MECHANICS OF MOBILIZATION: THE MAKING OF A TAXI WORKERS ALLIANCE

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For Aai and Baba.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the political engagement and occupational struggles of South Asian immigrant taxi workers in an American metropolis, and their participation in a taxi workers alliance. Contrary to popular understandings of South Asian immigrants as a model minority --- politically passive and economically successful professionals --- these South Asian immigrant taxi workers often struggle to make ends meet, and are actively involved in both leadership positions of their workers alliance as well as the rank and file. Further, their political engagements and their creative strategies to survive, maximize income, and achieve upward mobility show how poorer immigrants in non-professional occupations cannot be viewed simplistically as victims of structural exploitation. Using primary data (interviews with stakeholders in the taxicab industry) and secondary data (legislative records, Census data, newspaper archives), this study explores if, how and why immigrant workers chose to participate in this political mobilization. It recognizes three important factors that enabled the successful mobilization of this occupational group. Firstly, immigrant organizers used their social networks and ethnic ties to influence immigrant drivers' decisions to participate in alliance activities; these ties variously enabled and constrained their participation. Secondly, non-profit organizations assisted the fledgling alliance with logistics and

strategizing. Thirdly, national unions have been growing more receptive to nontraditional labor organizing, and provided institutional support to taxi worker organizations across cities in the United States.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction and Research Methodology

Get into a taxicab in Philadelphia, and it is likely that an immigrant from Asia or Africa will drive you to your destination. This ubiquitous immigrant driver, visible on the streets in all American metropolises, in journalistic articles and policy papers, on celluloid and in popular culture, is not nearly as visible in academic literature. Various news publications (print, radio and video), policy papers, and industry reports state that immigrants from South Asia form one of the largest geographic groups within the taxicab industry in cities like New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia [closely matched by immigrants from West and East African countries and the Caribbean]. Further, Census data show that numbers of non-professional immigrants have been increasingly steadily over the last 40 years. Yet a review of academic literature on South Asian immigrants in the United States shows an overwhelming focus on professional immigrants (Bhatia 2007; Purkayastha 2005; Rangaswamy 2000; Shukla 2001). This skewed focus is being slowly corrected as recent scholars have begun studying non-professional immigrant groups (Bald 2012; Mitra 2003; Mathew 2005). This dissertation aims to join that growing number, to increase the understanding of the lives of lower-income immigrants, and the larger South Asian diaspora within the United States.

Using the taxicab industry in Philadelphia as a case study, I examine the political engagements of South Asian immigrant drivers as they campaign and negotiate for better working conditions. Having used their immigrant social networks to enter the industry, I argue that drivers and labor organizers are using the same networks to mobilize co-ethnics and fellow-drivers, and that these networks and ties influence their decisions to

participate (or not) in taxi workers alliances. These immigrant drivers' lives and struggles belie the myth of the economically successfully and politically passive 'model minority' even as they reveal how poorer immigrants cannot be seen simplistically as victims of structural exploitation.

The next sections will describe the research problem and research goals in greater detail, followed by a brief history of South Asian immigrants and academic literature on their presence in the United States. Next, the analytical framework is outlined, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the research methodologies employed during research.

Research problem and objectives
"Why should I? Or 'how.' How should I?" the student asked her professor during a class discussion in a course on the history of the South Asian diaspora in the United States in early 2005. *"Or any of us,"* she added, waving in the general direction of her classmates. Most of the students, as well as the professor, were second-generation Americans whose parents had emigrated from South Asia, and the class had been discussing the terms "South Asian" and "desi" in small groups that afternoon. [*Desi*, a term commonly used by South Asians, refers to someone or something from the countries in the Indian subcontinent.] Shanti [named changed], a confident sophomore, had volunteered to summarize her group's discussion for the rest of the class, and she questioned the bases on which group identification was expected to occur:

> *"What exactly should I identify with? I've visited India once, when my grandfather died, when I was five or six. Years ago. And I got sick. That's all I remember, really."* Some of her classmates tittered in sympathy. *"We don't identify,"* she continued, switching to speaking for her group, *"with Indians or Pakistanis unless we know them personally." "And call them Uncle and Aunty-y-*

y!" called out another student, and the class laughed together. *"Yeah, yeah. And I don't know why we should be expected to. Like we, my family, we meet other Nairs* [a caste group from Kerala, a state in south India] *for Vishu* [the Malayalee new year] *or we know each other from school. But, like, the cab driver's Indian, so what?"* Shanti continued. *"Has he been to Kerala? The lady at Dunkin Donuts, what do we have in common? We literally do not speak the same language.* [Jokes within my smaller group revealed that this was a comment on the stereotype about Dunkin Donuts franchisees being immigrants, and their staff's limited fluency in English.] *I don't know them, you can't say we are the same people. Yeah, my friends, some of them are desis like me, Prashant's* [name changed] *desi and he's Indian, I'm American. But what do we have in common with these others? They can call themselves desis if they want to, but that's it. But identify, I don't know... They are so different from my parents, from everyone I know. So...Why should I? Or 'how;' how should I?"*

Shanti's comments [paraphrased from memory and detailed notes] were agreeable to most other students, and other groups noted that while they looked alike, their parents were from different parts of South Asia, practiced different religions, and that the terms *desi* and South Asian were only partially useful to describe such diverse peoples. Anita, a shy participant in my small group, pointed out that most parents would insist on maintaining distance between their own children and some *desis. "My parents wouldn't want me to be friends with a cab driver!"* She used an Indian accent, reminiscent of Appu from *The Simpsons*, and continued, *"Oh-h-h-h, what will Aunty say? What will people think...!"* This observation is unsurprising, and would likely be true in South Asia or any other place. Class boundaries are maintained for similar reasons (overtly or otherwise) across the globe.

However, what was striking about the students' discussions was that, unbidden by the professor, their discomfort with the umbrella terms had coalesced around economic differences. Meanwhile, religious and other differences, at least among these second-generation immigrants, were acknowledged and set aside. Observation of this discussion

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only two years into my own stint as an immigrant student in the United States, as well as casual conversations with the ubiquitous *desi*, the taxi driver, provoked an academic inquiry into socio-economic disparities among South Asian immigrants. In fact, as a detailed review of literature will show shortly, academic literature on the South Asian diaspora in the United States has been largely guilty of ignoring non-professional immigrants, and focusing, instead, on the study of highly-skilled, first-generation immigrants or second-generation hyphenated Americans. Further, while scholars have discussed the implicit or explicit political engagements of their research subjects, whether it be in their challenges to federal immigration law (Lal 2008), through their cultural performances of music or religion (Kurien 2007; Maira 2002; Nair & Balaji 2008; Sharma 2010) or their claims to cultural citizenship in the United States (Khandelwal 2000; Rudrappa 2004), few have discussed the political engagements of lower-income groups around issues of occupation and livelihood (Das Gupta 2006; Mathew 2005; Mitra 2003). Thus, though non-professional immigrants are a growing and visible proportion of the South Asian diaspora in the United States, and are increasingly engaged political actors, few scholars have shown significant interest in documenting their experiences.

Using South Asian immigrant taxi drivers as a case study, this research project moves away from neighborhood ethnographies and explorations of the identity-formation of second-generation immigrants, and examines how non-professional immigrants from South Asia participate in political mobilization across national and religious boundaries. It contributes to the literature on immigrant social networks by discussing how they have been successfully used for political mobilization, and also examines the relevance of the idea of the American Dream among South Asian immigrants [specifically taxi drivers]:

how narratives of rags to riches and of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps a common inspirational trope despite the lack of personal experience of significant upward mobility. In fact, in the United States, like the world over, the taxi driver is usually an immigrant. Given the relatively few skills and certification and limited financial investment required to enter the taxicab industry and the ability to learn on the job, the taxicab industry has been seen as an 'immigrant gateway' occupation.

Taxi drivers in Philadelphia have been organizing since the mid-1990s, with varying degrees of success. In the summer of 2005, a second taxi workers' organization [an 'Alliance'] was formed [the first having existed since the late 1990s], and in 2007, these two competing organizations merged to form the Unified Taxi Workers Alliance (UTWA), and elected a governing council in July of that year. Boasting of a diverse leadership and membership, this new organization has continued to campaign for better working conditions, trying to unite their native-born and immigrant (naturalized citizen and non-citizen) members under their common identity as taxi drivers. I examine the workings of this Alliance, and particularly, roles South Asian taxi drivers have taken on within and outside the Alliance. What specific conditions sparked initial attempts to mobilize? What methods or strategies did organizers use to reach out to more taxi drivers? What convinced some *desi* taxi drivers to join and others to abstain or even resist? What allowed such a diverse group to cohere and develop a solidarity based on their occupation, and at what cost? Where are there cracks in this solidarity? How does the UTWA leadership navigate various differences between taxi drivers?

In summary, a closer examination of South Asian taxi drivers' lives and political mobilization will allow an understanding of how political formations can be constructed

among working-class immigrant and non-citizen groups, and add to existing scholarship on non-professionals in the South Asian diaspora in the United States. The following section will provide a historical overview of South Asian immigration to North America, the immigration laws that enabled and constrained immigrants' arrival and resettlement, affected their place in the labor market, and their political and creative engagements with and responses to the same.

History of South Asian immigrants in North America

The earliest record of a South Asian presence in the United States dates back to the late 1800s, when agriculturalists from the Punjab province in north-west India settled on the U.S. western coast. Part of a wave of migration out of the Indian subcontinent, this "tide of turbans" (Prashad 2000: 72) charted a migratory route from rural colonial India to Western Canada to work in lumber mills and logging camps. Soon after, they crossed loosely-regulated borders into the United States. From Washington state, they traveled south to California to work on farms and on the railroads, and by 1908 their ships began docking directly at San Francisco (La Brack 1988; Lal 2008; Leonard 1992, 1997; Prashad 2000).

These immigrants, like other Asian immigrants before them, received a hostile reception. 'Orientals' like the Chinese and Japanese had been immigrating to the United States from the 1850s, and their growing presence during the gold rush and on the railroads had raised the ire of white America (Ngai 2004). Punjabi-speaking 'ragheads' fared no better. American immigration officials, responding to xenophobic sentiments against Asian immigrants and bowing to the pressure of unions on the West coast, began

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restricting immigration from Asian countries (Lal 2008). The United States Congress soon passed a string of restrictive laws. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 completely banned immigration from China, and the 1917 Immigration Law created the "Asian Barred Zone," which in effect banned immigration from all Asian countries. It also imposed a literacy test on all would-be immigrants. The National Origins Act or the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 explicitly favored immigration from northern and western European countries, and denied citizenship to Asian immigrants already residing in the United States. It set quotas on how many immigrants could legally enter the country based on how many of their nationals already resided within the United States. Since northern and western Europeans were the earliest immigrants, their numbers were greater and thus their quotas higher.

Immigrants from colonial India, also classified as 'Orientals,' were ineligible for citizenship, which was granted only to 'free white persons.' [Since the Indian subcontinent was still a colony of the British Crown up to 1947, for the purposes of this dissertation, all references to 'Indians' up to 1947 refer to colonial subjects from present-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.] The terms 'white' and 'Caucasian' were loosely defined and used as substitutes for each other, which allowed some Indian immigrants to claim to be of Aryan descent, and thus 'white,' and thus eligible for citizenship. A case in the United States Supreme Court brought the racial, political and cultural dimensions of citizenship to the foreground. In *United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), the Supreme Court, favoring an exclusivist immigration policy, turned down Bhagat Singh Thind's petition for citizenship (Hollinger 2006; Lal 2008). Thind's application for

naturalization had been originally granted on the basis of his claim to being a high-caste Hindu of the Aryan race, and therefore Caucasian. The *United States vs. Thind* case entered into legal record the determination that only persons originating from northern European countries were 'white,' thus disqualifying Thind and revoking his citizenship. The Court argued that while it might be true that blonde Europeans and brown Hindus "might have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, ...the average man [knew] perfectly well that there [were] unmistakable profound differences between them today" (Lal 2008: 38). In 1927, Sakharam Ganesh Pandit, another naturalized citizen, successfully petitioned the Supreme Court to uphold his naturalization, after which there are no recorded instances of denaturalization for reasons of racial ineligibility (Lal 2008). However, such restrictive laws did lead to an exodus out of America: From 8000 Indians in California in 1917, only 1476 remained by 1940 (Lal 2008).

Apart from controlling entry, the Federal government also passed restrictive laws to control and curtail the livelihoods of those already settled in the United States. One such example is the 1913 Alien Land Law, which forbade non-citizens from purchasing land or leasing it for more than three years. California was one of the first states to pass such a law in 1913 and several other states followed suit. Arizona passed it in 1917, and Idaho, Montana and Oregon in 1923 (Alba & Nee 2003; Lal 2008; Leonard 1992; Ngai 2004). However, many Asian immigrants eventually integrated themselves into local communities, including marrying Mexican and African American women, and found creative ways to get past legal restrictions on their resettlement in America (Bald 2012; Lal 2008; Leonard 1995; Ngai 2004; Prashad 2000).

In the 1940s, a range of factors convinced the United States to open its borders. One of the most important factors was America's self-image as a free nation, which was embarrassed by its racially restrictive immigration policies. The other was its booming war economy, which whittled away fears of unemployment --- particularly for the unions which had been powerful opponents of immigration (Briggs 2001; Lal 2008; Prashad 2000). Thus, on July 2, 1946, the Luce-Celler Act established a new quota system, and allowed 100 Indians to migrate annually to the United States. It also granted naturalization rights to a fixed number of immigrants from Asian countries. Upon naturalization, these individuals could own land and also sponsor relatives still living in their home countries to join them in the U.S. In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act increased the annual Asian quota to 2000 persons.

President Lyndon B. Johnson and the 89th Congress enacted significant pieces of legislation between 1964 to 1966, as part of President Johnson's vision of a Great Society, a few of which affected South Asian immigration into the United States. Firstly, the Medicaid and Medicare programs were established on July 30, 1965 as amendments to the original Social Security Act of 1935. The U.S. military-industrial complex was seeking to win the Cold War space-race against the erstwhile U.S.S.R. at the same time. Medical professionals, scientists and highly-skilled technical workers were needed to staff these programs. Secondly, the Hart-Celler Act or the Immigration Act was signed into law on October 3, 1965. The Hart-Celler Act changed the criteria for immigration. Kinship ties, refugee claims and 'needed' skills now influenced entry and naturalization rights, and restrictions based on race, sex, nationality and suchlike were abolished. These

new criteria fundamentally reconfigured the South Asian demographic profile by ensuring that a *particular* class of South Asians migrated to the United States, well-educated professionals like doctors, engineers and scientists, responding to the demands of the labor market, successfully emigrated to the United States (Das Gupta 2006; Prashad 2000). In fact, Prashad (2000) argues that this Act can be seen as an invidious attempt at a sort of social engineering, bringing in the cream of the professional classes from South Asia at a time when their skills in the fields of medicine and technology were in high demand in the United States. In effect, the labor needs of the U.S. economy manipulated the demographic profile of this community of immigrants.

These elite immigrants were politically active, like their poorer predecessors. Apart from mainstream electoral politics [like Dalip Singh Saund, who served in U.S. House of Representatives from 1957 - 1963], they also engaged in non-electoral politics. For example, an organization, Association of Indians in America, established on August 20, 1967, petitioned the United States Congress in June 1976 to officially redesignate Indians as non-white after the 1970 Census designated them as white. [This Census was the first time they were categorized as white. Meanwhile, American courts had determined they were white during naturalization hearings in 1910, 1913, 1919 and 1920 but non-white in 1909, 1917 and 1923 (Koshy 2001).] This demand came at a time when the American state, responding to civil rights campaigns, was putting anti-discriminatory measures into effect, and the organization was seeking protections for its own constituents. At the end of many debates, the 1980 Census form offered 'Asian Indian' as an option, a subcategory under the umbrella term 'Asian American.' This term, Asian

Indian, used to the present day, unintentionally reinforced India's hegemony in the region, and led to undercounting in the Census because persons from other countries in South Asia did not check that option (Das Gupta 2006; Lessinger 1995).

In any case, a series of laws after the 1965 Act continued to shape the educational and economic profile of new immigrants. The Health Professions Education Assistance Act of 1976 and the Eilberg Act of 1977 took professions like physicians and surgeons off the list of 'needed' skills and occupations after determining that there were enough already residing and practicing within the country [United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, USCIS]. The Immigration Reform and Control Act [IRCA] of 1986 put the onus of additional legal paperwork and fees on employers of foreign nationals --- it required that employers verify the identity and employment eligibility of all foreign nationals --- and penalized employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers. In effect, this made it harder for less-skilled or non-professional immigrants to enter the United States on skilled work visas and/or find legal employment after having entered on another eligible visa (for example, student visa). They were usually unqualified to work for larger firms, and smaller or family-run businesses could not afford to adhere to IRCA's standards.

IRCA also provided opportunities for the legalization of some undocumented aliens provided they admitted their guilt, and paid a fine as well as any back taxes they owed the IRS [USCIS]. Individuals who had entered the United States prior to January 1, 1982 and had been residing continuously ever since were allowed to apply for legalization under the Legally Authorized Worker [LAW] program. Approximately 1.7

million applicants were legalized under this program. The second program was called Seasonal Agricultural Worker [SAW]. Individuals who had documentation to prove employment in the agricultural sector for at least 90 days annually between 1984 to 1986 could apply for legalization under this program. Approximately 1.3 million individuals did so. More than 70% of all applicants were from Mexico (Woodrow & Passel 1990).

It is likely that professional South Asian immigrants rarely used this option. Historian Peter Kwong has noted that non-professional Chinese immigrants living and working illegally in Chinatown were distrustful of this provision. Knowing how scant Department of Labor oversight was (as they illegally worked long hours for minimal to no pay), they were concerned that their eligibility for this program would not be honored by the government. Kwong reports that many chose to not avail of this amnesty program out of fears of deportation (Herbst 1998). This could well be the case with non-professional undocumented workers in the South Asian community, too.

Therefore, despite these provisions for legalization, the IRCA of November 6, 1986 served as a disincentive for employers to hire foreign nationals (Das Gupta 2006). IRCA, like Hart-Celler before it, privileged immigrants from professional backgrounds. The non-professional or less-skilled immigrants *already residing within the United States* (having entered on other visas) who were unable to secure IRCA-compliant employment could (and did) risk working illegally. Those individuals --- regardless of their professional qualifications --- who had relatives who were legal residents of the United States could enter on family reunification visas. Non-professional or less-skilled immigrants commonly used this means to emigrate. Effectively, after 1965, "family reunification became a new, though clandestine, way for the state to recruit immigrant

labor for a restructuring economy hungry for low-wage, part-time, flexible labor while also restricting direct labor importation to appease domestic unease" (Das Gupta 2006: 100). Dhingra (2012) notes how the under- or uncompensated labor of immigrant relatives enabled the development of the American motel industry into an immigrant enclave. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is common across other small-scale enterprises, such as restaurants, convenience store or fast food franchises.

Patterns of immigration since the 1980s are significantly different from those after the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. The dotcom bubble of the 1990s notwithstanding, a significant proportion of immigration since the 1980s has consisted of non-professional workers and relatives of previously-settled immigrants (Lal 2008). Prashad points out that, between 1966 to 1977, up to 83% of Indian immigrants migrated under the category of 'professional and technical workers' (Prashad 2000: 75). Alba and Nee (2003) note that the American state, in effect, viewed the elite arrivals as 'human capital' and the post-1986 arrivals as 'labor.' These later immigrants are swelling the ranks of the American working- and lower middle-classes, and their presence has led to other stereotypes, such as the turbaned cab driver, the Indian restaurant or convenience store owner, or the proprietor of a 'Patel-motel'. The constant struggle against racism and poverty of many of these self-employed and lower-income workers (though several of them have professional education from the subcontinent) belies the rags-to-riches stories of the first-generation beneficiaries of the Immigration Act of 1965.

Prashad (2000) is the first to analyze how today's South Asian immigrant community is termed a 'model minority' on the basis of the elite immigrants who arrived on American shores post-1965.' It is seen as professionally successful, politically

conservative, and not dependent on government assistance, and this socio-economic and political profile is used to stigmatize the African American minorities as being inherently incapable and aggressive (Prashad 2000). Given the evidence of immigration policies determining who was allowed to enter the country, it is clear that South Asians are not inherently predisposed towards the levels of professional success they have achieved and experienced in the U.S.

The 'model minority' myth has been similarly dismantled for other immigrant communities, too. Peter Kwong (1998) closely examines life in a Chinatown and dispels that myth that Chinese immigrants are uniformly successful, law-abiding immigrants. He notes that there are distinct hierarchies and differences within the community: highly-skilled, professional workers (a group he calls the 'uptown Chinese') and immigrants from rural areas who lack technical and English language skills, and work in non-professional occupations (the 'downtown Chinese'). Even when these downtown Chinese establish themselves in an immigrant enclave (Chinatown), they operate under strict hierarchies: better-off ethnic business owners (garment factories or restaurants or grocery stores), and their poorly-paid employees who have limited opportunities for advancement.

In fact, immigration post-1986 allowed the slight correction of the previously-skewed immigration by welcoming non-professional workers, many of whom have joined lower-paying industries and/or work for their better-off co-ethnics. Kwong (1998) has argued that such immigrants --- undocumented workers or on family reunification visas which have been sponsored by relatives --- provide cheap labor to their co-ethnics

and the American labor market. Das Gupta (2006) notes, too, that members of ethnic groups often exploit their poorer co-ethnics.

> "In an ironic twist, the same ethnic solidarity that the model minority myth extols locks many members of that group into low-paying, dead-end jobs created by their better-off compatriots. The racism that creates the glass ceiling leads to a proliferation of ethnic businesses. In turn, these businesses rely on exploited labor – family labor, women's labor, and undocumented labor – made through the regulation of immigrant preferences" (Das Gupta 2006: 106).

The following section will examine the academic literature on this diverse group of South Asian immigrants, and discuss the few works focusing on non-professional immigrants, and the industries they are commonly concentrated in. After discussing the theories commonly used to explain immigrant occupational enclaves --- social network and ethnic economies --- and the model minority discourse, the section concludes with a discussion on studies of one particular 'immigrant occupational enclave' --- the taxicab industry --- and the historical interactions of labor unions and immigrants. The final section will discuss the research methods used to gather data on the taxicab industry and South Asian immigrant taxi workers in Philadelphia.

Literature review

A review of literature on South Asian immigrants in the United States suggests an overwhelming interest in the specificities and concerns of first-generation professional immigrants and second-generation immigrants. The elite diasporic experience can be succinctly summarized as one marked by "structural integration *and* ethno-racial marginalization, economic affluence *and* social marginality" (Purkayastha 2005: 1; italics in original text). Racism or xenophobia within the workplace (stereotypically, as overworked doctors or computer experts, for example), whether perceived or actual,

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made first-generation, elite South Asian immigrants feel like perpetual outsiders to America (Prashad 2000). In fact, most immigrant communities have had to deal with the machinations of nation-states (of origination and settlement) and their response has often been to withdraw into the relatively secure and familiar confines of family, community and faith, and reinforce them. Meanwhile, younger generations engage in creative reworking of their ethnic and religious identities as they navigate their status as 'hyphenated' Americans. Studies of the South Asian diaspora reflect these concerns.

Academic work on the South Asian diaspora can be broadly categorized into two distinct types. One type is a study where the author takes what I call an 'immigration' approach, emphasizing assimilation or adjustment or ghettoization within the host country (Bhatia 2007; Purkayastha 2005; Rupdrappa 2004). The second type is one where the author takes what I call a 'diaspora' approach, and emphasizes ties to the sending country (Gopinath 2005; Kurien 2007; Mani 2012; Mannur 2009; Shukla 2003). Most of these studies have two things in common: a focus on cultural elements of adjustment and identity, and confinement to professional groups who are at least middle-class, if not even better off. The work also, explicitly or implicitly, locates these groups within their national groups and embedded within immigrant social networks. [Das Gupta (2006) makes a very similar argument.]

