foreigner trope in their own discourse as well. As their time on the island lengthened, they began to equate their own nationalities with the hard-worker trope, proudly explaining their work ethic as a Serbian or Jamaican "trait." In approximately the same way that Filipino immigrants assert moral superiority over Americans (Le Espiritu 2001), these SWT students often relied on the hard-working trope to recast their economic precarity as superior character. As one foreign worker asserted, "One thing that, for example, Americans respect about internationals is that [we] internationals . . . [are] hard-working people" (SWT 19, Serbian, Cashier/Hostess). Another student, hearing that a particular employer was hiring more staff, observed: "They need tough workers. They need fresh men. We Serbians are known [to be] very hard workers" (SWT 16, Serbian, Server/Busser). And a housekeeper explained why she and her SWT colleague were her

employer's best cleaners: "I think we're more driven. . . . I guess it has a lot to do with how we were socialized [in Jamaica]" (Interview 12, Jamaican, Housekeeper).

As they come to identify with this trope, SWT participants also began to shift their approach to labor as the summer progressed. Their initial ideas of work (as a cultural experience, an occasion to learn English, and an opportunity for travel) did not entirely fade, but the urgency of earning and saving money came to the fore as a prime motivation. As one student explained several weeks into her job, "I need to add that I need money for my school. Because I'm going to university, so I don't want my parents [to] pay everything. So I will travel, I will make new friends, but I need the money for school" (Focus Group). Perhaps most illustrative was a student's reflection on their personal motivations shifting from travel to money: "I'd really love to travel. The main purpose was to travel. It was to come travel, yeah…Now, I'm crazy about money. I have to pay back my parents. I really have to" (SWT 22, Ukraine, Food Runner).

Indeed, they even invoke hard work as they envision *future* experiences on the island. At the season's end, worn out from juggling busy schedules and bosses' demands, almost all SWT students professed exhaustion, but surprisingly, many expressed an interest in returning. For instance, two Jamaican students explained, echoing each other, the day before departing, "I have been literally counting down the days, the days when we're [done] at [the job]. Counting down. Weeks. Okay, one more week" (SWT 17, Deli Worker and SWT 14, Cashier). Yet they, like others, planned to return the following summer because the summer wasn't "too bad," and because of the prospect of earning even more from different employers or higher-paying jobs. One foreigner who planned to change employers the next year explained: "Yeah, because I think, I don't know but I think that it's better. I'll make more money… I hear employers here give you jobs and they have more respect if you come back" (SWT 24, Serbia, Food Runner/Misc).

Another explained, “If I'm here [a] second year, they won't give me a housekeeper or something like that. I think that if they are satisfied from my work, they will give me a better job” (SWT 18, Macedonian, Housekeeper/Line Cook). Many also said that they now understood better how to impress managers (“He recruits under the assumption that [we] are better workers . . . because we don’t move slow” [Focus Group]). In other words, they believed that employers’ future opinions and opportunities hinge upon their on-the-job performance now.[9]

However, a few students, who we interviewed late in the season expressed hesitancy about returning to Egg Island (n=5), though they expressed interest in other U.S. locations the following year. Some described other destinations as opportunities for better cultural and touristic experiences, as they had initially expected of Egg Island. Others said they might opt for alternative locations where the cost of living was lower. While the latter postures suggest mixed motivations regarding their future plans, together they highlight how work and living conditions shape and transform these students into hard-working individuals. Some embraced the trope only temporarily, having come to define themselves as such only within a single work context. For others, the trope seemed to persist; they had come to understand from their Egg Island experiences that being a foreign worker in the U.S. meant working hard, which they now knew themselves capable of doing.

DISCUSSION

Our study contributes to the literatures on labor in organizations in several ways by spotlighting the role of the “receiving” cultural context in shaping foreigners’ relations to their work. Here, we present a case of foreign workers whose initial motivations to work in the United States are more about seeking a cultural experience than maximizing earnings. Yet over the course of their summer, they end up becoming hard-working foreigners—jockeying for paid hours, hustling to

find a second or third job, and viewing leisure time as wasteful. These findings highlight how rapidly the American work context can render low-wage earners hard-working, independently of any industrious work "ethic" that might be tied to their social or national upbringing. Workers' abrupt and ongoing encounters with marginalization set the stage for their behavior. Moreover, their employers' projection onto them of the hard-working trope reinforces these workers' orientation toward work; gradually, they internalize the trope. This process in turn invites employers to expect more from foreigners than from native-born workers, and to justify differential treatment accordingly. Since employers often base their decisions on systematic, even if flawed, cognitive calculations of worker productivity (Rivera 2020), such expectations can easily become self-fulfilling. These combined findings highlight how effortlessly social inequalities can arise from our shared tendency to categorize others (Massey 2007).

