

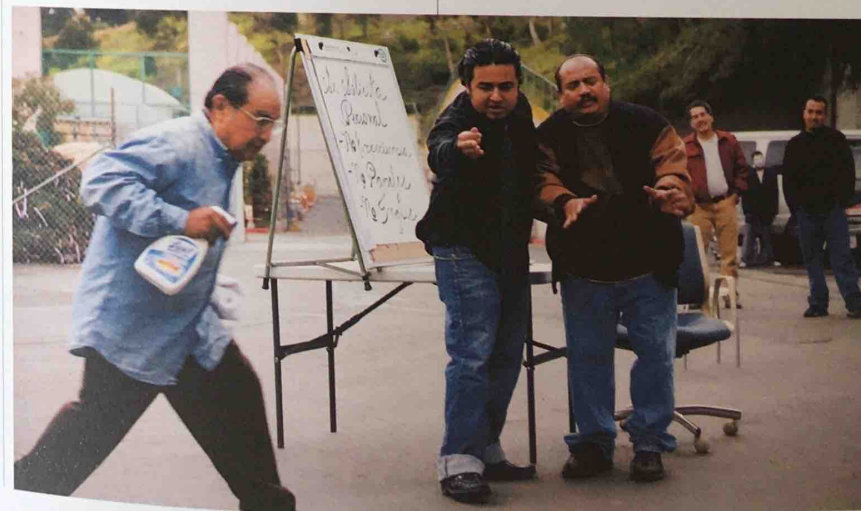
**CORNERSTONE
THEATER COMPANY**
LOS ILLEGALS AND TEATRO
JORNALEROS SIN FRONTERAS
(DAY LABORERS THEATER
WITHOUT BORDERS)

2007

For six months, playwright Michael John Garcés spent his days in a Home Depot parking lot in Hollywood and on a street corner in Redondo Beach, two of the most prominent—and controversial—day laborer job sites in Los Angeles. He waited in line with undocumented workers seeking jobs, listened to their stories, and formed relationships with members of this historically voiceless group. Then, as part of his residency at LA's Cornerstone Theater, he wrote the play *Los Illegals*, a fictional account of day laborers caught in the criminal justice system. Since its inception, Cornerstone has embedded professional playwrights and actors in a variety of com-

munities—from small towns to groups organized around social justice issues, like reproductive rights and environmental protection—to produce theater that reflects local concerns, histories, and efforts. Community members are then cast in the production.

Los Illegals, which premiered at Cornerstone in 2007 and then traveled to other cities, evolved into *Teatro Jornaleros Sin Fronteras*, a small touring production that enlists day laborers to engage in dialogue both on and off the stage. Directed by Juan José Magandi, a day laborer who first acted in *Los Illegals*, the company produces two to three plays a year at job sites for approximately 150 audience members. Full-time ensemble members write the scripts, which often convey difficult or painful subject matter in a raucous, rallying, comedic format. For example, on-the-job accidents may be exaggerated for the sake of emphasizing the harsh realities of working without healthcare benefits. Despite the inherent dangers of visibility, few day laborers decline to participate when offered the opportunity, says Garcés, who now serves as Cornerstone's artistic director. "In the social justice movement, it's hard to pin down cause and effect. There's a big difference between being represented in the media, and standing up to represent yourself. To be able to change the meta-narrative; that's empowering."



Opposite, top to bottom: Day laborers perform in *Los Illegals*, which premiered at Cornerstone Theatre in Los Angeles in 2007 (Courtesy John Luker/Cornerstone Theater Company). Day laborers perform in a production of *Teatro Jornaleros Sin Fronteras* (Courtesy Sam Cohen/Cornerstone Theater Company).

Above: *Los Illegals* evolved into *Teatro Jornaleros Sin Fronteras*, a small touring production that enlists day laborers to engage in dialogue both on and off the stage (Courtesy Sam Cohen/Cornerstone Theater Company).