Several scholars, within both 'immigration' and 'diaspora' approaches, have examined the meanings of home and belonging as expressed in literature and popular culture (Jain 2011; Maira & Srikanth 1996; Mani 2012; Mannur 2009). Bhatia (2007) explores the influence of sociocultural factors on human psychology and the construction of the selfhood and identity of his first-generation professional South Asian immigrant

research subjects. Others have used historical and ethnographic methodologies to examine the concept of citizenship as a means of belonging (Das Gupta 2006; Hall 2002; Kamal 2012; Rudrappa, 2004), and how entry into the United States and conferment of citizenship status [of all immigrants, not just South Asians] was mediated by race, class, labor requirements, gender and sexuality (Das Gupta 2006; Gardner 2005; Lal 2008; Luibheid 2002; Ngai 2004; Prashad 2000). Evelyn Glenn (2000, 2002) points to how although citizenship is seen as the great equalizer, in contemporary nation-states, the existence of various visa categories (as well as the presence of undocumented persons) actually *creates inequality* in access to state services. Further, formal membership in a state is not coterminous with substantive membership; hence, the concept of second-class citizens.

However, by and large, studies of the South Asian diaspora are qualitative studies of residential neighborhoods, cultural artifacts or negotiations of identity. Examples of such studies abound. Some have interrogated the race, class, and gender identities of first- and second-generation *desis* and how these individuals recreate and nurture their ethnic heritage and identities (Gibson 1988; Gopinath 2005; Purkayastha 2005). Others, like Maira (2002), Nair and Balaji (2008) and Sharma (2010), explore their musical influences and experimentation. The resulting *desi* hip hop serves as a commentary on the racialized identities of these second-generation Americans, a form of social protest, as well a means to navigate the local and global influences on their lives in the United States.

Ethnographies and historical works on first-generation immigrants also look at identity and assimilation. Some studies situate first-generation immigrant communities

within the history of immigration into America (Jensen 1988). Leonard (1992), for example, studies Punjabi immigrant men from colonial India in the early twentieth century who faced a range of restrictive laws (anti-miscegenation, against property ownership by noncitizens, limitations on who qualified to be a citizen and suchlike) as they tried to establish a livelihood and life in California. They married Mexican women, who were usually Catholic, and established multi-ethnic families and communities as a means to get around the racial prejudice they faced. These Punjabi-speaking men passed on their religious and cultural practices onto future generations who identified themselves as "Indian" rather than "Mexican." Bald (2012) studies Hindu and Muslim immigrants from what is now Bangladesh who arrived in the United States between the 1880s and the 1940s. These entrants, at first petty traders of silks and muslin and later also seamen who jumped ship at American ports, soon faced laws restricting immigration and land ownership by Asians. They melded into communities of color from Baltimore to Detroit to New Orleans, starting families with Creole, Puerto Rican and African American women, and working in factories or as self-employed traders (grocery stores, hotdog vendors, petty traders in ethnic goods from Bangladesh, and suchlike). Like Leonard's research, Bald shows that many South Asian immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America created multiracial communities by creating affiliations (through trade, residence and marriage) with communities of color already residing here, and also maintaining ties with communities in their sending countries (through trade and marriage). Later immigrants relied on earlier arrivals for shelter and assistance, just as Leonard's respondents had reported doing within their own community, and did not always manage to gain upward mobility.

Rangaswamy (2000) and Khandelwal (2000) highlight the differences between the post-1965 arrivals, who were financially well-off suburban dwellers, and the newer arrivals (1980s onwards) who were oftentimes struggling to make ends meet in their ghettoized rundown dwellings. Rangaswamy, in particular, argues that the class stratification between these two groups is visible in their cultural politics. For example, the growing orthodox Hindu fundamentalism among upper classes is contrasted with the majority of the immigrants who avowedly disassociate themselves from Hindu fundamentalist/nationalist organizations. When the two worlds (of post-1965 and post-1980 immigrants) do meet, the results can be troubling. Rupdrappa (2004) explores the practices and policies of two Chicago-based non-profit organizations. One, a shelter for battered women, employing South Asian staff, uses interventionist strategies to "train women out of their [South Asian] ethnicity" (Rudrappa 2004: 5) and make them conform to the ideal of the self-reliant American individual. The other, a privately-run cultural center, studiously avoids discussions of poverty and development within the subcontinent or class disparities within the diaspora during their presentations to Chicagoans. While well-off immigrants volunteer time and energy to teach English to newly-immigrated children, neighborhood tours in the Devon 'little India' area (organized for white Chicagoans) do not include the lower-class immigrants who actually inhabit and work in Devon. In effect, elite Indian immigrants in Chicago sanitize images and representations of Indian culture by consciously editing poorer communities.

The tendency to focus on professional immigrants and ignore their poorer fellow-nationals is reflected in much existing academic literature. This serious lacuna has begun to be filled by a few academic studies over the years, notably: Bald (2012), Das Gupta

(2006), Dhingra (2012), Leonard (1992), Lessinger (1995), Khandelwal (1995; 2000), Mathew (2005) and Rana (2011). These scholars and activists have recorded the presence and lives of non-professional immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in their residential neighborhoods and occupations, and their interactions (including marriages) with other immigrant groups.

Of the studies about South Asian immigrants, only Sheba Mariam George (2005), Biju Mathew (2005), Diditi Mitra (2003) and Pawan Dhingra (2012) have focused on an occupational group: nurses from the southern Indian state of Kerala, South Asian taxi drivers [Mathew and Mitra], and motel owners from the western Indian state of Gujarat, respectively. This section, like the dissertation, will focus on studies of non-professional occupational groups. Mathew (2005) explores one segment of the South Asian working-class – taxi drivers in New York City – in the context of race, class, immigration and global capital. Immigrant drivers' attempts to organize with the help of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (Mathew himself is one of its organizers) are discussed in detail, framed within a discussion of global capital and then Mayor Giuliani's varied on-going battles against crime and unionization. He conducted interviews with the immigrant drivers and describes their efforts to organize despite national and religious differences. One potent instance is the unity shown by Indian and Pakistani drivers in 1998 when the governments of the two countries were testing nuclear bombs. Mathew, with his intimate knowledge of the struggle as well as his awareness of the larger socio-historical context of Mayor Giuliani's governance and neoliberal policies, presents a complex picture of the taxicab industry in New York City both before and after the terrorist attack that brought down the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001.

Mitra (2003) examines the economic incorporation of immigrants from Punjab into the taxicab industry in New York City. She notes that prevailing theories on immigrant occupational niches explain the concentration of immigrants but do not explain how those niches are formed in the first place. She interviews over 40 Punjabi taxi drivers to understand why and how they entered the taxicab industry in New York City, and why and how they remain in the profession. Her research shows that they are drawn to the taxicab industry for two important reasons. Firstly, they know fellow-ethnics who provide crucial information about and assistance with learning the trade. Taxicab fleets show a concentration of particular nationalities, suggesting that once a certain group of drivers has established themselves, they tend to recruit newer drivers from within their own communities. Secondly, the occupation of taxi driving requires minimal investment at the outset: Drivers are able to lease taxis on shifts, share living quarters and expenses with fellow-ethnics, and earn their living without having to show proofs of education and degrees. [Though taxi drives often have advanced degrees, usually from their home countries.]

Dhingra (2012) focuses on another occupational niche occupied by South Asian immigrants: the motel industry. Using data gathered during interviews with close to 100 motel owners and employees over three years, he uses the theory of ethnic entrepreneurship to understand this industry. Immigrants from Gujarat (a state in western India) first purchased motels in San Francisco in the 1940s. Today, close to half of all motels in the United States are owned Indian-American owners, and 70% of the owners are Gujaratis. Three-quarters of these Gujarati owners share a caste name --- Patel ---

though they are not related to each other, leading to the popular term "Patel motels." Dhingra argues that these immigrants are seen [by themselves as well as by the political establishment which courts their votes] as exemplifying the 'can do' spirit of the American Dream because they have successfully established a self-owned and profitable business. However, such a narrative can create the false impression that the United States is a meritocracy where hard work and individual enterprise are unhindered by structural inequalities [such as those imposed by race, gender, and nativism]. In reality, Dhingra finds, the motel owners simultaneously suffer from social marginalization as well as enjoy entrepreneurial success, and live, as he terms it, on the 'margins of the mainstream.' Light and Gold (2000) note that ethnic economies depend on the unpaid labor of relatives and co-ethnics even as they increase the chances of upward mobility for the group --- precisely because they can rely on the [often free or cheap] labor of co-ethnics. The motel industry is a perfect example of this phenomenon. It is no surprise, therefore, that the motel industry's trade association [the American Hotel Owners Association] officially endorses increases in immigration while simultaneously opposing any increase in minimum wage. In summary, Dhingra explores the extent to which the motel owners' success can be attributed to American meritocracy, and the extent to which their exceptional talents as entrepreneurs are used to overcome structural inequalities and make do with the opportunities available to them.

In fact, Mitra (2003) and Dhingra (2012) come to similar conclusions about how these South Asian immigrant occupational enclaves were formed. Briefly, both taxi drivers and motel proprietors entered their respective industries by chance. No individual

planned or trained to become either a taxi driver or motel owner and the overwhelming number of research subjects had no experience in either taxi driving or motel operations in their home countries. Many were farmers or small businessmen in their home countries, and came from communities (Punjabis and Gujaratis) known amongst other South Asians for their entrepreneurial spirit. They appreciated the idea of being one's own boss, and once they established themselves, they recruited fellow-ethnics to join the family business or the industry. Both sets of respondents talk freely of the difficulties of their occupation, and the sacrifices required of them to succeed. However, in both these studies of occupational groups, there is no explicit discussion of political mobilization.

As the brief discussion of the history of South Asian immigrants in the United States has shown, these immigrants have not been immune to political engagement over the past century. In fact, they were late additions to the group termed 'model minorities,' joining Chinese and Japanese immigrants only in the late 1960s after the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 enabled the influx of highly-skilled immigrants from South Asia (Das Gupta 2006). These doctors and scientists were economically successful and conveniently racially ambiguous: "Amenable to be represented as nonblack, though also definitely not white" (Das Gupta 2006:32), they were passive participants in the denigration of 'state-reliant' and 'noncontributing' African Americans in cultural and political public discourses. They were cast as the 'right' kind of immigrant. That is, someone who was hard-working, self-reliant, unobtrusive, and apolitical. Essentially, an immigrant who was glad to escape to America, and able and willing to live the American Dream. As the review of literature has shown, South Asians themselves perpetuate some of these

inaccuracies, half-truths and stereotypes. "Indian American motel owners appear as the American dream incarnate — self-employed, self-sufficient, boot-strapping immigrants who have become successful without government intervention. …[A] group that has overcome obstacles on the road to great achievements, [and whose success implies] that racial or cultural inequality is no longer an issue" (Dhingra 2012: 2). These immigrants sometimes faced what Robert Chang (1999) calls 'nativistic racism,' "a potent combination of xenophobia and racism directed specifically at immigrants" (Das Gupta 2006: 35), yet narratives about South Asian success stories conveniently overlooked stories of discontentment with and failure to live this hallowed American Dream.

Mathew (2005) and Das Gupta (2006), unlike Dhingra (2012) and Mitra (2003), explicitly examine the political engagements of their South Asian immigrant research subjects. As mentioned previously, Mathew studies the political mobilization of taxi drivers in New York City. Das Gupta examines seven different South Asian labor, queer and feminist organizations, which are claiming rights as noncitizens. She develops the concept of a "transnational complex of rights" (Das Gupta 2006: 4), in which rights are mobile and delinked from citizenship and other state-sanctioned means of belonging. She differentiates between elite and accommodationist 'place-taking politics' and 'space-making politics,' which are "oriented towards social change" (Das Gupta 2006: 9). Space-making politics "recognize that passports, visas, work permits, green cards, citizenship papers, deportation notices, the jurisdiction of courts across nations in domestic violence cases, and the need to earn dollars to send home mark the daily realities of immigrant life" (Ibid). The 'new political actors' (Sassen 1998) practicing

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space-making politics, all post-1965 immigrants, recognize that while their struggles are specific to their own social location [as noncitizens and/or queer/feminist/working-class persons], their rights are mobile and not confined to national membership.

This ethnographic study is a seminal understanding of how South Asian immigrants have involved themselves in non-electoral politics in the United States. It highlights the influences on immigrant workers' decision to engage in political activity --- their ethnic ties, financial abilities, personal histories of activism --- and also discusses those individuals who were unable or unwilling to participate.

It is important to examine such political participation for two reasons, and this research contributes to existing literature in two significant ways. Firstly, immigrants are generally perceived to be 'unorganizable,' and the continued prevalence of the model minority discourse specifically presumes South Asian immigrants' political passivity. This study challenges both those presumptions. Two, these immigrants are experiencing firsthand the precarious nature of work in increasingly deregulated economies and occupations. Their official designation as 'independent contractors' [to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter] prevents them from forming a union, and denies them legal protections such as workers' compensation and unemployment benefits. This research shows how these taxi workers are exploring creative alternative strategies to negotiate for better working conditions, and effectively challenging traditional forms of labor mobilization, and thus contributes to existing literature on immigrant labor mobilization in productive ways.

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The next section will discuss the theoretical and analytical underpinnings of this research project. Social network theories also examine how social ties affect political participation. In this dissertation, I argue that the very social networks that enabled the concentration of immigrants in the taxicab industry also enabled the political mobilization of these individuals.

Analytical framework

Ethnographic and historical data about immigrant enclaves (in neighborhoods or occupations) are commonly explained by theories of social networks (Granovetter 1995; Portes 1998), urban replacement (Waldinger 1999) and ethnic economies (Light & Gold 2000). In combination, these theories explain how social networks enable the creation and maintenance of immigrant enclaves in occupations, economies, neighborhoods and suchlike. Workers move in and out of industries for a variety of reasons. Industries may decline or move overseas or workers may experience upward mobility and move to higher-paying jobs, for example. In some situations, the exit of native-born workers leads to a demand for new workers, which can be supplied by immigrants or racial minorities. In others, immigrants perform jobs that the native-born have refused, and once a group enters the industry, they tend to employ co-ethnics and thus develop an occupational niche or enclave. [While it is true that increased mobility among white workers causes vacancies usually filled by immigrants, there is a racial and cultural element to this: Employers may believe that immigrants work harder for lower wages than native racial minorities (Waldinger 1999)].

Belonging to an ethnic or social network provides individuals access to various kinds of resources. Studies on taxi drivers and other immigrant niches as well as research conducted for this dissertation validates this theory. Light and Gold (2000) note that such 'ethnic resources' include shared values and cultural assumptions, skills and information, social ties (including kinship and marital relations), linguistic and religious commonalities, and financial resources (capital, interest-free loans, patronage for businesses and suchlike). All these together also provide a basis for political activity among group members, and, through political activism, ethnic groups "can win concessions from the government agencies and establish a common standpoint for addressing conflicts with opposing groups and interests" (Light & Gold 2000: 128). Thus, the very networks that enable the concentration of groups in an occupation can also enable political engagement of the group. Further, individuals do not make political decisions in a vacuum. Social interactions can influence individuals' choices regarding political participation as well as involvement in social movements. Studies have analyzed how immigrant social networks facilitated the union-building process (Delgado 1993; Milkman 2006; Waldinger 1999). A Service Employees International Union [SEIU] organizer is quoted as saying, "Even though L.A. is famous for no community, we found a community of janitors" (Waldinger et al 1998: 116-7).

Scholars such as Lim (2012), Marsden & Campbell (2012), Passy & Giugni (2001) and Siegal (2009) have focused on various aspects of the role of social networks in political mobilization and participation. Individuals are more likely to participate in an activity when other individuals they trust already participate in the activity. The

underlying causes of individuals' choice to participate can vary from having their networks providing access to compelling information, imposing social pressure, engendering the fear of social sanctions if they refuse to participate and the sense of safety and strength in numbers (Siegal 2009).

Another issue that affects individuals' responses to political outreach is their own assessment of their potential contribution (Passy & Giugni 2001) to the political organization, and the individual risks of collective action. They note that social networks are useful in politically engaging their constituent members in three ways: They introduce the issue to their members, influence their understanding of the issue, and provide means of participation. Immigrant organizers in this research project served exactly this purpose when they conducted outreach within their own communities. Passy and Giugni (2001) also highlight the necessity of bridging the divide between 'structure' and 'agency' when discussing political participation. "Not only do networks form the social environment on the basis of which individuals make their choices in the short run, they also affect in the long run the cognitive parameters that lead to choices such as participating in a social movement or abstaining from doing so" (Passy & Giugni 2001: 124). For example, Milkman (2006) notes that recent Latino immigrants [particularly from Central America] tend to have a more positive view of unionizing than the native-born, and this view is based on their experiences with collective organization in their home countries. She argues that these immigrants "often arrive in the United States far better acquainted with the cultural idioms of collective organizing, unionism, and class politics than their native-born counterparts" (Milkman 2006: 134).

The strength and type of ties within the social network (relatives, coworkers, neighbors, parishioners and suchlike) also influence individuals' decision to participate. Marsden & Campbell (2012) note that ties are dependent on how both parties in a relationship view the same relationship: Two parties in a dyad may regard their tie differently, and assign it varying degrees of importance or influence. Reciprocity is an important aspect when considering the strength of ties [and consequently, their ability to influence individual choices]. They argue against generalizing the strengths of ties based on the type of relationship: That is, they argue against assuming that kinship ties are stronger than friendship ties, which are in turn stronger than ties to neighbors or coworkers. Further, they argue against assuming that ties are weakened by occupational or educational dissimilarities. In summary, "[a]lthough some relationship types may tend to be stronger ties than others, a good deal of variation in tie strength exists *within* types" (Marsden & Campbell 2012: 19).

Lim (2012) argues that, in the recruitment of political activists, there is no evidence that 'strong' ties [kinship relations] are more effective than 'weak' ties [coworkers]. The fact that South Asian immigrant drivers responded to outreach from drivers outside their own ethnic groups adds credence to this theory. In fact, the contents of relationships, the identities shared by two individuals, and their social interaction, rather than strength of the network, form the basis of interpersonal influence in political activism (McClurg 2003).

Individuals' relationships are affected by the immigrants' literal, geographical and metaphorical state of existence. Sassen (1998, 2004) has noted that while the flows of

capital are not matched by equally free and frequent flows of labor, contemporary globalization and immigration has created concentrations of two greatly disparate groups in global cities. Highly-skilled immigrants and tremendous financial and corporate power exist in the same cities as disadvantaged groups of workers (women, immigrants, persons of color) in low-paying occupations. The state categorizes these immigrants into legal/illegal, citizen/non-citizen and others, and provides differential rights and services to these categories. "The legal nature of these distinctions normalizes the hierarchy, thereby making common sense the differential treatment of immigrants in these categories" (Das Gupta 2006: 13). In today's globalized world, people no longer have a singular or exclusive relationship with the state or nation, and participate in various communities simultaneously (Das Gupta 2006; Sassen 1994, 2004). These social networks or communities, and interpersonal relationships within social networks, can encourage belonging [say as members of an occupational category] and participation [in a political campaign] despite state-ascribed differences.

Finally, the structure and diversity of the social networks can help determine the "availability of expertise and the levels of conflict and political sophistication to which one is exposed, all of which have an impact on the willingness to participate" (Siegal 2009: 122). This is particularly relevant in the case of the taxi workers' mobilization in Philadelphia because of the deep involvement of (a) driver-organizers from non-South Asian and non-immigrant groups and (b) of non-profits whose staff members were not always taxi drivers themselves. It is important to examine the role of non-ethnics and their influence in social networks, and of 'third parties' (Vervoort 2011) who can

encourage or discourage contacts within and outside one's own ethnic group. Further, "the fact that [social] elites are in a privileged position in the network does not imply they necessarily have a strong influence on aggregate levels of participation" (Siegal 2009: 123), and this is noticeable in drivers' responses to the involvement of certain nonprofit professionals.

Having said that, individuals respond differently to information and social pressure (Siegal 2009). Even when social networks are reinforced by religious or community based organizations (DuBry 2007; Milkman 2006), one cannot assume that social networks function positively and effectively in all circumstances (Menjivar 2000; Milkman 2006; Wierzbicki 2004). In summary, immigrant social networks undoubtedly influence the possibility and ability of immigrants' political participation but these individuals are making their own choices about risks and benefits of participation.

Finally, this dissertation is intellectually invested in two related endeavors. First, it shows how pervasive the troubling 'model minority' discourse is. Even individuals who have not directly benefited from it subscribe to it to some extent (as shown in the review of literature and my own data). And second, it acknowledges and problematizes the role of the 'middle class activist' in non-professional political mobilizations. Both Mathew (2005) and Das Gupta (2006) seem to glorify the politics of marginalized groups without adequately questioning their own and their subjects' prejudicial practices. Having said that, political mobilizations benefit from a heterogeneous and diverse group of organizers, especially when strategists are able to walk the fine line between the

knowledge gained from lived experience [of say, taxi driving] and that gained from learned expertise [of say, non-profit professionals].

The following section will discuss the research design of the dissertation and the role of the researcher in the data collection process.

Research methodology

This section will describe and analyze the research process: how and why specific tools and methodologies were used, how and where research subjects were approached for interviews, and how data was gathered and analyzed. Finally, this section will discuss the limitations of the study and the role of the researcher during the data collection process.

But first, a quick note on terminology. The terms 'driver', 'taxi driver' and 'taxi worker' are used interchangeably during discussions. They all refer, simply, to individuals who drive a taxi. A driver can own or rent a vehicle and a medallion. [A medallion is a license to operate the vehicle as a commercial taxicab.] When a driver owns the medallion, the fact is specified and/or the term 'owner-operator' is used. When the driver rents or leases the medallion, he is called a 'lease driver.' [These different categories will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.] When the specific issue under discussion affects drivers regardless of whether they are owner-operators or lease drivers, the term 'driver' or 'taxi worker' is used. Both the organizations working with taxi workers are referred to either by their name or as 'taxi workers organization' or as 'alliance'. [They are not technically a union; this, too, will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.] When speaking of all three nationalities (and discussing issues

equally affecting them in similar ways), the terms 'desi' or 'South Asian' are employed. In other cases, national identifiers are used to speak of issues specific to that national group. There is some academic and political debate over using the terms 'desi' and 'South Asian' when speaking of such diverse peoples. The term 'desi', which refers to experiences and cultural artifacts shared by South Asian immigrants, is used more often by those residing outside South Asia. This is a source of discomfort to some scholars:

> There is, it appears to me, something unsettling and certainly odd about the fact that the most enthusiastic proponents of the word 'desi' are precisely those diasporic Indians who, in many ways, have least claim to the word and its multiple inheritances, considering their location in metropolitan centers of thought and their immense distance from local and vernacular knowledge systems. (Lal 2008: xi)

Scholars have also problematized the use of the term 'South Asian', arguing that clubbing multiple countries under this rubric overemphasizes the influence of the larger countries (most notably, India) and risks ignoring smaller ones. The term 'South Asia' emerged out of the United States' strategic geopolitical interests after World War II, and had not been used in academic or policy literature before this era (Elder, Dimock Jr. & Ainslee 1998). Further, the geographic region 'South Asia' itself is disputed, with varying opinions on which countries constitute it and confusion between South and Southeast Asia. Scholars have also questioned how many persons outside highly-educated, secular and progressive groups consciously use the term 'South Asian' to speak of themselves (Bahri & Vasudeva 1996; Kurien 2004; Lal 2008;). In fact, Shankar and Srikanth's edited volume (1998) explores South Asians' self-identification through a series of essays. The contributors themselves switch between national and geographical labels (Pakistani/Indian American as opposed to (South) Asian American) depending on

their context and audience, but most authors also note that immigrant communities themselves rarely use the seemingly more inclusive terms 'Asian American' or 'South Asian American' to describe themselves. They, like other scholars, argue that there is a need to complicate the artificially homogenous and essentialized category of 'South Asian,' and highlight the specificities of the experiences of diverse South Asians; that is, "the different narratives of the newspaper vendor and the academic must be stitched together" (Bahri & Vasudeva 1996:3). However, I have chosen to use the term 'desi' because drivers themselves have used it in their conversations. Further, my use of the term 'South Asian' during discussion is a practical decision. It collectively refers to three countries represented in my sample --- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As this section will detail, I have ensured that no one country is numerically dominant in the research.