First, our study challenges the assumption that all foreign workers prove hard-working *prior* to arrival in their host country, and the United States in particular. On the contrary, our analysis suggests that any worker—foreign or native-born—faced with the working conditions we have described will become the kind of hard worker that employers desire. This suggests the strong possibility that the foreign groups widely viewed as the most hard-working might in fact be those the most marginalized and facing the harshest labor conditions. The extremely harsh historical working conditions, for instance in railroad construction and in sugar plantations (Daniels 2011; Hahamovitch 2011; 1997), might explain the cultural constructions, at that time, of Chinese and Bahamian employed as particularly hard-working. Similarly, the harsh and precarious conditions that Latino immigrant workers face today in the construction industry and in slaughterhouses may account for their imagined "hard-working" propensity. If it is the circumstances of their employment that make foreigners hard-working, it might be a productive

research strategy to identify the most demanding work contexts and the degree of occupational segregation of foreign nationals in those contexts, and to use that data to predict which nationalities will be viewed as the hardest-working in those locales.[10]

Because our study suggests that this trope is also embraced by workers themselves, future research could examine longitudinally the impact on foreigners' longer-term careers of being depicted by others and of viewing oneself as hard-working. We suspect that, even after foreigners return to their home countries, the anxiety provoked by constant pressure to earn and save money might profoundly "imprint" their subsequent work lives (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013). Past research has shown that holding instrumental motives to work (here, to earn money) can affect long-term work persistence and performance (Wrzesniewski et al. 2014). Tracking the professional careers of former SWT workers in their home countries might help us better understand the dynamics of such imprinting.

Second, our study uncovers the dynamic production and reproduction of the trope of the hard-working foreigner. While past literature often explains the emergence of this narrative by invoking foreigners' prior economic motivations to seek work in host countries, we argue that the work cultures that people encounter in host countries can also explain it. Work settings are powerful socialization spaces: they can transform humble navigators into respected "naval officers" (Elias 2007) and truck drivers into "independent entrepreneurs" (Viscelli 2016). In our case, the coffee shops, restaurants, and hotels that employed foreigners encouraged them, at least for the duration of a summer, to work hard. Such an experience was doubly estranging for SWT workers because they had not really "signed-up" for this and because their economic resources and social capital were sufficient to afford travel to the United States. In their home countries

they might have had the socio-economic resources to resist the hard-worker narrative, but over time they embraced it in America—evidence of the power of culture to shape behavior.

Third, our study contributes to the marginalization of foreign labor by examining the daily experiences of skilled and "mobile" foreign workers in the United States. Whereas immigrants are typically intent on settling, mobile workers are simply moving between geographies. Many past studies take for granted migrants' intention to remain in their host countries. Recently, temporary mobility has received new attention (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006), but until now research has rarely focused on the lived experiences of *skilled* temporary workers in the United States. This oversight is surprising because work globally is increasingly characterized as transnational, technical, and temporary (Sallaz 2019; Hinds, Liu, and Lyon 2011), and industrialized countries increasingly advocate and use temporary, rather than permanent, forms of mobility to address labor-market shortages (Goldring 2010; Terry 2018; Strauss and McGrath 2017; Anderson 2010; Iskandar 2021), particularly in an era of growing public anti-immigration sentiment. In fact, almost all high-income countries have temporary worker programs, and these programs have increased significantly over the past twenty years (Cook-Martin 2019, 1390).

The United States has a long history of using temporary work programs to fill labor shortages, both during wartime (i.e., the Bracero program; see Rodriguez 2004) and in response to restructuring of the global economy (i.e., H1B visas; see Harvey 2011). The Bracero program was, for example, designed to supply Mexican farmers to U.S. farms from 1917–1921 and again from 1946–1967 (Loza 2016). Today, the situation is no different with the state strategically deciding which populations enter and for how long they can stay (Cook-Martin 2019; Lori 2020; Menjívar 2006; Muñoz 2011; R. M. Rodriguez 2010). Our understanding of participants' work

experiences, however, remains fairly elusive. In particular, past scholarship still often assumes that workers' participation in these programs is either economically motivated or undertaken to accrue the human and social capital needed to regularize one's status and settle long-term. Our analysis suggests that these motivations might prove true, but that instead of being the supposed impetus for mobility, foreigners' economic betterment pursuits might also be the *result* of their stay in host countries.