Both primary and secondary data were obtained and analyzed for this dissertation. Primary data was gathered mainly over the course of three years, from 2005 to 2008, and consisted of non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews with respondents. I attended public hearings and rallies and those meetings at City Hall which were open to the public (including members of the press) up to 2011. 'Snowball sampling,' a method by which respondents provide references to other respondents on the basis of their own personal or professional 'bonds,' was used to identify and approach potential research subjects. Snowball sampling is commonly used in qualitative or exploratory research, and particularly to access 'hidden' populations. These are groups that hard to locate because they are, for example, marginalized, nomadic or because they either need to and/or choose to avoid contact with 'outsiders.' Some degree of trust needs to be established before individuals agree to participate in the research study. In the case of this qualitative

study, one important factor necessitated the use of this sampling method. Given the nature of the taxicab industry [which will be detailed in the following chapter], the governmental authority in charge of regulating the industry does not maintain a list of taxi drivers, and neither did the non-governmental organizations working with taxi drivers in Philadelphia. Thus, it was not possible to gather a numerically representative sample from a 'master list.' Further, participant observation, which would increase 'insider' access to drivers, was not an option. My legal status as an international student in the United States forbids work outside the university, so actively assisting with or engaging in any commercial activity [or even appearing to do so] was not possible. The other option would be to accompany drivers on their job without any active assistance; however, I was advised that this, too, might be problematic for legal reasons. Further, not only would my gender complicate my accompanying drivers while they drove their taxis, the presence of a non-paying passenger would negatively affect their earnings or expose them to other risks, like fines or reprimands from inspectors. Thus, the most effective way to identify research subjects was to use snowball sampling, and non-participant observation was the most effective means of gathering data.

The research design anticipated that as rapport was established with research subjects, they would provide contacts to friends and/or affiliates. In 2005, I first contacted members of a non-profit organization working with taxi drivers, who directed me towards two organizer-drivers, Ray Brown and Kinfe Zenawi. Simultaneously, I independently contacted organizer-drivers whose names appeared in articles about the taxicab industry in local newspapers. These organizer-drivers provided references to their coworkers, some of whom were active in the organization and many of whom were not. A total of 16

drivers were introduced by organizers (or were organizers themselves). Other resource persons were also asked for referrals to drivers. For example, owners of restaurants frequented by drivers were asked to spread the word to their patrons about possible involvement in a research study. This method netted four participants who provided in-depth interviews. An acquaintance, a doctoral candidate in the physical sciences who had lived with Bangladeshi drivers during some of his time in graduate school, provided introductions to three drivers.

Table 1.1- Sources of South Asian research participants

Type of contact	Number of drivers [N = 63]
Non-profit professionals	2
Organizer-drivers in either workers' alliance	16
Drivers (but not organizers)	28
Independently-contacted	10
Other sources	7

Source: Primary data

Finally, my volunteer work at a non-profit organization in Philadelphia introduced me to many more drivers and their relatives and acquaintances. [The organization provided various services to refugees and immigrants, such as assisting newly-arrived refugees with paperwork, housing, and employment, and providing English language classes to adult (immigrant and refugee) learners.] Many adult learners in my introductory-level English language classes as well as my history and civics classes (to assist legal permanent residents with their citizenship examination preparations) worked as taxicab and limousine drivers, as cleaners in garages, as attendants in parking lots, and in ethnic stores or businesses. None of my students were immigrants, refugees or asylees from South Asia, and were not asked to participate in or assist with this research study. However, I ran into ex-students (two from West African countries and one from Haiti) a

few times during my interactions with South Asian drivers at taxi stands, and I believe that their recognition and familiarity burnished my credibility with my respondents.

To avoid the biases inherent in snowball sampling [to put it simply, 'like attracting like' may bias the sample], particularly when examining the role of social networks, I tried to diversify my contacts and interview sites and increase my chances of contacting drivers who were outside the social networks I had already accessed. This served a dual purpose. Firstly, as already mentioned, it increased the chances of interviewing a more diverse cross-section of drivers. Secondly, it helped avoid the impression of being an organizer myself (or of being overtly sympathetic to their cause). I did not assume that all drivers were sympathetic to or interested in organizing, and this strategy (of approaching drivers independently) enabled greater access to taxi drivers who had reservations about the drivers' political mobilization. This strategy involved walking up to drivers at taxi stands, introducing and identifying myself (including showing university-issued identification), explaining the broad purpose of my interviews, and discussing what their involvement would mean. Apart from my gratitude for their help, issues of informed consent, anonymity, lack of any compensation for their time, and their freedom to discontinue participation without fear of negative consequences were the most important issues discussed.

The initial response rate of drivers was reasonably positive. Only 20 out of 83 drivers refused outright when first approached about their participation in the study. The majority of these 20 individuals were approached at taxi stands without any references from or introduction by a trusted contact, two were introduced by a restaurant owner, and one was introduced by an organizer. Three other drivers were introduced by other

contacts and said they could not participate because they did not have the time for the study. In total, 42 drivers participated in multiple one-on-one interviews, often lasting over an hour. Another 21 participated in shorter interviews, sometimes one-on-one and sometimes in groups, but did not agree to or were unable to participate in follow-up interviews. Many drivers, and all six organizer-drivers, gladly provided their cell phone numbers to schedule interviews, and two also offered to participate in phone interviews. However, over time, it became increasingly difficult to rely on cell phone contact with all drivers. Apart from innocent errors, such as calling during their rest hours (and disturbing them, if at all they answered their phones), and genuine cases of last-minute schedule changes, many drivers often did not answer, or asked to be called back at another time. Thus, it turned out that, drivers who provided their cell phone numbers were not necessarily more contactable or reliable respondents. In the end, cell phones were used primarily to remind drivers of the scheduled interview time, and I waited at the predetermined spot knowing that they might not show up. I learned to persuade drivers to make appointments for follow-up interviews in person. Only two drivers provided interviews over the phone; in both cases, this was because they were unable to make the original appointment or had forgotten about it completely. Some restaurant owners noted my presence, especially on occasions when drivers did not show up for appointments, and volunteered to pass messages to the drivers. Over time, my regular presence at popular sites [restaurants and taxi stands] and references from organizers increased my credibility, and the response rates increased.

Of the 42 South Asian immigrant workers and organizers who consented to in-depth interviews, 24 were of Indian origin, 11 were from Pakistan and 7 were from

Bangladesh. I also interviewed 3 taxi drivers and organizers from East African countries and 2 native-born Americans (one Caucasian and one African American). Approximately 21 South Asian immigrant taxi drivers were involved to a slightly less extent. These individuals participated in shorter interviews or were only a part of a group discussion or were eating or hanging out with their friend while I interviewed him and chose to weave in and out of our conversation. Of these 21 drivers, three were of Indian origin, eight were from Pakistan and the remainder Bangladeshi. Thus a total of 27 Indians, 19 Pakistanis, 17 Bangladeshis, and five non-South Asians were interviewed. In summary: 63 South Asian immigrant drivers and 5 non-South Asian drivers were interviewed, to make a total of 68 research subjects. I also spoke with one non-profit professional who was assisting organizer-drivers with their political mobilization.

Given the fundamentally itinerant nature of the respondents' occupation, observations and interviews were conducted at multiple sites. Initial scouting and observation enabled the identification of popular meeting places such as restaurants and taxi stands in different parts of the city. Later, drivers themselves directed me towards popular spots. Drivers were approached individually as they waited at stands in the city, the Amtrak train station and the airport. Some interviews took place at these stands as drivers waited by or in their taxicabs. Other interviews took place inside eating establishments and the parking lots outside these eating establishments. Organizers of one taxi workers alliance often preferred interviews in their office, while rival organizers from another workers alliance, lacking access to such an office space, were interviewed at taxi stands.

Attempts were made to interview both day and night shift drivers, and different strategies were employed to do so. The most effective strategy was to ask lease drivers if the driver they shared their lease with would be interested in aiding the research project. All the core organizers who were day shift drivers, for example, provided introductions to their shift partners. However, many others who were not as active in the workers organizations also did the same. The other strategy was to frequent popular eating establishments where day and night shift drivers met (sometimes intentionally to hand over keys) or overlapped by coincidence. While unable to get an equal number of day and night shift drivers [of the 42 who participated in in-depth interviews, only 12 were night shift drivers], analysis and comparison of drivers' responses suggested that their specific circumstances [as night- or day-shift drivers] were adequately understood.

Table 1.2 - Sites for interviews (one-on-one and group)

Site of interview	First approached and/or first interview	Follow-up interview(s)
Taxi stands (city, Amtrak station, airport)	67*	33
Organizations' office	0	5
Community organizations' premises	5	9
Restaurants	13**	21
Parking lots	7	6
Telephone conversation	3***	3
Public hearings or rallies	4	0

Source: Primary data. [63 of all the drivers approached for interviews who consented to participating in the study were South Asian immigrants]
* 17 of these 67 declined to participate in study
** One of these 13 declined to participate in the study
*** Two of these 3 declined to participate in the study

Consent was sought from each participant, and University-issued identification shown to establish further credibility. No participant was promised or given

compensation in cash or kind for their participation, and were regularly reminded that they were free to decline interviews at any point.

All of the 42 drivers who agreed to in-depth interviews participated in at least one individual (one-on-one) interview. Of these, 23 drivers further participated in one follow-up interview (one-on-one), and five participated in two follow-up interviews (one-on-one). The remaining 19 participated in group interviews of two to five (excluding the researcher). Most interviews with drivers from India and Pakistan were conducted in Urdu and Hindi, and almost all drivers who reported Punjabi as their first language were comfortable speaking Hindi or Urdu. In the few instances where older Sikh drivers preferred to speak in Punjabi, my own intermediate Punjabi skills were ably and kindly supplemented by their friends and fellow-drivers who did speak Hindi or Urdu. All interviews with Bangladeshi drivers were conducted in English. In the case of three Bangladeshi drivers, an organizer as well as a university student who was personally acquainted with them and fluent in Bangla assisted with the interviews.

The interview schedule consisted of both open-ended and close-ended questions, and respondents were encouraged to talk about issues they considered important. The broad categories of questions are as follows. The section on biographical information included questions such as the respondents' name, age, year of arrival in the United States, educational qualifications, and work history in their home country and in the United States. This included questions on how they emigrated, how they were able to procure housing and employment upon arrival, and their assessment and experience of the taxicab industry. The section on their social interactions and participation in their communities asked about their marital status, domestic set-up, residential patterns, their

level and type of involvement in local cultural and religious organizations, and relationships with relatives or others in their home countries. They were also asked about their workdays, interaction with fellow-drivers, and interaction outside and within their racial, national and religious groups. The section on their involvement with the taxi workers alliances asked about how and when they got involved, who approached them, the sites of such organizing or canvassing, and why they chose to or not to participate.

Secondary data, gathered from 2005 to the present date, included academic studies, Census figures, newspaper articles, publications and reports of city and state governmental bodies (including legislative records and legal filings), newsletters (printed and virtual) produced by taxi workers' organizations, and handouts and fliers made available to the public during rallies and public hearings. All these publications were in English. One of the taxi workers' organizations sporadically produced a newsletter, *The Waiting Times,* which was made available online as well as through print. The four to eight-page newsletter served as a mouthpiece for the organization, provided useful information for taxi workers, and discussed issues germane to the taxicab industry. Fliers and handouts were often produced by the non-profits affiliated with the taxi workers' organization.

As this is primarily a qualitative study of a relatively small scale, no statistical research instruments were used, and secondary statistical data was accessed through the Census and other government surveys and reports. The secondary data were useful to contextualize drivers' experiences within the histories of South Asian immigration, the development and structure of the taxicab industry, and the interaction between trade unions and immigrant workers in the United States.

One driver-organizer, himself a native-born American and fluent English-speaker, directed me to an electronic mailing list (*listserv*) managed by taxi drivers from all over the world. However, this listserv was not actively followed after it became clear that the conversations (often of a personal nature) took place amongst a dozen or so participants, only one of whom was a non-immigrant driver in Philadelphia, and were not relevant for the study of immigrant drivers in Philadelphia. However, this listserv would likely be a useful resource during a comparative study of taxicab industries across the English-speaking world.

Interviews were recorded with drivers' express consent, transcribed, translated into English, and filed without identifying information to maintain anonymity for the participant. In fact, due to issues surrounding legal documentation and work permits, and respondents' understandable reluctance to sign consent forms, explicit verbal consent was sought and provided. All interviews with more than one driver were recorded, and all but five one-on-one interviews were also recorded. In the case of the five drivers who declined to be recorded, each driver did allow notes during the interview.

Only drivers who consented to being recorded on tape have been quoted at length. In some cases, participants gave interviews while their friends [who had not consented to participate] were present and interested in listening to our conversation. Sometimes these drivers interjected comments or opinions, in which case they were asked if they agreed to be quoted and identified, if at all, only by their nationality. Most drivers agreed to this arrangement; in two cases, the drivers (both Indian Sikhs) declined and chose to remain silent observers. Pseudonyms have been used for every respondent. While some core organizers of the two different workers' alliances volunteered their real names (first and

last) for publication, and a few drivers volunteered their first names, everyone was given a pseudonym to maintain consistency and adhere to approved research protocol. This decision was further validated by the realization during data analysis that every single driver (whether organizer or not) who had volunteered their real name(s) was either a native-born American or, if an immigrant, had mentioned that he was a permanent resident or naturalized citizen. This highlighted the potential risks to drivers who had not volunteered such information.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. While respondents were encouraged to discuss issues they felt were important, each individual was asked for some biographical information [such as age, year of arrival, and country of origin], and also questions about their choice of occupation and employment history, family and community networks, aspirations for themselves as well their children [if any], and their assessment of and involvement (or lack thereof) with taxi workers' organizations. Organizer-drivers were asked these questions as well as the reasons for their deeper involvement in political mobilization, and their assessments of the level of involvement of drivers. Each respondent was also asked for a historical narrative of the development of the taxi workers' organizations, and their statements were compared to other drivers' and organizers' statements, and checked against archival data [newspaper articles, legislative records, and the organizations' reports].

Drivers peppered discussions with questions about myself, asking about my family, religion, and career plans, including if I intended to return to India. Four different drivers, on four different occasions, upon learning of the size of stipends and funding

issues in graduate school, offered employment in grocery stores owned by their friends or relatives. All offers of employment were declined. In fact, while contemplating research designs and sites, I consulted with the appropriate advisors at the University to see if unpaid work at an immigrant business for research purposes was possible. The advisors were unequivocal: Unpaid work in a commercial establishment would gravely endanger my legal status as a student, and paid employment was illegal and grounds for deportation. Thus, when drivers offered unsolicited help and employment offers, including reassurances that 'nobody need know,' I was always very clear in my refusal. This led to one rather uncomfortable situation. A driver from India was bothered by my refusal. He seemed defensive and was clearly irritated as he stated that he was only trying to help, and that he had no ulterior motives. I attempted to reassure him that I meant no disrespect, but that I did not intend to break any laws. After this interaction, both he and a friend withdrew from the research study.

It is important to discuss the role of the researcher in the data collection process. Qualitative research necessitates an awareness of the social characteristics of the researcher and his/her research subjects, and of how these characteristics might affect their interactions with each other. My own social characteristics did influence my interactions with my research subjects, and enabled and constrained my access to drivers in myriad ways. A rare but striking example: When speaking with non-South Asian drivers at the Amtrak train station one evening, one driver noted that I looked Indian (and I confirmed my nationality) and then asked if I was Hindu. I responded that I was an atheist because it is the truth. The driver's response seemed unpleasant to me. After

expressing some shock, he tried to convince me to attend his church and persisted despite polite refusals, even asking for my address and offering to pick me up and drive me over to the church for free. Had this event occurred later during my fieldwork, as opposed to the second month of active interviewing, I might have handled this aggressive behavior better. However, then, intimidated by his persistence, but aware of the other drivers [all potential research subjects] listening to the conversation and not wanting to antagonize anyone, I fumbled an answer, saying I would think about it, abruptly ended the conversation, and left.

These were the only two unpleasant experiences I had during fieldwork [refusing an employment offer, and attempted religious proselytizing]. I had decided to be as honest as possible about my own life, and not avoid questions about my hometown and nationality, faith, age and marital status, and other information like my degree, plans for the future and suchlike. I presented myself in 'ethnic' attire to highlight my South Asian background while making sure that none of it identified me as belonging to a specific religion. Other researchers' experiences (Mitra 2003) had suggested that my gender would be non-threatening, and my experiences of interactions with older, South Asian men suggested that my age would be helpful to gain access. Both these assumptions were validated. Drivers were usually receptive when I approached them, and willing to participate after their curiosity about why I was doing such research was satisfied. Many older drivers from India and Pakistan were overtly indulgent, and called me 'beta' [child]. This was not the case with the Bangladeshi drivers and I think this is for two reasons. Firstly, the oldest Bangladeshi drivers were in their mid-forties so the age

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difference between us was not very great. Secondly, our conversations took place in English, and we were sometimes accompanied by a Bangladeshi graduate student who served as a translator, which might have hampered the development of familiarity.

The rapport between researcher and subjects is strikingly different in two different accounts of interactions with taxi drivers (Kumar 2010; Mathew 2005). While individual personalities do influence the development of trust and rapport, this striking difference can also be attributable to gender. Kumar (2010) and Mathew (2005), both male scholars of Indian origin teaching in American universities, were able to ride shotgun with drivers on night shifts, fraternize with them at their restaurants, and interact with them 'man to man.' Kumar (2010) was also able to observe driver-passenger interactions but Mathew (2005) reported disembarking from the vehicle when the driver found a paying passenger. Mitra (2003) also speaks of how her gender limited her access to taxi drivers in some ways yet enabled it in others. She mentions that some of her respondents, especially those without families in America, saw her as a confidant who provided "a female ear" (Mitra 2003: 23) and could sympathize with their trials and tribulations. In my case, as mentioned previously, gender did influence the interaction, but I was usually identified as a *younger* female, and not as a peer to be confided in. This could be due to personality differences as well as potentially differing ages of respondents and researchers. My South Asian identity did not noticeably hamper or help my interactions with non-South Asians who participated in the study. I believe they were interested in speaking with me because I was a graduate student with an academic interest in their occupation and political mobilization.

There was a significant differential in the social and cultural capital accessible to my respondents and to me. While the drivers earned more than I did, my English language ability and education marked me as different from them. One of the first drivers I had approached for an interview was visibly taken aback by my request, and said, self-deprecatingly, that he had nothing useful to say. When I tried to engage him in a conversation, he commented that he was surprised that 'people like me' would be interested in speaking with drivers. He explained, upon questioning, that by 'people like me' he meant *desis* who were students in American schools and spoke good English, and were probably engineers. Although he did not participate in the study, his response is worth noting. I had initiated this conversation while he was driving me to the airport [I was on my way to pick up a visiting scholar], and the plexi-glass partition between driver and passenger divided us in more ways than one. His wariness reminded me of some undergraduate students' discussion had about class differences within the South Asian diaspora. The overwhelming consensus was that class differences, more than religious or linguistic differences, separated them from other *desis*. Hodges (2007) notes that sharing the same physical space gave taxi drivers in the early 20th century New York City the chance to mingle with members of the middle-class that they aspired to join. During my own interactions with drivers, I strove to highlight aspects of my own life in the United States that were overtly similar to theirs, such as limited income, distance from family, and adjustment to an unfamiliar culture. Additionally, I was careful to speak with drivers outside the space of the taxi, and not sit in the passenger seat when conversing with potential or actual research subjects. I attempted, on four separate occasions, to conduct an interview sitting in the front seat next to the driver but the interaction was invariably

stilted and awkward for both parties. I stopped suggesting it, and no driver himself offered to conduct interviews in the front seats. Perhaps it reinforced our passenger-driver roles; perhaps my gender and marital status (single) complicated it further. Mathew (2005) reports sitting next to the driver and driving around during night-shifts; this was not a real possibility for me. Finally, I also believe that my volunteer work with other immigrant drivers and our friendly interactions, which were witnessed by some of my South Asian respondents, might have positively influenced drivers' rapport with me.

In short, I tried to highlight what was common between us without hiding or lying about what might not be. The only information I chose to lie about was my atheism. When asked, I told drivers that my parents had raised me as a Hindu. Some South Asian drivers' familiarity could be mildly bothersome at times. I received unsolicited advice on how important it was to marry, on caring for my parents, and on how I had chosen the wrong profession if I only expected to make x amount of money. But, by and large, my gender, our common *desi* background, and my comfort in Hindi and Urdu assisted me during data collection.

The study does have some limitations. The use of snowball sampling risks exaggerating the cohesiveness and influence of social networks. However, I tried to diversify the ways and contacts through which I recruited research subjects to mitigate that risk to some extent. Further, the data showed [and will be discussed in later chapters], that while social networks did enable political mobilization, there was significant friction within social groups that belied the idea of a harmonious and organic immigrant social network. Snowball sampling does not automatically generate a representative sample. As my data shows, I interviewed unequal numbers of Indians,

Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. My attempts to contact equal numbers of drivers from all three countries were not successful. Conversations with drivers and organizers revealed a common perception: Immigrant and native-born drivers seemed to believe that Indian drivers were the largest in number. There was no consensus on whether Pakistanis or Bangladeshis were more numerous. I actively asked respondents to rank the three nationalities in terms of their numbers, and consistently received the same ranking: Indians were always ranked first, and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis alternated between second and third place. There is no way to validate these rankings, so although I tried to ensure an equal proportion of participants of all nationalities, the actual proportions of the participants (43% Indian, 30% Pakistani, 27% Bangladeshi) are reasonably representative of their proportion in the taxicab industry.

Another potential limitation was the diversity of languages used within the sample population. My fluency in Hindi and Urdu greatly assisted in data collection of the majority of the research subjects who spoke at least one of these two languages. However, my lack of knowledge of Bangla likely handicapped my interviews with Bangladeshi drivers. While I received very reliable help from a doctoral student and a driver-organizer who were both fluent in Bangla and English, it would have been better if I had known the language myself. Finally, my Punjabi language skills enabled limited conversations with Punjabi-speaking drivers (the overwhelming majority of whom also spoke either Hindi or Urdu). I was able to converse if they spoke slowly but, having knowledge of standardized Punjabi, I was unable to comprehend their regional dialects when they spoke quickly with me or with each other. Again, fluency in all four of these languages would have greatly enriched this research project.

However, despite these legitimate limitations, the study does provide information about and insight into the political mobilization of South Asian immigrant taxi drivers. This case study contributes to studies on the use of social networks, the growing collaboration between unions and immigrant labor, and corrects, in a small way, the hitherto skewed focus on professional South Asian immigrants' lives in the United States. The next chapter will detail the history and development of the taxicab industry, and discuss its constituents: the government, license owners, and lease drivers.

Chapter 2 – The Taxicab Industry

"Taxi work has traditionally attracted immigrants, students and free spirits.
…Taxi drivers are the most independent people around."
-        Alfred B. LeGasse, Executive Director, International Taxicab Association
(Saffron 1986)

"All [taxi drivers] are immigrants who, like generations of cabbies before them,
see taxi driving as a poor man's gateway to mainstream America" (Dao 1992).

These statements, which appeared in newspapers articles in the late 1980s and early 1990s, are still significantly true twenty years later. The taxicab industry is widely considered an immigrant niche, and an overwhelming majority of the drivers in the United States are first-generation immigrants. In fact, most of the earliest drivers of commercial horse-carriages in New York City were African Americans [New York allowed African Americans to apply for driver's licenses by the early 19th century]. By 1840, newly-arrived immigrants [at first, from Ireland] began to take over the trade. This phenomenon "established a tradition of entering immigrant groups viewing hacking [the use of a vehicle as commercial transport] as a viable income and a significant step up the ladder of economic mobility" (Hodges 2007:12).

While contemporary taxi work does bestow a veneer of independence on the driver, in that s/he works for himself, this independence does not guarantee significant upward socio-economic mobility. In fact, given the structure of the taxicab industry and the prevailing medallion system of licensure, which place disproportionate burdens on one of the stakeholders in the industry (the lease drivers), and the consequences born by

drivers (long hours, unsafe working conditions, and low take-home income), most taxi drivers [immigrant or not] barely make living wages.

This chapter will discuss the history and structure of the taxicab industry, the 'medallion system' in Philadelphia and the various stakeholders that constitute this system. The following chapter will focus on one group of stakeholders --- the immigrant taxi workers --- who are the most numerous and least powerful group in the medallion system.

The history and structure of the taxicab industry

The late nineteenth century saw rapid industrialization and urbanization in America, particularly along the railroads in the Northeast and Midwest. Larger cities, growing populations (partly due to due to immigration from Europe and domestic rural-urban migration), and a bigger middle-class fueled the need for a more accessible system of transportation. More people now needed to travel for both work and leisure. Those city-dwellers who could not afford to keep their own horse and carriage began hiring them, and hiring 'hackney coaches' soon became common practice in all the major cities in nineteenth-century America.

There are very few academic studies on the American taxicab industry and its workers, and those that exist have focused almost exclusively on New York City. Historians such as Hodges (2007) and Vidich (1976) have recorded the growth of the taxicab industry in nineteenth century New York City and traced its development up to the mid-twentieth century, including the varying levels of unionization of taxi workers.

Both these scholars discuss the medallion and leasing system of taxi driving that was first instituted in New York City in 1937. They note that the 1930s and 1940s saw union activity in the fast-growing industry: The Depression and Prohibition both drew men to the taxicab industry when they lost their original jobs, and tried to make a living from a relatively unregulated industry. Those men who did not enlist during World War II earned a good living in New York City where private automobile ownership was limited. The 1960s and 1970s saw the increased use of gypsy cabs (especially in the outer boroughs), as well a noticeable increase in racial tensions between driver and passenger. Hodges, himself a taxi driver in the 1970s, further notes that the 1980s onwards saw an influx of non-white immigrants into the taxicab industry, the entrenchment of the leasing system of taxi driving, and the withdrawal of national unions from the industry. He also discusses the cinematic and literary representations of taxi drivers throughout the twentieth century, and the attempts of the New York Taxi Workers' Alliance to organize for better working conditions from the 1990s onwards. Both Hodges (2007) and Vidich (1976) have produced rich and detailed historical studies of the taxicab industry, its rules and regulations, and the individual drivers who make up the industry.

Gambetta and Hamill (2005) have conducted a sociological analysis (using participant observation and interviews) of how drivers in New York City and Belfast, Northern Ireland calculate the trustworthiness of their passengers. Drivers in both cities need to gauge whether the person hailing the taxi is a legitimate customer or a mimic of a customer who intends to rob or somehow harm the driver. Drivers assess the trustworthiness (genuine or mimic) of customers with the help of "signaling theory."

Drivers' 'street wisdom' is based on the factual data about the customer (age, gender, race, outward signs of sectarian identity and suchlike) as well as their social knowledge (of groups, areas, crime and suchlike). This information in the form of 'signs' and 'cues,' allows them to calculate the customers' trustworthiness. Schaller (2004) has produced reports on taxicab drivers in New York City and the rules and regulations of the Taxi and Limousine Commission for use by policy planners. Mitra (2003), as discussed in the previous chapter, has conducted a sociological analysis of the community networks of Punjabi American drivers in New York City to analyze the formation of immigrant niches in the industry, and Mathew (2005), also discussed in the previous chapter, has recorded the mobilization of taxi workers in New York City in the late 1990s.

Hodges (2007) and Vidich (1976) tell us that in 1907, Harry N. Allen, a New York businessman, imported sixty-five gasoline-powered and metered Darracq cabs, or 'taxis,' from France. Sensing that the growing middle-class was annoyed with the limited modes of transportation available to it, and personally angered by arbitrary and extortionist fares charged by horse-drawn cabs, Allen gathered eight million dollars from French, English and American industrialists and businessmen and founded the New York Taxicab Company. Men who drove Allen's taxicabs were fulltime employees, and were rewarded for good service with a pension fund as well as personal gifts, such as gold watches. By mid-1908, barely a year into service, Allen's employees went on strike, claiming that their costs [gasoline, vehicle maintenance and renting the uniform Allen insisted they wear] far exceeded their earnings, which averaged a dollar a day. They joined the Teamsters Union to negotiate a fairer payment structure. Negotiations broke down, however, and the Teamsters Union abandoned the strike. Allen won a Pyrrhic

victory. Though the battered and disillusioned drivers returned to work within a month (to a payment structure no better than before the strike), the legal costs of the strike bankrupted his business. The first taxicab fleet had failed but others rose to take its place. A mere three years later, by 1910, the use of hackney coaches [horse carriages] had begun to die out, and taxis became more popular.

In the early twentieth century, 'taxi men' could be one of two kinds of drivers: The first, a *fleet*-driver, who was employed by one taxicab company at a time, could pick up fares at that particular company's private 'hack stand,' and who was often a union member. In fact, many attempts were made to unionize fleet-drivers, and there were just as many attempts to break their fledgling labor unions. The second kind of driver was an independent driver or 'owner-driver' [or 'owner-operator' in contemporary parlance] who was self-employed, not allowed at these private hack stands, and not usually a member of any labor union. Independent drivers found it harder to make a decent living than did fleet-drivers, and took every opportunity to beat the system. For example, they posted fake 'union' signs on their vehicles during a fleet-driver strike in 1911, and did very good business while fleet-drivers languished. Their occasionally successful attempts to outwit the taxi companies notwithstanding, the structure of the industry favored fleet-drivers and the odds were stacked against independent drivers.

This changed in 1913 when New York City's government decided to disband fleet-owners' private hack stands, and make all hack stands public property. Now, all taxicab drivers could solicit fares at any stand. This was a fundamental change to the structure of the industry. Fleet-owners did not accept this change quietly, and many

employed thugs to scare away independent drivers from the hack stands. But their resistance was temporary and, in the long-term, futile. Now that the single-biggest benefit of being a fleet-driver no longer existed [exclusive access to hack stands], men aspired and were able to invest in their own vehicles and become independent drivers. This ostensibly gave the drivers control over their means of employment. They were 'their own boss' and could own their own vehicle. This led to a greater number of owner-operator taxis on the streets, and greater competition amongst drivers for fares. Thus, during the early 1920s, most independent drivers [close to seventeen thousand in New York City; close to three thousand in Philadelphia] were engaged in a cutthroat competition for fares: for example in New York City they flew variously colored flags on their vehicles, signifying different rates, physically fought other drivers at hack stands, and drove recklessly. The situation only worsened during The Great Depression, when independent and fleet-drivers and fleets were forced to use whichever strategy they could to survive.

The newly-forming taxicab industry was in exceptional turmoil during these years. Drivers had gained a reputation of notoriety from the days of hackney coaches: They were commonly considered petty criminals who cheated their customers and enabled "nocturnal vice" (Hodges 2007: 21). Now, more men were taking up taxi-driving; some of these were petty criminals and ex-convicts, and some used taxis to commit minor crimes and felonies. Vehicles used as taxicabs were often in varying stages of disrepair. Fewer drivers were joining fleets [as employees] and unions [as dues-paying members], preferring instead to strike out on their own as independent drivers. Fleet-

owners continued trying to extract the maximum amount of labor from their fast-depleting fleets of drivers by cutting drivers' commissions and insisting on discounted fares for passengers. These newer conditions did nothing to improve the perception of the occupation. And yet, the daily interaction in the space of the taxicab between elegant middle-class residents and poorer, recently-arrived immigrants, further entrenched its reputation as an entry-level occupation that would lead to assimilation into the American mainstream. Nobody questioned the necessity of taxicabs. The only question was how to improve taxicab service.

The New York City government was the first local government to attempt regulation of the industry. They focused on establishing specific standards for driver qualifications and vehicle quality, and were less interested in acknowledging or accommodating the needs of the drivers themselves. Their next step [after disbanding private hack stands] was to try to limit the supply of 'wildcat' taxicabs [called 'gypsy' taxicabs in Philadelphia] on the streets, leading to the passing of the Haas Act of 1937, which was signed by then Mayor LaGuardia. New York Alderman Lew Haas proposed instituting a new system to limit and regulate the number of taxicabs (Hodges 2007; Mathew 2005; Vidich 1976). Each taxicab would have to apply for a license, called a 'medallion,' which was priced at ten dollars. Each fleet-owner was assigned a fixed number of medallions, and independent drivers received one, too. In fact, the Haas Act mandated that 42% of all cabs be owned by independent drivers. New York City was allowed 13,595 medallions but the woes of the Depression brought the number down to 11,787 as drivers voluntarily, unable to keep up with medallion fee payments, returned their medallions to the City. The Haas Act of 1937 is important because it laid the

groundwork for a 'medallion system' of taxicab licensing and regulation, which was adopted over time by most major North American cities, including Philadelphia. This medallion system is still in existence today. There is no serious historical study of the industry in Philadelphia, so information must be gleaned from legislative records, newspaper archives and industry publications, and interviews with current and retired taxi workers and other stakeholders in the industry.

The taxicab industry in Philadelphia

As New York City began experimenting with the medallion system, the taxi industry in Philadelphia was several decades behind, with several millions fewer residents, and several thousand fewer taxicabs. The Yellow Cab Company was the first taxicab company in Philadelphia. It maintained a large fleet of yellow cars [so chosen because the color was said to be most visible from a distance] and retained uniformed drivers on commission, providing them with employee benefits like health insurance and workers' compensation. [It provided these benefits through the early 1980s]. These working conditions and their large well-maintained fleet attracted drivers as well as passengers, and allowed the company to establish a near monopoly on taxi service in the city.

In the early twentieth century, in Philadelphia just like in New York City, unionized fleet-drivers were fighting independent drivers, and engaging in strikes and strike-breaking, respectively, in order to establish dominance over a bloated and struggling industry. These fights were often violent during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Newspapers reported instances of bombs being placed in taxis in 1920

("Two Bombs Wreck," 1920), and of strikers burning taxis and physically attacking drivers ("Strikers Renew Violence," 1934). Strikes were frequently called ("Unions Quit Strike," 1933) and eventually resolved ("Taxi Strike Settled," 1934) during this time (Ibid.). Bigger companies from outside the city, such as Ford Motor Company, tried to enter the Philadelphia market and run cut-rate cabs [heavily discounted fares]. The companies were not successful, however, because they were deemed by the courts to be "inimical to public interest" ("Philadelphia Cut Rate," 1930: 13). The courts feared that cut-rate taxis could cause a taxi war and hurt both the big companies already operating in Philadelphia as well as the independent drivers who would not be able to match the heavily-reduced fares offered by richer companies.

On August 15, 1938, things came to a head when the American Federation of Labor Taxi Drivers Union, representing Yellow Cab Company's fleet-drivers, went on strike, demanding a minimum weekly pay of $30 [up from $18 under the old contract] and a greater share of commissions ("Philadelphia Strike Ties," 1938). This took 450 taxicabs and 1000 drivers off the streets, and should have paved the way for the 100 independent drivers to make extra money. But the union warned the independents to "get off the streets before we tear your cabs apart," ("Terrorism Laid to Taxis," 1938: 28) and though the independent drivers complained about "terroristic tactics," they complied (Ibid.). This left the two million residents of the city completely stranded without a single metered and licensed taxi for 18 hours. Newspapers continued reporting on residents having to use illegal cabs or "trolley it or walk" ("Philadelphia Walks," 1938: 21) as the strike continued, and Mayor Wilson tried to mediate between the company and union

when the strike stretched into October ("Tries to End Strike," 1938: 4) and ended late that year.

Unions continued to campaign for better wages over the course of the next two decades, often resorting to strikes to force companies to meet their demands ("Philadelphia Cab Drivers," 1973: 17). The city of Philadelphia suffered and grumbled but not much changed in the industry. It was relatively easy to become a taxi driver in those days because there was little to no regulation of the industry. A prospective driver did not have to undergo any background check or worry about clearing unpaid tickets, or take classes on driver education or local neighborhoods or geographies. Despite the relative ease of entry into the industry, the city experienced an acute shortage of taxicabs. At a public hearing about the taxicab industry, the Public Utilities Commission, the regulatory authority, heard testimonies from would-be passengers about the unsatisfactory service. A kidney clinic reported 16 unanswered calls in a week for taxicabs, and the President of Yellow Cab Company admitted that 10% of all calls went answered. The shortage was worsened by the State Legislature's long-standing 'proof of need' law, which forbade the government from granting the city new licenses unless a clear need was explicitly established. Vested interests in the industry ruthlessly maneuvered to maintain the status quo because the existing taxicab companies and their drivers did not want more competition for fares. They were already competing with unlicensed gypsy taxicabs for fares, and did not want to compete with freshly-licensed taxicabs, too. Even when the 'proof of need' law was finally struck down in the early 1970s, Yellow Cab Company [and its fleet of drivers] along with the United Cab

Association, a union of 225 independent licensed drivers, threatened to swamp the courts in litigation in order to continue the status quo. Later, the medallion system skewed the financial and bargaining power against drivers and concentrated it in the hands of medallion owners and regulatory bodies.] By 1979, Philadelphia's taxi service had the dubious reputation of being the worst in any American city, and was one of the major reasons the Democratic National Convention organizers overlooked the city when choosing a site for their 1980 Convention ("Philadelphia's Taxi Service," 1979: 12). Yellow Cab Company employed 1600 drivers at its peak in 1958 but was now mired in financial struggles, and could only operate 400 taxicabs despite owning 800 licenses. It defaulted on pension payments to its employees, and auctioned off its assets due to bankruptcy that year. Much to the relief of drivers and Philadelphia's residents, Checker Motor Company, already running large fleets in Chicago and Pittsburgh, entered the market. It promised to establish a fleet of 600 taxicabs and sell 200 licenses *to whoever wished to purchase them* ("Sale of Philadelphia Cab," 1981: 58). With more licenses available, Philadelphia's taxi drivers gradually moved to independent driving, and over the 1970s and 1980s, taxi workers' unions began to fade away. Residents, in the meantime, made do either with unsafe, unlicensed but readily available gypsy cabs or licensed but hard-to-find taxicabs. By the 1990s, residents as well as owners of the city's 1,500 licensed taxicabs were voicing regular complaints about the loosely regulated industry, which still tolerated unlicensed or 'gypsy' or illegal taxicabs. These taxicabs were notorious as unsafe, unmetered vehicles, and their drivers charged passengers arbitrary fares as they brazenly plied the streets. There were up to 200 such taxicabs in Philadelphia in 1990.

The city government finally responded to the complaints and instituted the contemporary medallion system of licensing in July 1990. Now each taxicab had to have a special license, a 'medallion,' and was subject to annual inspections and standards. By December 30, 1990, all taxicabs plying on the streets would have to show a medallion and proof of inspection or receive a citation. The medallion cost $1,225 in 1990 and had to be displayed on the vehicle's hood so that all passengers could see it and be reassured of the vehicle's safety and legality. The state government of Pennsylvania's Legislative and Finance Committee Report (2001) as well as the current regulatory authority's [PPA] publicly available records show that the State planned to use money collected from the sale of medallions to fund the Philadelphia Police Department [PPD], and that the PPD would be involved in the day-to-day regulation of taxicabs. A special 14-member squad of police officers was designated with checking and fining taxicabs for problems like balding tires and broken windshields. Government officials were also planning driver certification tests which included an examination on traffic laws and Philadelphia landmarks. The first version of this test was administered in November 1992. The Report recommended that taxicabs operating outside the city, which were allowed to operate without medallions, should also be held to the same standards as medallion taxicabs. They should be required to register with regulatory bodies, use inspected and certified vehicles, and their drivers would have to undergo criminal and background checks.

Over time, the medallion system was as well entrenched in Philadelphia as it was in New York City and the taxicab industry in Philadelphia in 2012 is one of the largest in the country. It comprises of thirteen dispatch or taxicab companies, 1600 'medallion'

taxicabs, 200 'partial-rights' and non-medallion taxicabs, and approximately 5000 'hack licensees' or drivers. The next section will discuss the specifics of this medallion system: broadly, the structure and workings of the medallion system of licensure, the costs of operation, the stakeholders, and their relationship to each other. An understanding of this structure will lay the foundation for understanding why and how taxi workers began agitating for better working conditions and earnings.

The current medallion system

The Pennsylvania State Code defines a medallion as "a piece of metal in the shape and with a color to be determined by the [regulatory authority] which is to be affixed to a vehicle by Authority Staff before that vehicle may provide citywide taxicab service" (PA Code, 2011). The medallion, which may be owned by an individual or a corporation, also known as a 'financing company', allows the use of a vehicle as a taxicab. [Governmental regulatory authorities determine which vehicles may be equipped with medallions to be used as taxicabs. These governmental authorities will be discussed shortly.] Thus, in essence, the medallion system effectively separates the *ownership* of a vehicle from the *authorization to operate it as a taxi* on the streets. Further, a medallion attached to a vehicle merely permits the use of that *vehicle* as a taxicab; it does not grant *any individual person* the permission to drive that vehicle as a taxi. That permission must be obtained from Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation, which issues a commercial driver's license. Thus, there are a few different stakeholders within the system so far: the medallion owner, the vehicle owner, and the driver. These will be discussed shortly.

The government (both city and state) is another stakeholder in the industry. The state government in Harrisburg determines the total number of licensed taxicabs in any given city in Pennsylvania, and authorizes each city to establish an agency to regulate the taxicab industry. This agency's rules, regulations and budget must be approved by the State Legislature. Up to 2005, the taxicab and limousine industry [this dissertation will focus only on taxicabs] was regulated by the Public Utilities Commission [henceforth, PUC], which oversees other service providers like PECO (electric power) and Philadelphia Gas Works to this day. The Pennsylvania State Code's Act 94 of 2004 transferred oversight to the Philadelphia Parking Authority [henceforth, PPA], a quasi-independent administrative agency, which officially took over from the PUC on April 10, 2005. The Governor of Pennsylvania appoints the majority of the PPA's Board members.

The city of Philadelphia had created the PPA on January 11, 1950 in accordance with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Parking Authority Law, Act of June 5, 1947. Documents made available by the PPA state that the scope and complexity of its responsibilities have increased over the years. Originally charged with providing various aspects of on-street and off-street parking services in the city for its residents, businesses and visitors, their portfolio was expanded in 1983 to include, among other things, issuance of parking tickets and parking meter collections. In 2004, the City also charged the PPA with regulating taxicabs and limousines operating in Philadelphia. This dissertation will limit itself to discussing this particular responsibility (of regulating taxicabs).

The State government instituted the medallion system in Philadelphia in 1990 with 1000 medallions priced at $1,225 each. Their number was increased to 1600 in 1999, and there has been no increase in the number of medallions since then. A medallion is notoriously expensive and cost approximately $50,000 each in 1999. The fixed number of medallions assigned to the City coupled with the growing demand for public transport made the price of each medallion skyrocket over the years. By 2001, their price rose to between $85,000 and $90,000 and made them unaffordable for most individual drivers. The next significant spike in their price occurred around 2006 when the entrance of a new and rich dispatch company, and its aggressive hunt for medallions to establish and expand its fleet of taxicabs, more than doubled the price of a medallion. In 2007, they were valued at $170,000 to $180,000. The price rose to $220,000 in 2010, and the PA State Senate Appropriations Committee Fiscal Note (2012) mentions that medallion prices today hover around $400,000, which is almost double of what they cost two years ago. The astronomical price of each medallion is an effective barrier to entry into the taxicab industry, a fact which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The PPA earns a monthly rental fee from each medallion, which is to be paid by the medallion owner. The owner may use the medallion to operate his/her own taxicab or may lease it to another driver. (The PPA loosely regulates these lease rates.) As will be described later in the chapter, given how prohibitively expensive each medallion is, most are owned by a few very rich individuals or companies.

The PA State Code states in Chapter 30 (adopted 1991) that only the Enforcement Department of the city's regulatory authorities [at first the PUC and now the PPA] may

attach a medallion to a vehicle. While medallion owners may remove a medallion from a vehicle after receiving written approval from the PPA to do the same, it must be handed over to the PPA for safekeeping within two business days of removal. Chapter 1013 of the Code, which discusses Medallions, notes that the PPA stores all medallions that are not attached to vehicles. Medallion owners pay a monthly fee to the PPA for the safekeeping, which was set at $1,250 per month in July 2010, and is scheduled for an increase to $1,500 in the 2012-13 budget. The medallion itself does not require any renewal. It may be sold or transferred with written advance approval from and under the supervision of the PPA. There is a nonrefundable fee to be paid to the PPA to transfer ownership of a medallion. Under the PUC, the transfer fee was $350. In 2008, the PPA charged $750 or 1% of the purchase price, whichever was greater. The current fee is $2,000 or 2% of the medallion price, whichever is greater. To give an idea of how much revenue each transfer accrues to the PPA: Approximately 20 medallions are transferred each month. At 2% of the medallion price ($400,000), the PPA earns $160,000 per month just from 'Medallion Ownership Transfer Fees.' Incidentally, the PPA has requested that this fee be increased to 5% of the medallion price in its 2012-13 budget proposal, and documents made available by the PPA show that medallion owners have formally lodged strong protests against this request.

The PPA also requested the State Legislature to increase the total number of medallions from its current number of 1600 to 1750, and asked that the PPA be allowed to add up to 15 medallions to its fleet each year till the approved total of 1750 is reached. The PA State House Bill Code 2390 records that the new medallions would be sold to the

highest bidder and the auction would be advertised and announced in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, which is a weekly State government-issued publication that lists changes to rules and regulations.