Arguably, our case is unique since the population we studied is relatively privileged compared to others. Students that participate in the SWT program have legal status via nonimmigrant visas. Also, they are fairly educated as they must be in college to participate in the program. Finally, most in our case were also racially white, a racial privilege which deviates from the experience of larger populations of racially-marked immigrants who come from Latin America, such as Mexicans. Yet, if even privileged foreigners can be acculturated into the hard-worker narrative and marginalized by precarious working conditions, we can only imagine how promptly less privileged foreigner might need to perform and subsequently to embrace this trope. In that sense, our study can be seen as a conservative test of workplace marginalization dynamics that probably play out more rapidly and sharply elsewhere in the U.S. labor market.

Table 1: Demographic Summary of SWT Interviewees (n=59)

Nationality	Age	Gender	Years in the program
Serbia (23)	19–20 years (10)	Female (34)	1 year (39)
Jamaica (11)	21–23 years (36)	Male (25)	2 years (8)
Macedonia (8)	24+ years (13)		3 years (12)
Bosnia (7)			
Dom. Republic (4)			
Thailand (2)			
Turkey (1)			
Taiwan (1)			
Ukraine (1)			
Montenegro (1)			

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ENDNOTES

[1] Though Disney does not disclose its number of temporary foreign workers, it is estimated that several thousand Walt Disney‘s Word Resort (in Orlando) cast members come on J-1 student visas (Johnson 2011, 920). A response to Freedom of Information Law request for 2015 indicates that Disney was the top employer of SWT workers in the U.S. (2,355 students) that year, followed by Cedar Fair Parks (2,340), McDonald’s (1,735), and Six Flags (1,560) (International Labor Working Group 2019, 14).

[2] Alongside more traditional temporary guest workers programs, cultural exchanges and “working holiday” programs are relatively new but growing forms of transnational mobility that augments host countries’ workforces. Ranging from student “gap” years (Heath 2007) and au-pair programs (Anderson 2009; Chuang 2013) to “working holidays” (Clarke 2005; Kawashima 2010; Tsai and Collins 2017; Yoon 2014) and “work and play” programs (Oommen 2019), these programs draw young adults from countries as varied as Poland, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan to destinations such as Australia, the United-Kingdom, and New Zealand. In Australia alone, working holiday makers (and temporary graduate workers, another form of temporary visa) constitute 20% of the workforce in the 20- to 24-year-old age group (Robertson 2014, 1917). Foreign students in the SWT program, like other guest workers, are significant contributors to the U.S. economy (Bowman and Bair 2017). This explains why Cook-Martin (2019) calls for “more analytical attention to temporary migration regimes” (1392).

[3] From a legal viewpoint, these individuals are not immigrants since they do not seek to a establish (either legally or informally) permanent reside in the United States.

[4] The coronavirus pandemic has significantly disrupted SWT recruiting for the 2020 season.

[5] We found this distinction, between SWT participants and their American peers, to be of far greater significance than racial differences; in fact, we found little in the way of racialized conceptions of worker effort, despite being attuned to racial differences among our interviewees.

[6] Participants often came from low- and middle-income countries where incomes are typically lower than their earnings in the U.S.. On Egg Island, over half of the SWT workers were from the Balkans, a region with high unemployment where per-capita GDP at the time of our study was barely more than $15,000 per year (Central Intelligence Agency 2018).

[7] A country whose overstay rate exceeds 5 percent is flagged for extra screening by the State Department; the rate of overstays by Serbians on J-1 visas is about 10 percent (conversation with a State Department representative, 2016).

[8] Secondary employment also required formal approval from a student's U.S. and home-country sponsoring agencies, a process often described by interviewees as a hassle requiring extensive international communication.

[9] As in Paul Willis' classic study *Learning to Labor* (1977), SWT students end up paradoxically reproducing a social hierarchy by performing the very set of expectations which were projected upon them.

[10] We suspect that receiving contexts (more so than geographical origins) might also explain other tropes associated with sub-sets of foreign workers. For instance, private agencies in the business of "mail-order" brides promote the "Asian woman" as "upstanding and gentle" while sharing potential husbands' "beliefs" and valuing "tradition, home, family, and fidelity" (Constable 2003, 96). Also, governmental agencies in the Philippines market Filipino medical workers as possessing as "the strong desire to heal and help people" (R. M. Rodriguez 2010, 90). All these qualities might trace their origins to the employment settings where people work, rather than to their home countries.