Medallion sales and purchases are now a highly-regulated and brokered affair. Commercial banks are not involved in the financing of medallions. There are firms that specialize in the brokering of medallion sales, and the largest such firm in the United States is listed on New York Stock Exchange: Medallion Financial Corp., a New York-based firm. Its founders first began investing in medallions in 1937, when the medallion was first introduced in New York City, and now base the core of their financial enterprise [worth billions in 2009] on the ever-increasing value of medallions (Medallion Financing Corporation, 2009). Apart from bigger, multi-city owners, each local market has multiple medallion brokers who finance medallion sales, and most buyers and sellers (whether individual or corporate) use a broker's services. One local broker provided these recent sale prices:

Table 2.1: Recent medallion prices in Philadelphia

Date of Sale	Price
02/08/2012	$392,000
02/18/2012	$395,000
02/25/2012	$393,000
03/15/2012	$398,000
03/15/2012	$398,000
04/15/2012	$400,000
05/17/2012	$398,000
05/17/2012	$398,000

Source: Medallion Financing Corporation

This steep rise in medallion prices is not limited to Philadelphia. Figure 1 shows the medallion prices for New York City, the largest and most expensive medallion market in the United States, as listed by a credit research firm based in New York City (Credit Finance Risk Analysis, 2011).
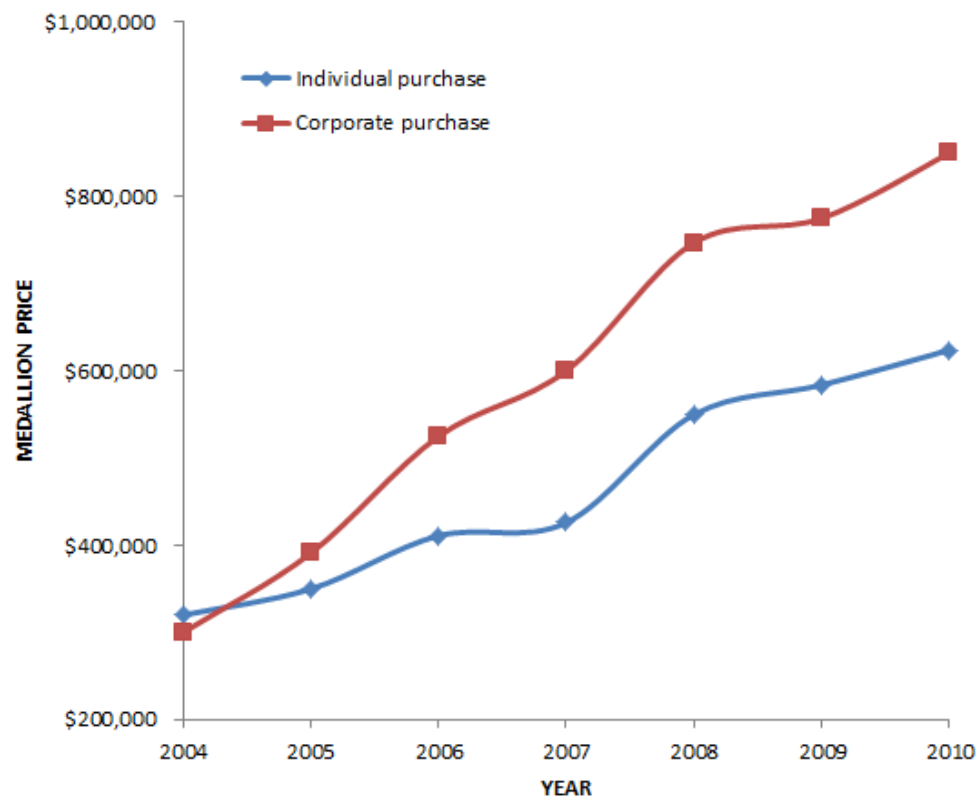
Figure 2.1: Medallion prices in New York City

Thus, medallion owner, another stakeholder in the system, can be thought of as an investor: someone with the financial capital to purchase and maintain a medallion [maintenance in this case involves paying the PPA the monthly fee and other fees as necessary, for example to transfer or sell a medallion]. Some laws restrict the number of medallions that can be owned by an entity: For example, New York City's Taxi and

Limousine Commission requires that 37% of its medallions must be owned by individuals and not corporations (Mathew 2005). However, there is no specific provision for or against this in Philadelphia. To give an idea of the extent of concentration, newspaper reports, taxicab company records and interviews with drivers suggest that Victory Cab's owners own 66 medallions (Brubaker 2006) and Checker Cab's owners own 40 medallions (diStefano 2003), and PHL Taxi's owners own anything between 130 to 200 medallions. These three companies cumulatively account for a quarter of all available medallions. In fact, organizers from taxi workers alliances estimate that close to 40% of all medallions are owned by entities (like dispatch companies)_ who own ten or more medallions each. The remaining 60% are owned by different entities, including individuals. Medallion owners in Philadelphia have a trade association, the Greater Philadelphia Taxi Association, which lobbies the PPA for their own interests.

Medallion owners possess a steady means of investment income, and drivers have narrated anecdotes about medallion owners vacationing abroad. The PPA regularly receives sizable sums as transfer fees, monthly fees, and fines from the medallion owners. Regardless of the veracity of the specifics about medallion owners' vacations, what is unquestionable is that none of these revenues benefit taxicab owners or taxicab drivers. Thus, "[the] medallion is an expensive piece of private property …used today to deny workers a decent living, though at its inception, it was intended to regulate the industry and ensure some protection to the workers" (Mathew 2005: 49).

As suggested previously, many medallions are owned by taxicab companies or dispatch companies. Thus, these dispatch companies are another major stakeholder (after

the government and medallion owners) in the medallion system. Since 2005, the PPA has regulated medallion taxicabs operating within Philadelphia as well as to and from Philadelphia. The major dispatchers in the city are All City Taxi, Capital Dispatch Incorporated, Checker Cab Company, City Cab Company, Crescent Cab Company, Liberty Cab Company, Olde City Taxi, Philadelphia Taxi, Quaker City Cab, United Cab Company, Victory Dispatch, and Yellow Cab Company. The PUC continues to regulate medallion taxicabs that operate between locations outside Philadelphia. There are also some 'partial rights' and non-medallion taxicabs operating within select areas in Philadelphia as well as between locations outside Philadelphia. These are Bennett Cab Service, Concord Coach Taxi, Bucks County Services, Penn-Del Cab, and Germantown Cab Company. These companies are under PPA oversight when they are providing services in PPA-authorized vehicles within, to and from Philadelphia. These taxicabs fall under PUC oversight when operating between locations outside Philadelphia. Essentially, they have limitations on which areas they can serve. Anecdotal evidence suggests that gypsy cabs still operate in some parts of Philadelphia (North Philadelphia, Germantown, and the lower Northeast), particularly in immigrant neighborhoods, and it is very likely that these drivers are even more vulnerable and disenfranchised than lease drivers.

To operate a taxicab company or a dispatch company, Chapter 1019 in the PA State Code requires the following:

- Control a radio frequency of sufficient strength to transmit and receive real time verbal communication and data throughout Philadelphia.
- Respond to customer calls and have taxicabs available for dispatch 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- Obtain the PPA's confirmation of a taxicab's good standing before commencing to provide it with dispatching service.
- Have a minimum of four coordinated telephone lines to receive incoming calls for service from the public.
- Operate and maintain a taxicab meter system approved by the PPA.
- A dispatcher may not discriminate against nor allow its affiliated drivers to discriminate against any member of the public and may not refuse service to any section of Philadelphia. Partial-rights taxicabs may only be dispatched to provide service consistent with the certificate holder's rights.
- A dispatcher shall be able to receive and respond to emergency or distress alerts received from taxicab drivers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Dispatch companies are also regulated by the city - first by the PUC, and now by the PPA. They are not legally required to own the medallions and taxicabs in their fleet but they do for two reasons. One, the medallion is a lucrative investment with long-term benefits. And two, the law requires that each medallion (regardless of who owns it) be affiliated with a dispatch company. Taxicabs must 'carry dispatch colors' of one company or the other; it is illegal to drive an unaffiliated vehicle (a 'gypsy' cab). Dispatch companies then charge a monthly radio fee to drivers who carry their colors and use their dispatch services. Thus, the above combination of market and law concentrates medallions in the hands of dispatch companies.

The bigger dispatch companies established accounts with various businesses in the city, such as law firms, financial firms and hospitals. All calls from the business would be placed to the chosen dispatch company, which would then advertise these 'corporate jobs' exclusively on their radio. Some businesses established voucher payments and did not require the individual passenger to pay [and tip] the drivers. These vouchers were highly coveted because all the money went to the driver, and the driver was not dependent on the generosity of the rider for his/her tips. [Over the years, some

companies, notably Quaker City, began charging the driver 10% of the voucher.] Thus, drivers joined companies that were reputed to have good corporate jobs because they provided more regular income. Some companies used the strength of their corporate accounts to charge the driver higher monthly fees. One company, Olde City, charged drivers a one-time fee of $100 (over and above the monthly fee) to be placed on a preferential list called "Code 500." If their cabs passed the special inspection, all long-distance corporate jobs would be given to these fee-paying drivers, and only offered on to others on the radio if the Code 500 drivers weren't available. Companies had other rules that were applicable to all drivers. Quaker City was famous for stringently enforcing their company rules: Drivers were expected to wait till the passenger entered his/her house, they had to check-in with the dispatcher to tell them when they had picked up their passenger (that they were "loaded) and when they had dropped them off (that they were "clear") (Chervenka 2012).

Some dispatch companies are known to choose a few trusted drivers as supervisors to manage the other drivers. These supervisors receive no tangible benefits for supervising. They pay the same leasing and radio fees as the other drivers but do sometimes receive the better long-distance or well-paying fares. Chervenka (2012) writes about one such driver, who worked as a dispatcher part-time and drove part-time. The owner trusted him enough to leave the company in the supervisor-driver's charge while he vacationed. The supervisor-driver was, in effect, the human resources manager of the company: he maintained good relationships with and among the lease drivers, tried to mediate disputes, and since he was also the dispatcher, he also shared the jobs and

maintained some discipline. Thus, the dispatcher plays an important role in the income-earning potential of a lease driver. He/she takes 'bids' on jobs on the radio, and offers a job to a driver based on his/her location, and relationship with the dispatcher. Many drivers reported bribing the dispatcher to get good jobs. Drivers are fined for infractions and their radio and dispatch services can be temporarily revoked as punishment. [Drivers sometimes get around this by asking friends for information on where to pick up fares.] In any case, the dispatch company and medallion owner can be one and the same.

So, the structure of the industry is such that the PPA regulates the industry and earns revenues via fees and fines. The medallion owner pays $1,250 per month to the PPA but collects money from those who lease the medallion. The dispatch company (which owns several medallions) also pays fees to the PPA but collects money from those who use their dispatch colors. This leaves the vehicle owners and drivers, the last remaining stakeholders in the medallion system. As the details of a driver's costs and earnings will show later in this chapter [see Table 2.2], the medallion system of operation is skewed against the average individual driver. The ramifications thereof will be discussed in the next chapter. Further, as the requirements to drive a taxicab will show, the regulatory authorities [PUC and PPA] continued to increase their scrutiny of drivers over time, while dispatch companies and medallions owners were left, relatively, to themselves.

The requirements to start and continue driving a taxicab in Philadelphia were first formulated in the 1990s, and have been modified and added to over the years. In the early 1990s, PUC Enforcement Officers were charged with conducting inspections on the

drivers and vehicles to ensure that the newly-formulated regulations were met and "reasonable service" was being provided. A taxicab company failing to meet the PUC's standards was subject to fines and/or loss of its operating license. For example, a Driver's Certificate issued by the PUC was first required in 1992, as were tests on English language skills and information about Philadelphia (Belden 1983; Watson 1992), but air-conditioning in taxicabs was required in 1999. Penalties for failing to meet these standards were established in the early 1990s, but fines have increased over the years, particularly under the management of the PPA. For example, up to the end of their decades-long tenure in 2005, the PUC fined drivers $25 for not wearing a collared shirt; the PPA has increased the fine to $100 over seven years. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Under the PUC as well as the PPA, for a vehicle to provide commercial transportation within the city of Philadelphia, multiple requirements need to be met. A summary of the relevant sections of Chapter 1013 of the PA Code:

- The <u>medallion</u>, essentially a metal disc, must be attached to the hood of the vehicle.
- The owner of the vehicle must possess a current and valid <u>Medallion Taxicab Certificate</u>, which is attached to the medallion the taxicab is using, issued by the relevant regulatory authority [i.e. the PUC up to 2005, and the PPA after 2005]. If a medallion is leased to a driver who does not have also have the Certificate, the medallion itself may be revoked.
- The vehicle must be marked with the name of the taxicab company, as well as its <u>vehicle registration number</u>. This number is not the license number provided by PennDOT (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation). This is the number under which the medallion taxicab is listed with the relevant regulatory authority [the PUC number was preceded by "PUC A-" and the four-digit PPA number is preceded by "P-"].

- The driver of the vehicle must possess a current and valid driver's license [issued by PennDOT] and a Driver's Certificate [issued by the PUC or the PPA].
- The Driver's Certificate must be displayed on the protective shield of the taxicab on the driver's side, with the front of the certificate (driver's picture and information) visible to passengers in the rear seat.
- The Driver's Certificate can be permanently cancelled for serious infractions such as driving under the influence of alcohol or other substances, leaving the scene of an accident or driving with an invalid PennDOT driver's license.
- The Driver's Certificate is not transferrable and only one may be attached to a taxicab at any time.
- The driver must go through the required criminal and driving history checks, be over the age of 20, and must have documentation to prove work authorization or legal permanent residency and at least one year's continuous driving history in the United States.
- The driver is responsible for maintaining a copy of the Independent Contractor Agreement in the vehicle; this is the legal document which reaffirms the driver as a self-employed individual and not as an employee of the taxicab company or vehicle or medallion owner.
- The driver, vehicle and passengers must have insurance coverage. Taxicabs may not operate without a minimum of $15,000 in liability coverage.
- The meter must be sealed and not tampered with.
- The taxicab driver is responsible for maintaining a clean and presentable, neat taxicab and person and providing courteous service. These requirements are varied. Examples include maintaining a neat interior for the taxicab, maintaining low volumes for the radio, not wearing open-toed shoes or using a cellphone or Bluetooth device during service, and only wearing wear skirts when gender-appropriate.
- In terms of service-provision, a driver must take the shortest possible route to the destination; charge approved fares [based on flat rates, odometer mileage or according to zones approved by the PPA]; post such rates within the vehicle; and, provide a receipt upon request.
- A felony conviction within the last five years renders them ineligible to apply for any PPA certificates; an arrest or prosecution leading to conviction also renders an individual ineligible to apply for or renew PPA certificates but this may be waived upon appeal. The PPA looks at appeals on a case by case basis.
- No road test is required.
- A vehicle older than three years may not *enter* service as a commercial vehicle and it must *leave* commercial service upon accumulating either 250,000 miles or

eight years on the road, whichever comes first. It must also satisfy other safety regulations, and meet all PA equipment and inspection standards.

The drivers must get their commercial driver's licenses from PennDOT. All other authorizations or certificates are issued and renewed by the PPA: the medallion taxicab certificate, the taxicab driver certificate, the medallion broker's certificate, and the dispatcher's certificate. The PPA has 11 taxi inspectors to issue fines and regulate the day-to-day running of taxicabs. Warnings are rare; erring drivers are immediately penalized at the first infraction. Fines range from $100 to $5000. There are 'driver fines' (e.g. for not wearing a collared shirt or for talking on the cell phone while driving), which are paid by the driver; and, 'vehicle fines' (e.g. below-standard air-conditioning or an unclean interior), which are paid by the owner of the vehicle. If a driver refuses to accept a credit card payment, he is fined $150 and the medallion owner is fined $250. The $100 fines are for violations such as not wearing collared shirts or missing a hubcap or a dirty trunk or passenger seating area; for committing the same offense a second time, the driver is fined $225. For the third time, it is $350 and a possible suspension. The biggest fines ($5,000) are for violations like driving with a phony medallion or continuing to use a car that has crossed 250,000 miles.

The fines are only part of a driver's daily concerns; the entire medallion system rests on the backs of few thousand individual drivers in Philadelphia. According to estimates given by Mr. Ray Brown, organizer-member of the Taxi Workers' Alliance, there are approximately 5000 'hack licensees' in Philadelphia. These are individuals who drove a taxicab at some point or the other, and still possess a valid and current driver's certificate. Drivers are considered 'independent contractors,' and of these 5000

independent contractors, 3000 to 3200 currently drive full-time. These 3000 to 3200 drivers can be categorized on the basis of their ownership or leasing choices: owner-operators, vehicle-owners who rent medallions, and lease drivers who lease both vehicle and medallion.

An owner-operator is an individual who owns both the vehicle he drives as well as the medallion attached to it (which makes it a commercially-pliable taxicab). Only 300 to 350 taxicabs in the city are owner-operator vehicles. Of 1600 available medallions, less than 400 (25%) are owned by individual drivers; the overwhelming majority of the medallions are owned by dispatch companies. Of this small group of owner-operators, approximately 100 individuals fully own their medallions; the remaining number is in the process of paying for full ownership of their medallions. According to reports by taxicab alliances, close to 200 of those financing their medallions default on their payments and are unable to gain complete ownership. In such cases, they lose the medallion completely, including whatever payments they may have already made. Such instances have been recorded in New York City, too (Mathew 2005). Owner-operators are responsible for medallion fee payments to the PPA, insurance coverage for the vehicle and passengers, gasoline and maintenance of the taxicab.

Then there are the vehicle-owners. These are drivers who rent a medallion on a weekly basis and drive their own car. Approximately 400 such drivers rent medallions. They, as the owners of the vehicle, are responsible for the medallion rental fee and the maintenance of the vehicle. The owner is liable for any fines on the vehicle (such as broken lights or missing hubcaps) regardless of whether he/she or another driver is

actually driving when approached by a PPA inspector. And finally, there is a large group of drivers owning neither the medallion nor the vehicle they drive. These can be divided into two categories: weekly and daily shift drivers. Weekly shift drivers lease both medallion and vehicle on a weekly basis. A weekly shift driver may then drive himself at all times or share lease time [not the lease itself] with another driver. Around 300 to 350 taxicabs are leased out on a weekly basis. Daily shift drivers lease the vehicle and medallion for 12-hour shifts, either day shifts or night shifts, each with their own benefits and problems. This 12-hour lease can be made on a weekly basis or can be renewed each day. The shift driver (whether weekly or daily) is responsible for rental payments for the medallion and vehicle, insurance for himself, any traffic violations (but not fines for the condition of the vehicle), and gasoline. Taxi workers and organizers state that drivers in this category are increasing in number. These drivers struggle the most to make ends meet because of the pricing and payment structure (details follow) for this lease type.

During interviews with drivers and organizers, they made the point that it is more convenient to lease a car than it is to own and maintain one. However, they also said that in the long run, if they chose or had to remain in the taxi industry, they would prefer to own a taxi and/or a medallion and *lease it out to someone else*. Drivers report that their choices are determined by their financial ability. That is, if they have limited capital available to invest, then they have no choice but to lease [on a daily or weekly basis] both the medallion and the vehicle. Once they are able to, they purchase their own vehicle and then pay leasing fees to the medallion owner. However, this then burdens them with the costs of maintaining the vehicle. A majority of drivers stated that they would like to own

their medallion, and also realistically admitted that, given the price of a medallion, it was not possible.

Table 2.2: Cost structure for operating a taxicab in Philadelphia

Items	Cap (determined by PPA)	Market rate	Paid by	Paid to
Medallion fee	$1,250/month	$1,250/month	Medallion owner	PPA
Medallion lease without vehicle (24 hours)	$420/week	$350-400/week	Vehicle owner	Medallion owner
Medallion and vehicle lease (24 hours shift)	$570/week	$410-500/week	Certified Driver	Vehicle owner
Vehicle lease (12 hours)	$70/day	$50-60/day	Certified Driver	Vehicle owner
Dispatch company's radio fee	N.A.	$50-90/month	Vehicle owner	Dispatch cos. (varied)
GPS fee	N.A.	$18/month	Vehicle owner	GPS company (VTS)
Credit card fees	N.A.	10% of meter amount	Certified Driver	5% split between VTS & bank; 5% taken by dispatch co.

Source: Primary data

As the table shows, the costs of operating a taxicab fall overwhelmingly on drivers. The PPA has fixed the maximum rentals for each lease category for all medallion taxicabs but these are not strictly enforced, and respondents and organizers both reported that drivers were sometimes forced to pay more. These PPA-determined maximum rates are: (a) Weekly medallion rental: $420; (b) Weekly shift (24-hour): $570; and (c) Daily shift (12-hour) $70. While these are usually adhered to, respondents and members of the Taxi Workers' Alliance reported hearing some cases of immigrant drivers not knowing their legal rights and thus being charged higher rates by the taxi/medallion owners.

Drivers reported the amounts listed as 'market rates' and only one respondent reported paying a significantly lower amount. The dispatch company's radio fees vary from company to company. The older, better established companies charge more. All drivers interviewed unanimously agreed that Olde City was the biggest dispatch company in the city, and charged the highest radio fees.

Drivers who own neither the vehicle nor the medallion have to pay the owners of the vehicle and the medallion their leasing fees upfront, and then hope to do enough business to cover the fees and make money for themselves. The vehicle insurance and radio dispatch fee (both mandated by law) are often included in the lease when a driver is leasing a vehicle and a medallion. Drivers are also responsible for other operational costs such as gasoline and drivers' insurance. While the overall maintenance of the car is the responsibility of the owner of vehicle, drivers are often expected to contribute to maintenance costs. The PPA charges fees to transfer equipment from one vehicle to another, such as a $750 medallion transfer fee or a $300 GPS and credit processing machine transfer fees. In 1994, drivers began to pay $100 as an annual registration fee to maintain the dispatch system at the airport and $1.50 per trip as 'airport departure' or 'egress' fees for passengers picked up at the airport ("Taxi Fares Between," 1994). [State regulators allowed them to pass the $1.50 'airport departure' fee on to passengers ("This Ain't London," 1994).] Taxicab owners are legally required to affiliate with a radio-dispatch company and also pay for its radio services but drivers are also allowed to respond to 'street hails.' Dispatch companies who service corporate accounts can charge

drivers who pick up corporate customers a certain percentage of the fare. Such fees, drivers argue, make it difficult to enter a new taxicab in the market.

In terms of metered income, the PPA determined that the meter should start at $2.70, of which $1.25 is a fuel surcharge, and then increase by $0.23 every $1/10^{th}$ of a mile. The passenger may be charged an extra $2.75 to or from Philadelphia International Airport over and above the flat rate, which is $28.50. This is the 'airport departure' fee, which was $1.50 when first introduced in 1994. In Philadelphia, tolls must be paid by passengers.

In effect, every month, most drivers who own their vehicles pay up to $1600 for the medallion rental, close to $500 for gas (based on estimates provided by respondents in 2009), and up to $120 for their PPA-mandated GPS system and radio dispatch fees. They estimate that they spend a few hundred when they pay 5% of every credit card transaction of every paying passenger, and purchase the paper and ink to print receipts for passengers. Maintenance costs vary month to month as do accidental expenditures like injuries or time off (when they can't earn) or due to crises such as robberies. They work up to 12 hours a day and at least six days a week to make a profit to make a profit. A good shift involves toll-free fares, few cruising or waiting periods, and no PPA fines and can earn them up to $500 (about $100 after deducting expenses) with a little more on weekends and weeknights. Drivers usually refused to provide estimates of their annual incomes; a mere handful agreed to provide estimates of monthly incomes. These ranged from $1,500 to $3,000 (after deducting expenses related to lease driving).

The medallion taxicab driver as an independent contractor

The medallion system brought two profound changes to the taxicab industry. One, the medallion itself, which set up artificial barriers to entry. Two, and perhaps more importantly, it designated each driver as an 'independent contractor,' or a *self-employed* individual. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, independent contractors are not covered by employment, labor or related tax laws such as the National Labor Relations Act [NLRB] of 1935. Thus, their labor accrues neither social security nor Medicare benefits nor federal unemployment insurance, and they cannot unionize. Their marginalization is institutionalized because only 'employees' are allowed to vote in NLRB elections [or nominate persons to the board], so independent contractors do not have much influence over the organization set up to protect workers. Finally, the NLRB has been "virtually incapacitated by decades of employer manipulation" (Milkman 2006: 22). The construction industry provides a good example of the incapacitation of the NLRB. This is an industry which cannot be outsourced yet suffers from "the blight of subcontracting" (Milkman 2006: 92). In the early 1970s, increasing automation across industries meant that the construction industry, too, required fewer human workers. However, the NLRB's 1973 decision to allow 'double-breasted' firms seriously damaged workers' security within the residential construction industry. A double-breasted firm was one which hired both union and non-union subsidiaries. This, in effect, set up a battle between these two types of workers and the firms profited: Non-union subsidiaries consistently undercut unionized workers by offering lower prices, and unionized workers fought back by renegotiating their contracts and giving up hard-earned rights. This particular law of the NLRB paved the way for "the broader wave of concession

bargaining in basic industry that rippled across [the United States] in the 1980s" (Milkman 2006: 92). Before long, labor unions began leaving the residential construction industry, and employers began relying on labor barons, Latino entrepreneurs who "moved into the vacuum created by the union's collapse and began to recruit immigrant workers into the industry, drawing on extensive social and kinship networks in the immigrant community" (Milkman 2006: 95). Thus the policies of the NLRB indirectly contributed to the development of immigrant enclaves in non-unionized occupations.

In any case, in Philadelphia, the contract reaffirming a driver's independent contractor status is signed with the dispatch company, and since all taxi drivers are required by law to affiliate with a dispatch company, in effect, taxi drivers cannot escape being independent contractors. The Department of Labor (DOL) agrees that existing statutes do not provide a single standard by which to distinguish between independent contractors and employed individuals, and notes that businesses sometimes reclassify employees to avoid taxes, benefits, and liabilities. A 2009 DOL report claimed that up to 7.4% of the active labor force was misclassified as independent contractors.

The Internal Revenue Service uses a "20-factor test" to determine how much control a company exercises over the independent contractor. Simply put, the greater the degree of control, the likelier that the individual is an employee and consequently, the greater the company's tax liability. Ascertaining the degree of control, however, is an involved and ambiguous process. Most States use the "economic realities test" to determine workers' claims to workers compensation. That is, how dependent is the economic well-being of the individual upon the business that is contracting his services?

Courts have been known to use a combination of both these tests (20-factor test and economic realities test) to determine the status of the worker. A cautionary note: The plethora of tests [those listed above are only two commonly used] allows a worker to be classified as an employee under one law but an independent contractor under another. In fact, so rampant is the mislabeling of workers as independent contractors that the DOL website recently announced a program called the Misclassification Initiative, under the auspices of Vice President Joseph Biden's Middle Class Task Force, to standardize these definitions and prevent misclassification of workers across all industries.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics cites these employment and income figures for taxi drivers and chauffeurs in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area in May 2011: 3,390 individuals with an average annual income of $25,010. It must be noted that the Bureau's data does not distinguish between taxicab and limousine drivers. Their official designation for private (meaning owned by individuals) or corporate limousine drivers is 'chauffeurs.' In fact, in a nationwide comparison of the numbers of taxicab drivers and chauffeurs in metropolitan areas (according to data made available by the Bureau in May 2011) Philadelphia ranks seventh. Refer to Table 2.3.

However, these are all figures for *employees*, who are covered by the NLRA (1935), and do not include a single independent contractor, which is what the overwhelming majority of taxi drivers are. Comparing their mean wages to those of lease drivers shows a substantial difference in income. In Philadelphia, full-time taxicab and limousine drivers [usually those in private services, not public transport] earn $12.02 an hour.

Table 2.3: Metropolitan areas with highest employment levels in the taxicab industry

Metropolitan area	Employment	Hourly mean wage	Annual mean wage
New York-White Plains-Wayne, NY-NJ Metropolitan Division	10,300	$15.84	$32,950
Las Vegas-Paradise, NV	9,580	$15.60	$32,450
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL Metropolitan Division	5,050	$13.91	$28,930
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA NECTA Division	4,410	$12.96	$26,950
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA Metropolitan Division	4,210	$11.43	$23,770
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	3,770	$12.63	$26,260
Philadelphia, PA Metropolitan Division	3,390	$12.02	$25,010
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan Division	3,320	$15.39	$32,010
Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale, AZ	2,700	$12.12	$25,220

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011

Meanwhile, research conducted by the Taxi Workers Alliance shows that independent contractors make approximately $4.50 an hour. (Here, the term "full-time driver" refers to individuals who receive the benefits of a full-time employee.) Philadelphia is not an exception. To use two other examples of large American metropolises: New York City full-time drivers earn $15.84 per hour while lease drivers earn approximately $8.33 per hour. In Chicago, the numbers are $13.91 and $4.38, respectively. It is also interesting to note that, according to the 2000 Census, while immigrants made up only 7% of Philadelphia's workforce, they constituted 12% of *all self-employed workers*. While this categorization is entirely legitimate in many cases [family-owned and –run businesses like grocery stores or restaurants], it is not as clear in the case of taxi workers. This issue will be discussed in detail in later chapters as one of the important issues tackled by the taxi workers' alliance.

In fact, legislative data and employment figures suggest that the basic structure of the taxicab industry seems to have some common features across cities in the world (Bruno 2008; Hathiyani 2006; Khosa 1992; Reitz 2011; Schaller 2004). State governments or city-specific regulatory authorities issue a fixed number of licenses to ply vehicles commercially, licenses that are immensely valuable given the fact that the supply is limited (and slow changing if not entirely *un*changing) and the demand for transportation elastic (and usually growing). The license owner, the vehicle owner and the driver can be and often are three different entities. They are also subject to different sets of standards and regulations to maintain their respective legal documentation, and, as will be clear later, while responsibility for each is clearly delineated *legally*, in practice, the financial burden is borne overwhelmingly by individual drivers. Drivers of taxicabs may or may not own the vehicles they drive, and usually cannot afford the license that permits the commercial use of the vehicles. While the license itself is transferable, and while rates of vehicle ownership may vary, what remains largely unchanging is the rigid hierarchy and skewed resource allocation within the industry. A majority of drivers lease taxicabs and make minimum daily wages, and those who own their vehicles are slightly better off. Only license owners own any estimable financial capital. In fact, the medallion and leasing system make taxi driving "one of the few professions in the world where not only are you not guaranteed an income, but you might end a long twelve-hour workday losing the money you started with" (Mathew 2005: 49). Drivers must pay for the lease upfront so that they start their work day (or night, depending on the shift) already in debt. They must then spend their twelve hours earning fares, deduct the necessary gasoline

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costs as well as any fines incurred. They may return to their beds with less money than they started out with.

Drivers face other problems during their shifts, and these are crucial details about the workforce that drives, literally and metaphorically, the medallion system. The system of leasing (of a medallion and a vehicle) has divided the workday into two shifts of twelve hours each, and given the job security detailed earlier, drivers find that they have to work all or most of the shift to earn enough take-home income. Given that they spend a fixed amount in fees and rentals at the beginning of every day, and have no guarantee of how much they are going to earn, their net daily income averages out to just a little over half the State minimum wage. The problem is worsened by the high incidences of robberies, passengers running out without paying, and passengers who are no-shows on dispatch calls leaving.

Drivers unanimously stated that PPA instructors hit them with multiple fines at every opportunity. Once they were pulled over for one infraction, like a broken taillight, they often proceeded to examine the vehicle for other infractions and the fines pile up. While drivers can petition the PPA judge to challenge a fine, each petition requires a $100 deposit and unforeseen amounts of time, which takes away from the time they could spending earning fares. If dissatisfied with the PPA Court's ruling, drivers are allowed one retrial for a $146 fee. They reported that such fees for court hearings always dissuaded them from petitioning unless the amount fined was significantly greater than $200.

Apart from the low wages and potentially high fines, the long hours also cause problems. In interviews with respondents, as well as in published materials on taxicab industries in other cities (Mathew 2005; Mitra 2003; Schaller 2004), taxi workers regularly complain about the hours. Drivers usually drive at least six days a week and usually take up 12-hour shifts: that is 72 hours per week. An owner-operator [a driver who owns the vehicle he drives] often drives up to 18 hours a day if he cannot or does not want to lease his vehicle to another driver for a 12-hour shift. Daily shift drivers who have 12-hour leases have to return their vehicle to the next lease-driver at the end of their 12 hours, and drivers negotiate between themselves about pick-up and drop-off locations.

These long hours have consequences on drivers' health. Many respondents reported chronic back pain, a consequence of sitting in uncomfortable seats for extended periods of time. Alliance organizers conducted a survey towards the beginning of their mobilization in 2005 and were stunned by the pervasive reports of back pain and the inability to pay for required treatments for it. In fact, most respondents also complained about a lack of health insurance to adequately treat the condition. They cannot always afford their own insurance, and, as stated previously, the medallion owners or dispatch companies only provide insurance for the vehicle and passengers and not for the driver. Some day-shift drivers said they avoided going to the doctor also because it cut into the time they could be earning some money. Ironically, one of the drivers to participate actively in the taxi workers' organization drives was able to do so because of health issues: having suffered one heart attack and being saddled with mounting medical bills, Charles Smith returned to his day-shift against doctor's orders to start earning again. A

second heart attack only a week later forced him to completely stop all driving. During this time, he conducted surveys and mobilization drives and wrote up pamphlets only because he couldn't work at all and luckily had enough saved up to avoid destitution (Kinney 2008)!

Drivers also have to constantly deal with and be polite to irritable or offensive passengers without losing their own tempers, and have to quickly learn a "mixture of independence and servility" (Hodges 2007: 3), and it is worth asking whether this behavior stems out of "professionalism of a sort, or powerlessness, or a mixture of greed and need" (Kumar 2010). Night-shift drivers reported that threats and robberies were common during their shift. In fact, most respondents reported attempted or successful robberies, regardless of how long they had been driving. Safety is a major cause for concern for taxi drivers, which only worsens the problems posed by long hours and low income.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH, which is overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services] published a study on homicide in workplaces in May 1995 (based on data from 1980 to 1989). This widely-cited study (Kumar 2010; Mathew 2005) discovered that taxicab or limousine drivers suffered the highest rate of occupational homicide in all occupations in America. Taxi driving was, literally, the most life-threatening job in America, even more than a job with law enforcement. The study showed that 15 out of every 100,000 taxi workers were victims of occupational homicide in comparison to 9 out of every 100,000 law enforcement officers. There has been no comparable study since.

Table 2.4: Workplaces with the highest rates of occupational homicide

Workplaces and SIC* codes	Number of homicides	Rate †
Taxicab establishments (412)	287	26.9
Liquor stores (592)	115	8.0
Gas stations (554)	304	5.6
Detective/protective services (7381, 7382)	152	5.0
Justice/public order establishments (92)	640	3.4
Grocery stores (541)	806	3.2
Jewelry stores (5944)	56	3.2
Hotels/motels (701)	153	1.5
Eating/drinking places (58)	734	1.5

Source: NIOSH Report, 1995
*Standard Industrial Classification. Workplaces were classified according to the *Standard Industrial Classification Manual*, 1987 [OMB 1987].
†Number per 100,000 workers per year.

The NIOSH report notes that while death certificates do not identify the circumstances of the homicide, the type of workplaces and occupations suggest that robbery was the likeliest motive for the homicide. Finally, the factors increasing the risk of homicide almost exactly describe a taxi driver's working conditions: exchange of money with the public, working alone or in small numbers, working late night or early morning hours, working in high-crime areas, guarding valuable property or possessions, and working in community settings (that is not in offices or factories).

Table 2.5: Occupations with the highest rates of occupational homicide

Occupations and BOC* codes	Number of homicides	Rate †
Taxicab drivers/chauffeurs (809)	289	15.1
Law enforcement (police officers/sheriffs) (418, 423)	520	9.3
Hotel clerks (317)	40	5.1
Gas station workers (885)	164	4.5
Security guards (426)	253	3.6
Stock handlers/baggers (877)	260	3.1
Store owners/managers (243)	1065	2.8
Bartenders (434)	84	2.1
Taxicab drivers/chauffeurs (809)	289	15.1

Source: NIOSH Report, 1995
*Bureau of Census. Occupations were classified according to the 1980 Census of the Population: Alphabetic Index of Industries and Occupations [U.S. Department of Commerce 1982].
†Number per 100,000 workers per year.

However, all drivers had also developed strategies to get the most business out of their shifts. These are not without historical precedent; Hodges (2007) records that similar tactics were used by Depression-era drivers in New York City. Almost everyone chose an area or route that they operated in primarily but not exclusively. They also reported having to strike a fine balance between waiting at pick-up spots (hotels, the Amtrak station, the airport or pre-established queuing zones in different parts of the city) and cruising around looking for fares. They also used dispatch calls and relied on friends to share information on available fares. Drivers, when they knew of an ongoing good corporate job, would adjust their cruising patterns to maximize earning potential: Quaker City once got an account with Conrail to transport railway workers from train station to worksite. Often their worksites were in areas with poor public transportation, involved travel during non-peak hours or were long-distance trips (sometimes as far as Harrisburg). The calls were advertised exclusively on the Quaker City radio, and drivers reported whiling away time near the worksites or train station so that they could respond to the dispatcher quickly, and get the well-paying fare (Chervenka 2012).

Drivers chose their areas of operation and decided whether to wait or cruise depending on the time of day and the day of the week. Having learned that 10 AM to 2 PM was usually a slow hour at the Airport, many drivers reported cruising around downtown or other parts of the city and actively looking for 'street hails.' The Amtrak Station's heavy commuter traffic attracted taxis around 9 AM and 5 PM. Since 1 PM to 3:30 PM tended to be slow at the Station, drivers tried to cruise around the city during that time. Weekends usually meant good business downtown, and rainy days usually

mean good business everywhere. Drivers agreed that those working the night shift might earn a little more than the day shift drivers but the chances of being robbed were definitely much higher at night. Experience had taught them that they could make a week's pay working just two nights --- Friday and Saturday --- especially if they cruised or waited downtown.

Conclusion

Changes in federal immigration law, particularly IRCA of 1986, which required the verification of employment eligibility and identity, had made it harder for less-skilled, non-professional or undocumented workers to find legal, salaried employment. Many respondents had therefore taken up taxi driving. Lease driving is a seemingly easy occupation to enter and learn but a difficult one to thrive in. Scholars have noted that community networks enable taxi workers' entry into lease driving (Mathew 2005; Mohammad-Arif 2002; Mitra 2003) and research conducted for this dissertation has also shown the same. Respondents gave similar reasons for entering the lease driving business: They knew a friend or a relative (almost always from their own national or religious community) who helped them with their first lease. The job required relatively few skills to begin earning some income, and it was seen as a stopgap arrangement before something better came their way. Their reasons for continuing in the industry were also similar: The 12-hour shifts left them no time to pursue any other employment opportunities, and they had already invested all their resources into their vehicle. And most disconcertingly, as the years went by and the longer they stayed in the leasing cycle, it turned out that taxi driving was the only skill they had. The job was difficult but it was the only one they could get.

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The next chapter discusses the individuals performing this difficult job, in fact, the most dangerous job in the country judging by the NIOSH report on occupational homicides. It discusses the demographic details, migrant trajectories and lives of South Asian immigrant drivers in Philadelphia, their location in their immigrant group's socio-economic network, and finally, their interaction with members of different immigrant groups.

Chapter 3 – Taxi Workers in Philadelphia

"Jisé koī apnā samjhé, uss kī madad to har koī karta hai. Cheenī dekho Chinatown mein. Yā South Philly mein Mexican logon se poochho. Hum bhī wahīn karna chahte hain. West Philly mein Bānglādeshī driveron ko dekho. Āp batāo, āp ko kis ne madad ki jab āp Amreekā mein pehlī dafa aayee thī?"

[Everybody helps out a compatriot. See the Chinese in Chinatown. See the Mexicans in South Philly. We [at the gurudwara] also want to help our own. See the Bangladeshis in West Philly. Tell me, who helped you when you first arrived in America?]

- Charanjeet Singh, taxi driver

"The TWA is fighting for all drivers. This is not like a charity, it is our right. I want to tell others that we are all drivers helping drivers. …I want to help other Bangladeshis. Telling them [other taxi workers] about the TWA is helping them. Ok, I am not giving [them] money, I am giving information."

- Mushtaq Khan, taxi driver

The Hart-Cellar Act or the Immigration Act of 1965 abolished all existing immigration restrictions based on race, sex or nationality, and established new criteria like kinship ties, refugee status and 'needed' skills. South Asian immigration in the years immediately following the Immigration Act of 1965 consisted of highly-skilled professionals, and today's South Asian immigrant community is termed a 'model minority' on the basis of these elite immigrants (Prashad 2000). Later immigrants, using visas enabling family reunification, which do not differentiate on the basis of educational qualifications, have joined previously-settled relatives. Many of these individuals, lacking technical or highly-skilled qualifications, have sought employment in lodging, retail and transportation industries. The taxicab industry absorbs a large number of such non-professional immigrants.

In fact, taxi workers are the most numerous stakeholders [after passengers!] in the taxicab industry --- approximately 3000 in Philadelphia --- and the majority of these individuals are immigrants from South Asia and Africa. The previous chapter detailed the history and structure of the industry and its powerful stakeholders: the government, medallion owners and dispatch companies. It examined how the industry is built on the labor of its most numerous, overregulated and under-protected stakeholders --- lease drivers --- and discussed the problems they face and the strategies they use to maximize their earning potential.

This chapter will focus on the lease drivers, the workforce that drives, literally and metaphorically, the medallion system. It will discuss the demographic details of taxicab drivers in Philadelphia and the broad commonalities in their life histories, including their arrival in the United States, their initial employment, and entry into the taxicab industry. Three South Asian groups, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, are discussed in greater detail: their religious and national communities, their geographic concentration, and their interactions with each other. This will provide an understanding of the drivers' occupational and social networks, and how these networks were a crucial factor in the creation of their occupational alliances. The chapter concludes with an exploration of why some South Asian immigrant drivers considered participating in the taxi workers labor organization [or alliances], and why some did not: their previous political engagements, their current socio-economic status, and their degrees of involvement with their social networks all affected their participation. The following chapter examines just how their participation was sought and secured.

The internal structure of the taxicab industry

Most lease drivers in Philadelphia are recently arrived immigrants from all over the world. They struggle to make ends meet, earn at low hourly rates, and are predominantly from West and East Africa and South Asia. Having arrived in the United States in the 1970s and later, through family reunification programs or special visas [Diversity or Refugee], these immigrants are 'at the bottom of the food chain.' Given the high costs of medallions, not even long-term drivers realistically hope to own one. Newly arrived immigrants usually have no choice but to rent both the vehicle and the medallion, and even newer arrivals will probably take their place as these drivers find a way to move up the chain.

Drivers who own their vehicles have been in the business longer, and have also tended to arrive sooner --- the late 1970s onwards. These drivers have survived the business long enough to be able to make some investments [a vehicle, perhaps two]. All the drivers who own their own medallions [eight out of a sample of 68] purchased them in the mid- to late-1990s, which is very soon after this licensing system was instituted in Philadelphia, and while its price was still in the tens of thousands. For the most part, immigrants who arrived in the late 1990s and most native-born drivers do not own their own medallions. Several drivers and an organizer mentioned, when discussing medallion and vehicle ownership, that "the Russians" [Eastern European immigrants] usually owned at least one cab and a medallion. Newspaper archives reinforced this impression. Articles from the late 1980s quoted drivers and PUC officials commenting on the growing concentration of medallion in hands of immigrants from Eastern Europe ("In

Fare Game," 1978: B01). In fact, today, those who own medallions in Philadelphia are overwhelmingly white and either first- or second-generation immigrants.

Waldinger (1999) argues that immigrants take jobs that require few skills and offer little remuneration, in occupations avoided by native-born workers or inaccessible to native-born racial minorities (in his study, New Yorkers). South Asian immigrants take up jobs like taxi driving and dish washing because of the lack of better alternatives. They, like many other immigrants, enter occupations that have been "degraded by deunionization and restructuring" (Milkman 2006: 9). This is true of the taxicab industry in Philadelphia, which underwent three interlinked changes over the mid- to late-twentieth century. Firstly, the move towards independent contracting; secondly, the declining involvement of national unions; and thirdly, an increase in the numbers of immigrant drivers (from South Asia and Africa). All three phenomena helped to cause greater "employer-driven workforce casualization" (Milkman 2006: 6), and locked lease drivers into a cycle of significant risk-taking, penury, stagnancy, and limited upward mobility.

Briggs (2001) and Borjas (1999) have argued that cheap immigrant labor lowers the wages for native-born workers, and have hypothesized that increasing immigration will lead to decreasing unionization. Milkman argues the opposite: "deunionization – which …typically leads to deterioration in wages, benefits, and working conditions – provokes native-born workers to abandon no-longer desirable jobs, at which point immigrants then fill the vacancies" (Milkman 2006: 105). There is evidence to suggest that deunionization preceded immigrant influxes, especially in the trucking industry in

the United States, which is structurally very similar to the taxicab industry. The racial and ethnic make-up of the workforce in the trucking industry changed very little up to the 1980s. When the industry was dramatically deunionized (indeed, as were industries across the country) in the 1980s, more immigrants entered the industry and the composition of the workforce changed significantly. "In short, even if the availability of a vast pool of immigrant labor accelerated the shift to low-road employment practices, the timing for both construction and trucking in Los Angeles suggest that immigrant employment was more a consequence than a cause of the change" (Milkman 2006: 109). ['Low road' employment practices include paying the worker low wages, excluding overtime payments, not offering health or unemployment benefits and suchlike.]

The Census (2010) reports that 4.7% of the civilian employed population in the United States aged 16 and over is "self-employed," and taxi drivers who constitute some portion of that figure earn, on average, the modest amount of $27,480 annually (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). However, as the previous chapter detailed, individual drivers developed strategies to maximize their earning potential despite the structural handicaps the system has placed on them. Strategies described previously as well as those to be discussed in the following chapter rightly prevent us from viewing immigrants in low-paying occupations uni-dimensionally or too simplistically as victims of structural exploitation (DuBry 2007; Gomberg-Muñoz 2010). In fact, immigrants and ethnic minorities are usually proactive and agential in their individual situations (Bourgois 2002; Das Gupta 2006; Milkman 2006; Ong 2003; Prashad 2000). They develop strategies, given their specific circumstances, to maximize earnings and establish

economic and social security nets while also trying to maintain their self-respect. Behind stereotypes of turbaned taxi drivers and mythic narratives of immigrants going from rags to riches are stories of individuals trying, essentially, to make do. More often than not, these individuals do not operate alone. As in the case of taxi workers from South Asia, it is clear that they were not operating entirely alone. Their immigrant social networks enabled and sustained their individual [and their family's] existence in the taxicab industry, and were eventually utilized to fight for better working conditions in the industry. These social networks and the ethnic economies they enable help co-ethnics "maintain neighborhoods, support communal institutions, assist the indigent, train the recent arrivals, educate and protect children, build political power, and maintain cultural integrity" (Light and Gold 2000: x). The following sections discusses the lives of the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrant drivers living and working in Philadelphia both before and after they arrived in the United States, and how they are embedded in such social networks and ethnic economies.

South Asian immigrant drivers in the United States

Census records in 2011 show that approximately 29% of all foreign-born persons in the United States (citizens and non-citizens) came from Asian countries.

Table 3.1: Percentage of foreign-born residents in the U.S. from Asian countries

Year of arrival	Numbers of foreign-born persons from all over the world	Percentage of foreign-born persons from Asia
Entered before 1990	15,185,962	27.7%
Entered 1990 to 1999	10,780,767	26.9%
Entered 2000 or later	14,411,131	31.0%
Total in 2011	40,377,860	28.6%

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2011

Table 3.1 details the percentages of Asian immigrants from before the 1990s to 2011. In other words, of the approximately 40 million immigrants from all over the world recorded in the United States in 2011, 28.6% or close to 11 million came from Asia. Of this 11 million about three million are from South Central Asian countries (American Community Survey 2011).

Table 3.2 breaks the numbers for Asian countries down further, and shows the numbers of immigrants from countries in South and Central Asia. The Census includes the following countries under 'South Central Asia:' Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (American Community Survey 2011). Understandably, higher percentages of earlier arrivals are now naturalized citizens.

Table 3.2: Foreign-born population in the U.S. from South Central Asian countries

Year of arrival	Percentage of total who are naturalized citizens	Percentage of total who are not citizens
Entered before 1990	22.6%	2.5%
Entered 1990 to 1999	19.0%	6.9%
Entered 2000 or later	9.3%	39.7%
Total* in 2011	50.9%	49.1%

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2011
* Total number of foreign-born persons from South Central Asia: 3,009,592

Finally, Table 3.3 breaks these figures down even further, showing nationwide figures for immigrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. It shows that India sent the maximum number of immigrants out of all South Central Asian countries. As the next section will show, these proportions (that, is, an Indian majority, followed by Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants) is true of the Philadelphia metropolitan area as well as participants in this research study.

Table 3.3: Foreign-Born population in the U.S. from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

Country of birth	Numbers
India	1,857,000
Pakistan	304,000
Bangladesh	184,000
Total from South Central Asia	3,009,592
Total from all Asia	11,562,000

Source: American Community Survey 2011

South Asian immigrant drivers in Philadelphia

The Philadelphia Metropolitan area houses close to six million (5,911,638) residents according to the census of 2010, and has one of the largest and fastest growing immigrant populations in tri-state area (Brookings Institute 2008). [The Office of Management and Budget includes the following counties in the Philadelphia Metropolitan area: Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery in Pennsylvania; Burlington, Camden and Gloucester in New Jersey; New Castle (Wilmington) in Delaware; and Cecil in Maryland.] The census of 2010 reveals that 68.2% of the total population of metropolitan Philadelphia is Caucasian, 20.8% is black or African American, and 5% is Asian (295,766 residents). Asians Indians make up the largest sub-group (1.5%) of all Asians. A little over half a million residents are foreign-born, which is 9% of the total metropolitan population. A significant majority of these foreign-born residents arrived in the metropolitan area before 1990, which accounts for 65.9% of the foreign-born population. The remainder arrived after 1990. The majority of South Asian immigrant respondents came from India.

As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, research subjects for this study were reasonably representative of this breakdown in national figures. Of the 63 South Asian immigrant taxi workers who participated in the study, 27 were of Indian origin

[Hindu and Sikh], 19 were of Pakistani origin [only one was a Christian; all others were Muslim], and 17 were from Bangladesh [all Muslim]. These individuals had lived in the United States for varying lengths of time, one as few as four years, and the longest having lived here for 27 years. The majority of respondents arrived in the decade beginning in the middle of the 1980s and ending in the late 1990s. Table 3.4 details their reported year of arrival, and Table 3.7 details their reported means of entry. Their arrivals sometimes coincided with turbulent times in their home countries. The older Sikh drivers from the Indian Punjab, like Charanjeet Singh, Baadal Singh and Satpal Singh, arrived in the late 1980s, when the Indian government was violently repressing a secessionist movement in Punjab. These men, all of whom have been given pseudonyms, who were in their twenties when they arrived, traveled alone and sent for their eligible relatives after they had settled in the United States. Some drivers from Pakistan traveled alone, and others with their families; there was no preference for one or the other. The same was true of Hindu drivers from India.

Table 3.4: Reported year of arrival of South Asian immigrant drivers in the U.S.

Year of arrival	Number of drivers [N = 63]
1966-1970	0
1971-1975	0
1976-1980	11
1981-1985	10
1986-1990	19
1991-1995	13
1996-2000	9
2000-2005	1

Source: Primary data

Interviews with respondents suggest that many adult immigrants who traveled alone arrived on work, student or tourist visas, which they sometimes overstayed. Aseem Bhatti, Abdul Khan, Mohammad Khan, and Gurdeep Laroya all entered the country on

student visas, and began working part-time to help pay for tuition and rent. They washed dishes in restaurants, staffed the sales counter at a 7-11 convenience store, and delivered pizzas after classes, but dropped out of school when they could not keep up with the fees and classes. They began working full-time, and eventually procured legal documentation. Three of these four men are now naturalized citizens. In such cases [involving visa overstays], they were able to reunite with relatives left behind in their home countries only after they had managed to procure legal documentation, which took years to accomplish. Today, all the respondents have family in the United States.

Six of the 17 Bangladeshi drivers interviewed for this dissertation arrived in the late 1980s but not everyone traveled with their families. Fourteen drivers arrived alone, and lived with other single fellow-nationals for varying numbers of years before reuniting with or living with a spouse and family. Three drivers arrived on 'lottery visas.' The U.S. Department of State's Diversity Visa program, established via the Immigration Act of 1990, is colloquially known as the lottery visa, and seeks to diversify the immigrant population within the country. The Department of State maintains an updated list of countries that have not sent more than 50,000 emigrants in the previous five years, and adult citizens of these countries may apply for the annual 'lottery.' If granted a Diversity Visa, the applicant and his/her legal dependents travel as one unit, and are each granted legal documentation and eventual permanent residency. In the late twentieth century, Bangladeshi citizens were eligible to apply because their country had only been formed in 1971. Of the seventeen Bangladeshi drivers in the sample, three drivers applied and won this lottery. Indians and Pakistanis have not been eligible to apply since the mid-

twentieth century, and Bangladeshis can no longer apply either. In fact, many Indian and Pakistani drivers spoke enviously of Bangladeshi drivers' lottery visas, and staunchly [and inaccurately] believed that most Bangladeshi drivers had entered the country in this manner.

Not all stories associated with this lottery are happy, though. Mushtaq Khan couldn't believe his luck when he won the lottery. He had applied on a whim after he heard his neighbors talking about it, and said he felt blessed when he received the approval notification. However, he did not know that a family had to apply as one unit – he had only put his own name on the form – and that they could not accompany him on the lottery visa if their names had not been included in the original application. He rationalized it thus: Even if he had known about the rules, he would have had to make a heartrending decision. He would have to decide who to bring with him and who to leave behind because he would have been unable to provide for all his dependents as soon as they reached the United States. So, he made the journey alone and saved each penny he earned in the United States so that he could visit them in Bangladesh regularly. He was reunited with his wife and dependent children in 1990. Two of his children turned twenty-one while he saved, and were no longer eligible to come as his dependents. They still reside in Bangladesh, and Khan has since applied to sponsor them under another visa which allows the reunification of families.

Today, all the respondents have family in the United States, regardless of when they arrived. Some have endured long separations. Baadal Singh from the Indian Punjab had to save for several years and wait for sixteen years before he and his entire family

were reunited under the family reunification visa. This visa program, created by the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, allows U.S. citizens to apply for legal permanent residency for their parents, spouse and minor children, and grants visas to these relatives without regard to numerical quotas. Other relations are affected by quotas, preferential ranking and longer wait times. A simple summary of this preferential ranking is as follows (in order of decreasing preference): Adult unmarried children of citizens, spouses of legal permanent residents, adult married children of citizens, and siblings of citizens. It is no wonder that sixteen years passed before Baadal Singh's spouse, parents and minor and adult children were reunited.

A notable number of immigrant taxi workers interviewed (14 out of 63) had traveled to other countries before arriving in the United States, and had done so for various reasons. Several Sikh drivers reported arriving in Canada because they already had relatives there, and because their immigration system was perceived to be easier to work around than the American system. A few Sikh drivers still have extended family in Canada, and worked there for varying lengths of time before migrating south into the United States. Many Muslim men, Arab and South Asian, had worked in the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia in a range of occupations before moving westwards to the U.S. Some of the jobs in these transit countries were in the service economy (supervisors, accountants and administrative staff) and others were in the construction industry. During a conversation with a multinational group of immigrant drivers, a driver from Sudan opined that fluency in Arabic helped him procure a higher-paying job in the Middle East as a quality-control expert. This was corroborated by two Pakistani drivers, one of who

agreed that employees would be limited to low-pay jobs (like construction) without fluency in Arabic.

This trend of stopovers in transit countries was common across immigrant groups. Drivers from African countries revealed that many of them had worked seasonally in other African countries for years before finally leaving for the United States. Two common examples: Drivers from Mali and Guinea had worked in South Africa for years, working as water carriers, delivery men or construction workers in order to save enough to travel to America. Having once landed in the United States, South Asian drivers did not report much domestic travel. Close to a quarter of the South Asian respondents moved to Philadelphia after a stint (lasting between two to seven years) in New York City; all others settled in Philadelphia after landing in America. Every single individual who relocated gave the same reason for it: that it was too expensive to live in New York City.

Part of the reason that drivers struggled to make ends meet is that they usually had low-paying jobs. Most drivers' first jobs were in businesses either owned or run by co-ethnics. Examples include restaurants, grocery stores, car washes, garages, and gas stations, or they worked as delivery men or taxi drivers. [African immigrant drivers added employment as parking lot attendants to this list.] In fact, every single respondent worked one or more of these listed jobs at some point during their lives here. This is unsurprising. These are occupations immigrants are able to find employment in because of the structural set-up of the particular occupation, and these are often occupations that make up 'ethnic economies' (Light and Gold 2000). That is, the possibility of day-to-day

employment, cash payments, easily accessible through social networks (co-ethnics who already work there and can vouch for you), and requiring skills that can be learned within budgetary constraints (a driver's license for taxi driving, for example) or can be learned on the job (dish washing in restaurants, for example).

Table 3.5: Reported first jobs of South Asian immigrant drivers in the U.S.

Type of job	Number of drivers [N = 63]
Taxi driving	33
Restaurant (including dishwasher, cook, deliveryman)	15
Grocery store (including newspaper stands)	10
Garages	5

Source: Primary data

These jobs had no correlation with their education. An overwhelming proportion of drivers had college degrees from their home countries. They had Bachelor's degrees in disciplines like Accounting, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Geography, History, Mathematics, and Physics. These degrees did not help them when they entered the immigrant economy. Their fluency (or lack thereof) in English distinctly affected their employment in the taxicab industry.

Table 3.6: Reported educational achievement of all sampled drivers in comparison with metropolitan Philadelphia*

Educational achievement	% of PHL metropolitan area	% of respondents [N=68]
Less than 9th grade	3.8% [150,648]	0%[0]
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	8.1% [320,575]	0% [0]
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	31.2% [1,235,142]	2.9% [2]
Some college, no degree	17.7% [699,137]	10.2% [7]
Bachelor's degree	19.7% [779,173]	75.0% [51]
Graduate or professional degree	12.9% [510,430]	11.7% [8]

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; all data for individuals aged 25 years and older.
* Metropolitan Philadelphia as defined by Census Bureau

Charanjeet Singh failed his first driver certification test because, although he could converse with passengers and read the street signs, he could not read some of the unfamiliar words on the written test. He was already an experienced driver, and estimated that he must have been driving for three or four years when the PUC instituted the test. He was allowed to re-take it and confessed that he passed it the second time because he spent several nights memorizing the questions and the correct answers. His friend and compatriot, Satpal Singh, joked about the irony that they had considered degree programs in the humanities [or the "Arts," as they are known in India] a waste of an education but that a degree in English might have come in handy for their driver certification tests! It is no surprise that fluency in the dominant language of the region significantly improved employment opportunities; drivers had also commented on their knowledge of Arabic facilitating their employment in the Middle East.

Close to a half of those respondents who took up taxi driving as their first occupation (33 out of 63) said that they had intended it as a temporary job, a stop-gap arrangement to pay for food and rent till they found something better suited to their qualifications. Some reported trying and failing to find employment that matched their professional training or previous experience (such as a mechanic, an accountant, a civil engineer, and in one solitary case, a self-employed businessman), and so took up taxi driving. Others worked for a while (years, in some cases) in one more of the listed jobs before taking up taxi driving.

The jobs they held in the United States were usually a far cry from their occupations in their home countries. Many drivers reported that their families owned agricultural property in their home countries or that they ran a business. The businesses tended to be small-scale family-owned affairs like mom-and-pop stores, collecting and reselling used paper for recycling, stores selling specialized goods (like hardware for construction or home repairs) or a photocopying shop. Some worked in the service sector as accountants or insurance policy salesmen. Interestingly, other immigrant groups had more diverse skills and employment histories. One Nigerian driver was a preacher in Lagos before immigrating to the United States. He spoke vaguely about leading a Nigerian Christian denomination in Chicago for a few years before moving to Philadelphia in 2006. He began driving taxis that same year. Two African drivers, one Malian and one Ghanian, used to be full-time drummers in troupes in their home countries, and performed traditional music and dance. They still performed for their community but had to take up taxi driving to pay the bills.

Many drivers mourned their education and training going to waste behind the steering wheel of the taxicab. Amarjeet Singh noted:

> Taxi chalānā koī āsān kām nahīn. Kabhī 5 yā 10 dollar sé zyādā kī sawāri nahīn milti, to kabhī shift-wālā āné mein der kar de to uss kā intezār karo... Kabhī PPA inspector kā mann karé to raid par raid, binā-bātī fine par fine lagāté hain. Harr din kuch nā kuch hoté rehtā hai. Ādmī aqalmand to honā chāhiyé, imāndār, mehnatī, bahut kuch honā chahiyé…Lekin college jāne kī zaroorat nahin! Merī Chemistry kī B.Sc. degree hai. Ab taxi chalā rahā hoon. Kyā faidā. Kabhī lagtā thā ké B.Sc. nahin, B.Com. kī degree sé shāyad accounting kī naukri lagtī. Lekin Amreekā mein B.Com. bhī nahīn chaltā.
>
> [Taxi driving is not an easy job. Sometimes, you get rides that pay only $5 or $10, sometimes your shift partner is late. Sometimes the PPA inspector makes up his

mind to conduct a raid, and pile up fines for non-issues. There is some such issue every day. One needs to be smart, honest, hardworking, many different things…but one does not need to go to college! I have a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry. And I'm driving a taxi. What a waste. I used to think that I had a chance of getting a job as an accountant if only I had studied Commerce. But that degree (from India) would not work in America.]

Reitz (2011) calls this problem 'brain waste,' that is, of engaging in occupations well below one's educational levels, and notes that it is common enough within the taxicab industry so as to be termed the 'taxi driver syndrome.' There are two main reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, educational degrees from foreign countries are not always recognized, which makes it harder for immigrants (even highly-skilled persons) to prove their qualifications. Secondly, immigrants often lack the cultural capital to penetrate the social networks which would produce high-paying jobs. Many immigrant-intensive occupations suffer from this problem, overqualified workers in low-paying jobs, and this is particularly common in the taxicab industry (Hathiyani 2006).

Drivers who still had families in South Asia often helped maintain agricultural property, and seemed to have great nostalgia for their ancestral land. They had sent money for investment, such as for improved housing or mechanization for their farmland (tractors) or purchase of personal vehicles (two-wheelers) for family members. They had also made investments in their relatives' education (including their own adult children) by sponsoring tuition for degree programs or vocational training or apprenticeships as electricians or plumbers. Such stories, of the family's resources being used in the process of emigration, were not very common but were not unheard of. Access to such capital enabled the cross-continental travel of these men, and all drivers reported remitting money to replenish or increase the original investment once they began earning in the

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United States. Many reported sending regular remittances to dependents in home countries. Some reported paying paying them regular visits, especially while their own parents still lived there, while others reported long gaps between visits because they could not afford expensive airfare. While not explicitly stated by any respondents, it is conceivable that some drivers were not able to travel internationally because they lacked the appropriate legal documentation.

Drivers stated unequivocally that they wanted to ensure that their children would never need to resort to taxi driving. Indeed, the snowball sample did not produce a second-generation South Asian immigrant driving a taxi, and when questioned, drivers could not name a second-generation driver of their acquaintance. When adult children did join immigrant occupational niches, they joined in ownership or proprietorship of grocery stores, restaurants, fast-food chains or gas stations. Nobody followed their parents into the taxicab industry. Incidentally, this is somewhat similar to other immigrant-intensive industries. For example, Dhingra (2012) notes that the children of motel owners were not expected to continue in the same industry, though many of his younger respondents returned to the industry with college degrees and used their education to improve the family business. Many of his respondents were drawn back to the family business for two reasons: Their fathers were earning more at the motel than they were earning in their professional jobs, and working in one's own family business meant they were their own boss.

Aseem Bhatti, a driver from Multan, said he missed his ancestral home in Pakistan, but his decision to come to America was dictated by larger concerns --- "rotī,

kapdā, makān" [food, clothing, shelter] --- for his extended family in Pakistan and his children in Philadelphia. This theme of sacrifice was commonly repeated by drivers, who said that they were working this hard so that their children could live in comfort. While many drivers' children were just entering high school, the children of a few early arrivals had graduated community college, and were working in the service industry as office assistants or sales representatives. Charanjeet Singh's son had entered military service, and Singh was particularly proud of his son's choice because he felt it continued the tradition of righteous militarism in Sikhism. Some drivers mentioned that their adult unmarried children resided with them, and contributed to the household income if employed. Others had children away in college or working around Philadelphia, such as at the airport. Some spouses also worked, and in similar 'ethnic' industries like ethnic grocery or clothing stores, Indian movie rental stores, or in beauty salons. Many were active in their local community. Sikh spouses, for example, often cooked and served food in the kitchen associated with the gurudwaras, helping prepare the *langar* [food to be served to the congregation after services] in Upper Darby as well as Millbourne. Many drivers were thankful to have their own parents to assist with childcare when their children were younger, and implied that the lives of elderly immigrants revolved around religious organizations.

All drivers stated that they had married co-ethnics. Even when their spouses were American citizens, they practiced the same religion and were from the same nationality. Most of my respondents were over the age of forty. Those who spoke freely about their marriage reported that the match was arranged. Many had returned to their home

countries, where relatives had either shortlisted promising candidates or had selected an individual for the driver to marry, and drivers brought their brides to the United States as their legal dependent. The reverse was equally true: A significant number of drivers had married an American citizen before arriving in the United States. In their cases, their brides flew to their home countries to marry, and they journeyed together as husband and wife.

When asked indirectly about their own visa status, some avoided answering the question altogether, most reported that they had entered on valid visas (student, tourist or work visas), others had married American citizens, and the smallest number reported entry on lottery visas.

Table 3.7: Reported means of entry of South Asian immigrants into the U.S.

Means of entry	Number of drivers [N=63]
Work visa	7
Tourist visa	11
Student visa	10
Diversity visa	3
Marriage to an American citizen	9
Family reunification	17
Did not declare	6

Source: Primary data

Half the drivers who reported entering on a tourist visa (11) came to visit relatives, and admitted to overstaying their visits. Their relatives had assisted with their travel to the United States, including at times paying for agents to arrange for passports and visas, as well as provided housing upon arrival. One driver reported arriving in the United States as a seaman on a merchant ship, and then jumping ship at Baltimore. All the drivers who voluntarily mentioned their own status were all naturalized citizens. Four

drivers who entered as unmarried individuals and married American citizens after entry are not included in Table 3.7. All four of these individuals had entered on tourist visas.

Barring the children of a handful of Sikh and Pakistani drivers who had arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, the children of other drivers were born in the United States. Drivers exhibited an assimilationist attitude (in varying degrees) especially when their children were concerned. There was widespread appreciation of the idea of American meritocracy, even though they did not always experience it in their own lives. They wished for greater economic assimilation for their own children (such as better education and employment as service professionals) but they were keen that children not lose touch with their ethnic and religious identity and mores. Parental pride in children's accomplishment was not far removed from national pride: Charanjeet Singh's son's military career brought honor to Singh and the Sikh community, for example.

Most drivers were keen that their unmarried children marry someone from within their own community. Marriage was one area where national and religious boundaries were strictly enforced, and drivers made statements that were rife with ethnocentrism. Drivers of all nationalities gave mixed responses when asked about their children's marriages. Many were explicit about their preferences. Aseem Bhatti, as one representative example, declared that both his daughters (one a senior in high school; the other a sophomore) would marry men from his home country (Pakistan). Children of Pakistani Muslim immigrants were not acceptable to him; non-Muslims and non-Pakistanis were unthinkable. He was not as definitive about his third child, a son, who was ten years old. Baadal Singh's daughter was engaged to a fellow Sikh --- his friend's

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son. Singh was pleased because the family was well-known, the father was also a taxi driver, and the son was gainfully employed as a member of the maintenance crew at the Airport. Some drivers, like Mushtaq Khan and Yaqub Qureishi, laughed off the question, saying that their children were too young to think about marriage. Others answered a little differently. They hoped their children would choose well, and they hoped their daughters would prioritize family and career appropriately. However, further questioning revealed that every single individual expected their child to marry within the [religious] community.

Another area where national or religious boundaries were maintained was residential choices. However, unlike the case of marriage, these boundaries were loose, and developed more out of convenience than ethnocentrism. Almost without exception, drivers settled close to fellow-nationals, deepened social ties within that group, and expressed no need to expand ties across national or religious lines. Vervoort et al (2012), in a study of residential patterns in ethnic neighborhoods, note that in such cases, ethnic minorities usually meet non-ethnics in their occupations, which is exactly the case with taxi workers. Taxi workers reported experiencing language barriers to a small degree, and having to use English to communicate across ethnic groups. Religious institutions and commercial establishments developed around residential clusters, which in turn clustered around existing religious and economic establishments.

Thus, the city has clearly identifiable concentrations of specific immigrant communities: Bangladeshi immigrants in West Philadelphia, Sikh immigrants in a township outside West Philadelphia, and all South Asian communities can be found in

Upper Darby. Pakistani drivers included in the sample lived in two distinct geographic regions of the metropolitan Philadelphia --- a large immigrant community resided in Upper Darby, and another (though smaller) one in Northeast Philadelphia. Pakistani drivers reported regular community gatherings, both amongst immediate friend circles as well as extended religious circles. Distinctions existed between Sunni and Shia communities; most Pakistani Muslim drivers who gave detailed interviews were Shia. [This is a bias of snowball sampling, and not representative of the Pakistani Muslim communities in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.]

Such geographic concentrations are true for taxi workers from other national groups, too. For example, West African drivers reside further south in West Philadelphia than their Bangladeshi counterparts; Sudanese and Eastern European drivers are largely concentrated in different parts of North Philadelphia. These concentrations grow denser when a place of worship is established, accompanied by the development of ancillary establishments like retail, hair dressers, ubiquitous grocery stores and restaurants, as well as travel agents, accounting and law offices firms. This is starkly visible when walking in immigrant neighborhoods. Evident are not just the satellite dishes on rooftops or by windows, but also small businesses that cater specifically to immigrant customers.

In fact, all drivers were asked about their levels of involvement in their ethnic groups, and drivers self-identified along religious and national lines. They reportedly socialized with families from their religious group (especially those who attended the same religious establishment), and interacted informally at each other's private residences and at their common places of worship. Several Sikh drivers were deeply

involved with the Philadelphia Sikh Society [PSS] of which they were all members, and were concentrated in one borough in the Philadelphia metropolitan region: Millbourne. The PSS was set up to 'promote the Sikh religion' and help integrate newly-arrived Sikhs into the local socio-religious scene. Members of PSS and residents of Millbourne were engaged in local politics, and actively campaigned for Sikh candidates for the school board (Melwani 2005). Financial help or loans or business advice were given on an informal basis. The PSS did not involve itself directly in such matters but functioned as a site for practicing Sikhs to gather and engage in independent transactions. The gurudwara, was also very actively involved in outreach far beyond its neighbors. For example, Charanjeet Singh hosted an undergraduate class from the University of Pennsylvania, which was studying immigrant communities in the city. He organized a presentation on Sikh history in a room festooned with banners calling for the establishment of Khalistan [an independent state for Sikhs carved out of the state of Punjab in India], and also provided a generous *langar* for the visiting students --- a delicious meal of rice, naan, vegetables and beans, and clear plastic cups filled with cold, rose-flavored, luridly pink but delicious *lassi* [a yogurt drink]. In fact, most Sikh drivers who congregated at the gurudwara in Millbourne and were also active in taxi worker organizations consciously self-identified as Sikh and not Indian --- even though all of them emigrated from the Indian Punjab. In fact, of all the labels South Asian drivers who participated in the study could use to describe themselves [Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christian, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi], these Sikhs never identified as 'Indian.' What seemed a curious fact was better explained after a visit to the gurudwara, when their political views on a separate state for Sikhs in India were made explicit.

Not all Sikhs were members of this gurudwara, however, and not all Punjabi-speaking drivers were Sikh. These drivers were rooted in different immigrant networks. Some Sikh drivers attended services at the gurudwara in Upper Darby. Hindu Punjabi drivers in the sample resided in Upper Darby, and Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-speaking drivers had their separate networks, also in Upper Darby. Language barriers, as mentioned previously, did make a difference to inter-national interaction to a small degree. Elderly immigrants, as reported in two instances, confined themselves to those who spoke their mother tongue and centered their social lives around their religious institution. Most drivers, however, used English to communicate with members of different immigrant groups. The only exception is Punjabi-speakers from India and Pakistan, who interacted comfortably in Punjabi once national and religious barriers were overcome. Closer questioning revealed that Punjabi speakers did not mingle socially across these national and religious boundaries but often interacted with each other in Punjabi when they met at taxi stands or the Airport holding lot.

Drivers were not untouched by nationalism and the violent histories of their home countries. Though a combination of enforcement and convenience, they maintained national boundaries in their choices of marriage partners and residential neighborhoods. National identities rose to the fore in other, sometimes tense, circumstances. Dissenting opinions amongst drivers were explained by their national affiliations as opposed to discussing the issues themselves. My observation of a public hearing in 2005 provided one example of such behavior. Waiting to attend a public hearing about the PPA's decision to install GPS equipment in taxicabs in 2005, drivers, organizers and supporters

mingled in the parking lot outside the venue. Unsurprisingly, most individuals stood with friends and acquaintances, and were usually in groups of three to five. Almost all the groups were speaking a specific language amongst themselves. There was a group of agitated Urdu speakers, questioning some of the drivers' resistance to the GPS; a large group of Punjabi-speaking Sikhs; several scattered groups of drivers from Africa [speaking in French, English and tribal languages], some more South Asian drivers, a handful of English-speaking Caucasians, and a diverse group of drivers and organizers. Once the hearing began, every member of the group of the agitated Urdu speakers spoke up in favor of the PPA's plan. They were joined by a few other drivers; these were some of the South Asians as well as some Caucasian drivers who had been standing silently in the parking lot earlier. Their statements [all made in English] seemed reasonable, and they were largely supportive of the PPA's plans. They were followed by another group of drivers, who criticized the PPA's plan. There was a continual murmur in the roomful of drivers as various individuals made their statements, interrupted by claps and cheers for 'their own' spokespersons.

Yet a significant number of drivers (South Asian and non-South Asian) later recalled the public hearing as an example of the Urdu-speaking Pakistani drivers 'refusing to cooperate with everybody else, as usual.' In a later conversation with Mohammad Khan, a Pakistani driver resisting the PPA's plan, he rued the internal divisions within his national group. He was a busy man; he drove a taxi during the day shift to support his family, and was involved in the local Pakistan People's Party, of which he claimed to be the regional representative. Now he would be busier than usual,

he cautioned, and could only talk briefly, because his parents-in-law were expected in a few days. He was disappointed with the outcome of the public hearing and with the actions of the dissenting drivers. "*Sab milké kām kar rahein hain. Ray, Tom, Satpal Singh, Mushtaq Khan… sab apné apné logon ko samjhā sakté hain, bhāī-bhāī ék doosré ko samajh saktā hai… Bas humāri Pākistānī community mein log ék doosré kī madad nahīn karnā chāhté.*" [Everybody is working together. Ray, Tom, Satpal Singh, Mushtaq Khan…are all explaining the situation to their own folks, brothers can understand each other…Folks in the Pakistani community do not want to help each other.] However, in this case, the national identity of dissenting drivers was hiding more complex differences of opinion about the taxi workers' campaign strategy. Yet, their dissent was narrated by the other drivers in terms of betrayal and resignation --- as a refusal to cooperate with fellow-*desis*, and as a repeat offense. This tension will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

National identities rose to the fore in other, not hostile, circumstances, too. Apart from examples discussed in the section on Research Methodology, drivers' interactions with each other provided more examples. For one, drivers watched cricket (a hugely popular sport in the Indian subcontinent) matches in their national groups. A survey of the eating establishments frequented by drivers, many equipped with large flatscreen TVs that kept up a steady hum of news from the subcontinent, often revealed a diverse clientele. On the nights of important matches during the Cricket World Cup in 2007, the audience was strikingly homogenous. At other times, ethnic or religious differences hid underlying disparity in access to resources. Organizers and the Sikhs themselves credited

the Sikh drivers as being one of the better organized and involved ethnic group. However, most Sikh drivers who were actively involved in the taxi workers' organizations were older men who had lived longer in the United States and were, simply put, richer than some of the other groups of South Asian immigrants. This was largely because they had arrived sooner, and had managed to enter both the country and the taxicab industry when there were fewer regulations and less scrutiny over paperwork. Mitra (2003), in the only other academic study of Punjabi drivers, discusses their various attempts at legalizing their undocumented status. Drivers commonly overstayed visas and finagled papers or married American citizens. Such strategies are reportedly much harder to pull off after September 9, 2001. Sikh organizer-drivers who participated in this research study had had more time to work, earn and save. Further, they were a particularly tight-knit group, partly because of the length of their residence in Philadelphia, and their social networks provided a strong safety net. Satpal Singh, chairperson of the daily operations of the local gurudwara, proudly noted that the gurudwara assisted with the orientation of newly-arrived Sikhs, providing food, shelter and occupational training for those who entered the taxicab industry. When asked how many entered the taxicab industry, he replied, *"Qāfī. Kuch logon ko koī aur chārā nahīn."* [Several. Some of them have no other option.] In any case, these drivers took time out of their shifts to campaign for the workers alliance not just because they were committed to fight for better working conditions but also because they could afford it. Not all South Asian immigrants had such a choice. However, their choices were explained in ethnic terms [as "well-organized Sikhs"] and not in terms of their more secure economic status [as financially secure drivers].

Finally, one last common aspect of South Asian immigrant drivers' experiences was their political engagement in their home countries. Satpal and Charanjeet Singh shared some information about their political activity in India. Both were now actively involved in the PSS and the gurudwara in Millbourne, and had left India when the Indian state cracked down on supporters of the Khalistan secessionist movement. They reported that their relatives and friends, particularly young men, were harassed 'without cause' by the Indian government's security forces in the 1980s, which encouraged them to leave the country at the first feasible opportunity. They mentioned that they tried to talk and share information about the struggle for Khalistan from within the United States and Canada, but refused to say much more. They were particularly reticent about fundraising activities. Gurdeep Laroya and a friend, neither of them supporters of the Sikh secessionist movement, reported being tangentially involved in a student union on their college campus near the city of Ludhiana in the Indian state of Punjab. They were interested in the union's advocacy for students and Punjabi agricultural workers but the union leaders' involvement in the secessionist movement and the ensuing violence turned them away from active engagement. Both drivers reported that they were only interested in nonviolent negotiations, and would detach themselves from Philadelphia's taxi worker alliances, too, if they ever turned violent. Mushtaq Khan and Sadiq Mohammad both reported being influenced by the nationalist struggle which created the sovereign state of Bangladesh in 1971, and being inspired to fight for what they determined were their rights. As Passy and Giugni (2001) and Milkman (2006) note, immigrants' past histories of political engagement affect their political participation in the United States. Milkman (2006) also argues that immigrants often have greater exposure to political activity than

their native-born counterparts. Comments made by some South Asian immigrant drivers suggest that their claims to better working conditions, and their involvement in the taxi workers' organizations, were indeed influenced by their experiences in their home countries.

South Asian drivers' interactions with other ethnic and racial groups

Immigrants can carry over or learn racist attitudes. Prasad (2000) argues that the professional successes and political passivity of South Asian elite are used to unfairly criticize African Americans. The phenomenal successes of highly-skilled immigrants are contrasted with the visible lack of similar success within African American communities. The black civil rights struggle and the supposed welfare dependency of black minorities is seen to contradict the wholesome all-American spirits of hard work and meritorious achievement, spirits that elite South Asian immigrants epitomize and validate. Ethnographic studies of South Asian immigrants show the prevalence of this belief (Das Gupta 2006; Dhingra 2012; Rudrappa 2004; Singh 1996).

Taxi workers have made passing references that suggest that they, too, might hold such problematic ideas. Their social and economic spaces require interactions with minority populations in ways that elite South Asians' do not, and these interactions provide possibilities for collaboration as well as misunderstanding. Taxi workers, specifically, have a history of tension with the African American community (Mathew 2005), and were accused of ignoring black passengers trying to hail cabs on the street. Drivers plead innocence, arguing that the life-threatening nature of the job, their experiences with would-be and actual robbers, and the rates of crime in underserved communities, make them wary of picking up black passengers. Chervenka (2012) points

out in Philadelphia, cabs on 'corporate' calls ignore all street hails, and not just black passengers' hails, making it easy to read some actions as racist when they were not.

Many drivers and organizers commented that they had not interacted with drivers outside of their own ethnic groups so extensively before the mobilizations in 2005. Ray Brown's race [African American] did not hinder his acceptance into immigrant groups. Mushtaq Khan bristled at the suggestion that some drivers might be resistant to interaction with Africans or African Americans. *"Not Bangladeshis! We learn to judge people by their actions,"* he said. *"Mistakes may be made in the past but we cannot forget [that] we all are drivers. We all are suffering in the same way under the PPA."* Though Mahmud Hassan joined in Khan's defense of his fellow nationals, a significant number of South Asian immigrant taxi workers hinted at or expressed reservations about African American drivers' work ethic. They hinted that African American drivers 'did not care' about their vehicles. When asked whether any lease driver really 'cared' about his vehicle, their responses were less equivocal. *"Zaroorat se zyādā kām nahīn karnā chāhté,"* said Shaqeel Khan, commenting on black drivers. [They don't seem to want to work more than necessary.] Muqsood Khan, who leased on a first-come first-served basis from a dispatch company, responded to my question about whether any lease driver paid much attention to his leased taxicab:

> Bé-shaq! Main dispatch jaldī pahunchtā hoon, tāqé nayī gādī milé. Passenger ko bhī sāf gādī pasand hotī hai. Derī sé jāo to dispatch purāni gādī deté hain, kabhī kabhí phatī-huī seat, yā suspension kharāb. Garmī ké dinon mein AC achchā honā chāhiyé. Koī purānī gādī chalākar main pareshān aur passenger bhī pareshān. Tip nahin dété, ultī sīdhī bāt karté hain. …Yeh kālé driver derī sé āté hain to unhein bekār taxi miltī hai, aur uss hī sé kām chalānā padtā hai.

> [Without a doubt! I go to the dispatch company early so that I can get a new vehicle. Passengers prefer clean vehicles, too. If you get there late, they give you

old cars, sometimes with ripped seats or the suspension doesn't work well. You need a vehicle with good air-conditioning in the summer. Driving an old vehicle is troublesome for me, and troublesome for the passenger --- they don't tip you well, they make their irritation clear… Black drivers show up late, they get broken down vehicles, and they have to do the best they can with those.]

Drivers tended to use the word "kala" [meaning, literally, 'black' in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi] to refer to African American drivers, and "African" to refer to African immigrant drivers. Thus, 'kala driver' and 'African driver.' Upon being questioned about this choice of terminology, drivers gave two kinds of responses. Some reported that their terminology made sense to them because they thought the two groups were different --- African American drivers were not immigrants. *"Unhein nayā ghar nahīn basānā padā,"* Gurdeep Laroya pointed out. [They did not have to set up house from scratch.] Others reported using those terms simply because they had heard others using them. *"Kuch bhī kaho, kālé ādmī par nā-insāfī huī thī, goré né yéh kiyā, woh kiyā. Sab driver par nā-insāfī ho rahī hai, sirf kālé driver par nahīn. Aur unn ké pās Amrīkī passport hai. Woh to kuch bhī kar sakté hain."* [You can say what you like, that black drivers have suffered injustice, the white man did this, did that. [But] every driver suffers injustice today, not just black drivers. And they [meaning African Americans] have American passports. They can do as they please.] State-ascribed hierarchies were clearly important in deciding who was alike and who was different (Glenn 2000, 2002; Das Gupta 2006), and the drivers were differentiating between groups on the basis of their legal status (and not their ethnic or racial identity), and the benefits that status was supposed to provide. The drivers seemed more concerned with the contemporary injustices suffered by all drivers, and did not place much import on historical injustices. Charanjeet Singh was visibly irritated

when I began to talk about the fact that not all American citizens possess passports, and dismissed it as a technicality; his point was that their citizenship [however it was documented: Social Security numbers, birth certificates or other government-issued records] allowed them rights and opportunities that were not immediately available to him. Drivers were quite clear, however, that all drivers had to work hard on the job regardless of their ethnic or racial identity or legal status. "This is not a job you can do half-asleep!" said Mushtaq Khan. His fellow-driver (but not a fellow Bangladeshi), Shaqeel Khan, described the various aspects of the job:

> Taxi chalā kar paisé kamāné ho to har minit kām karnā padtā hai. Āp né kabhī kisī driver ko ārām karté hué dékhā hai? Intézār kar rahā hogā, stand par. Lékin ārām kī zindagī nahīn hai yeh. Mazdoor yā coolie kī kasrat nahīn, ké sāmān uthāo, sīdīyān chadho, idhar udhar bhāgo… Yeh alag kism kī kasrat hai, 8 ghanté taxi chalāo. Taxi sāf rakho, passenger log kachrā karté hain lékin PPA né pakdā to fine driver ko lagégī. Khānā-pīnā, restroom jānā ho to, sab kī planning karnī padtī hai. Passenger sadak pé khadā hai, hāth hilā rahā hai to dikhnā chāhiyé, jo patā batāé woh mālūm chāhiyé. Passenger bāt karé, to jawāb do. Nahīn karé, to chup baitho. Jo bhī sawāl karé, uss kā jawāb do. Kahān sé ho? Idhar kitné sāl ho? Bīwī? Bacché? Apné désh nahīn lautnā? Kabhī phone par bāt karo to koī kahegā, allowed nahīn hai. Yeh koī āsān kām nahīn!

> [If you want to earn a living as a taxi driver, you have to work every minute of the day. Have you ever seen a driver resting? [If it looks like he is] he must be waiting at the taxi stand. This is not a life of luxury. It doesn't involve the sort of work done by a manual laborer, like lifting heavy goods and hustling around. This is a different kind of work, sitting for eight hours at a stretch. Keeping your taxi clean, clearing up after passengers because if the PPA inspector stops you, the driver pays the fine. If you're hungry or thirsty or if you need to use the restroom, you have to plan [the time for and access to] in advance. Keeping an eye out for passengers hailing taxis on the street, knowing the address they give you. If they want to talk, you respond. If they don't, you shut up. Answering whatever questions they have: Where are you from? How long have you been here? Do you have a wife? Kids? Will you return to your country? If you're chatting on your cell phone, some passenger will tell you that this is not allowed. This is not an easy job!]

Despite such generalizations about African American drivers, many South Asian immigrant drivers seemed aware that the benefits of citizenship were not equally available to black and non-black Americans. When asked to estimate which groups owned the most and least number of individual medallions, for example, Gurdeep Laroya and his friend (also a driver from India) easily declared that the 'Russians' had the most, and African American drivers had the least. When asked why, Laroya shrugged. "*Medallion kī qīmat,*" he stated. [The price of the medallion.] And his friend turned to ask a question of me: "*Mehengī chīz kaun kharīd saktā hai? Gorā yā kālā?*" [Who can buy an expensive object? A white man or a black man?] This suggests a more complicated understanding of how race might affect the opportunities available to white and non-white individuals. The acknowledgement that expensive objects were out of the reach of some groups seemed like a comment on the marginalization of these groups, and the limited avenues for socio-economic advancement available to them. Yet, some of his compatriots had voiced their perception that black drivers worked only 'as much as necessary.' Despite some drivers' nuanced understanding of the opportunities available to marginalized groups, it must be stated that common experiences of subordination do not necessarily unite groups that self-identify as different from each other, and that subordinated groups often compete with each other for material and social benefits. Scholarly works suggest that immigrants have distanced themselves from African Americans in their attempts to integrate themselves with white middle-class America (Ong 2003; Singh 1996), and African Americans might see them as having easier and quicker access to material and social resources that they themselves do not. Having said that, some scholars (Mathew 2005; Prasad 2000) seem to imply a rather simplistic

relation between race and class --- that elite South Asians are racist and working-class South Asians reveal more sensitivity to race relations. This is an important critique of their otherwise perceptive works. The problem may be in the assumption that they are not affected by racist attitudes or prejudices themselves. Experiential knowledge does have its merits, but this is akin to assuming that all women are inherently more inclined to be feminist.

In fact, when describing the difficulties of their jobs, drivers report feeling what Bearman (2005) calls 'socially dead.' That is, while they are literally present in the taxicab, they are invisible to the passenger unless he/she chooses to acknowledge them. The power dynamic is such, however, that when the passenger does choose to engage in a social relationship, drivers must respond and enter that temporary relationship. In any case, while there was widespread acceptance that the nature of the occupation required hard work, drivers did offer their impressions of the work ethic of groups of drivers. Some of these impressions seemed straightforward. For example, owner-operators, or drivers who owned both vehicle and medallion, were widely-perceived to have the best-maintained and most personalized taxicabs. This was understandable. Lease drivers, who constituted the majority of taxi workers, did not own their vehicles and, while they were responsible for maintaining clean interiors during their shift, the overall maintenance and décor was the responsibility of the vehicle owner. Owner-operators had already invested significant capital into their taxicabs, and it was in their own interests to maintain the vehicles. Mohammad-bhai, Yaqub Qureishi, Charanjeet Singh, Satpal Singh and Kinfe Zenawi were examples of owner-operators who took great pride in their taxicabs. They had pictures or symbols of religious figures or religious text and/or political signage

(relating to Khalistan, a religio-nationalist secessionist movement in the Indian Punjab) on their dashboards, they regularly changed their air fresheners, and had comfortable grips added to their steering wheels and/or cushions (and lumbar support) on their driving seats. Satpal Singh reported lighting incense in his vehicle every morning before he began his workday. Zenawi rented his taxicab and medallion to a fellow-Ethiopian for the night shift, and reported checking the vehicle each morning to see if his friend had caused any damage.

South Asian immigrant drivers had opportunities to meet with drivers from other immigrant groups in transitory spaces ---- in queues outside hotels or the Amtrak Station, for example, as they waited for fares. They also met drivers outside dispatch companies, where they queued to be assigned taxis for daily shifts. Companies assigned such taxis for daily shifts on a first come, first served basis so if the taxis were already taken, drivers waited and mingled with whoever else was waiting till another taxi became available. They were asked to describe their social circles, and most reported socializing within their national and/or religious groups.

Charanjeet Singh and Yaqub Qureishi, sitting for a joint interview at a local Pakistani halaal restaurant, seemed equally surprised when I asked where they socialized outside of work. *"Matlab? Milnā-julnā yāné...?,"* they asked, when I wondered if they mingled with drivers outside their own religious and/or national groups. *"Sāth sāth chāi pī rahén hain!"* they joked at first, pointing to the steaming tea in the plastic cups in front of us. *"Aur samosé mangai hain!"* added Singh. [What do you mean, socialize…? We're drinking tea together! And we've just asked for samosas!] But they continued:

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Kis ké pās waqt hai? Ādhā din kām mein jātā hai. Zimmédāriyān bhī nibhānī hain, sab kī aisī hālat hai. Log door, door rehté hain, sab ké apné apné bīwī-bacché, naukrī, masjid jānā --- yā gurudwārā ---," Qureishi added, nodding towards Charanjeet Singh, "ittī sāri chīzon mein din-rāt sab mashroof hoté hain. Charan-bhāi gurudwāré mein doston ko milté hain, hum North Philly mein. Stand pé milté hai, kabhī kabhī, yā airport holding lot mein, bas.

[Who has the time? Half the day is spent in work. We have responsibilities to take care of, every one of us does. People live far away from each other, and everyone is busy with their own wives, jobs, children, going to the masjid or gurudwara. Everyone is busy with these things. Charan-bhai meets his friends at the gurudwara, I meet mine in North Philly. We meet at the taxi stands or at the airport holding lot, but that's it.]

Thus, drivers spent most of the day working alone, and interacted mainly with co-ethnics. Satpal Singh noted that things were, in fact, better these days: *"Ab toh sab ké pās cell phone hotā hai; pehlé to sab driver din-bhar akélé thé. Passenger ho yā nā ho, driver khud ko akelā samajhtā thā. Uss time mein sab radio sunté thé, bas. Ab to phone par kabhī kabhī kīsī sé bāt kar lo, address poochho, bīwī ko phone karo. PPA inspector né dékh liyā to fine karégā, lekin…"* he trailed off. [Everyone has a cell phone today; earlier, drivers spent their workdays alone. Whether there was a passenger in the vehicle or not, the driver felt alone. We used to listen to the radio, that's all. Now, we can chat on the cell phone sometimes, ask for an address, call our wives. The PPA inspector can fine us if he sees us, but…] There was a risk of being caught and fined but technology had offered drivers the choice to not work entirely in solitude (Griffith Williams 2012). Vervoort et al (2012) note that ethnic minorities often 'hunker down' within their own ethnic groups (particularly in their residential neighborhoods), and interact minimally with non-ethnics and natives. They note that such individuals interact with non-ethnics primarily in their occupations; taxi workers are a perfect example of this phenomenon. The organizer-

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drivers were the exception to the trend of intra-group mingling, and reported interactions across national, religious and racial lines. As the next chapter will detail, organizers proactively reached out to co-ethnics and other drivers, attended social events, conducted 'briefings' to share relevant information with other drivers.

Some perceptions about particular communities were popular, and perhaps further perpetuated stereotypes. For example, speculations about visa statuses of other taxi workers: Respondents of Indian origin frequently stated that Bangladeshi drivers were 'lucky' because they could get lottery visas, and two West African drivers (from Mali and Ghana) declared that 'all the Somalis' were on refugee visas. Drivers and organizers noted that while Philadelphia had a respectable proportion of individual medallion-owners, most of these individuals were Eastern European immigrants. The congruence [or lack thereof] between these impressions and the reality of the taxicab industry is apparent during the discussions of medallion ownership and the taxi industry as a microcosm of lower-income, immigrant, urban America.

Some attitudes were expressed by all immigrant groups. One was a wavering belief in the possibility of realizing the 'American Dream,' which seemed tempered with desperation. Drivers complained about not being remunerated adequately for the financial, physical and mental resources they invested in their jobs every day, and noted that even though their lives weren't easy, America was the only place they would amount to anything.

Yet, class and status and occupational identities were a source of some awkwardness, sometimes even tension. Many respondents repeatedly emphasized that their present occupation began as a temporary occupation when they couldn't find jobs

more suited to their qualifications, and were frustrated that the long hours and backbreaking work wasn't providing as much upward socio-economic mobility as they deserved or had hoped. Respondents also tended to stress on their other (academic/technical) qualifications and their family backgrounds as landed peasantry or business owners in South Asia. Lessinger (1995) notes that Indian immigrants holding low-status jobs have been far too ashamed of their low social status and lack of upward mobility to publicly fight over that job. Matthew (2005), too, notes that initial resistance to the taxi workers' alliance came from the drivers who were not ready to rally around an identity as taxi workers. Viewing their job (taxi driving) as temporary and low-status made them reluctant to embrace it as an identity. Rather, their national or religious identities provided them far simpler narratives to present and be proud of.

The lives of drivers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are fundamentally similar after arrival in the United States. Many of them worked in other countries before resettling in Philadelphia, and though many arrived alone, they all eventually lived with their families (spouse and children; sometimes also parents). They held graduate degrees from their home countries but were not directly utilizing that education in their current occupation, and all their economic opportunities derived from their social networks. Their social networks enabled not only their entry into the taxicab industry but, eventually, also their involvement in the taxi workers' alliances. The next section will discuss this in greater detail.

Role of immigrant social networks
All the drivers talked about the help they had received from friends, relatives and co-ethnics. Academics have studied extensively the formation of such occupational

niches (Mitra 2003; Waldinger 1999), ethnic economies (Light & Gold 2000) and the social ties, relationships and networks that sustain them (Portes 1998; Stack 1997; Venkatesh 2009). There are myriad reasons for why a certain group clusters in a given occupation, such as the skills and resources needed to engage in that occupation, and the pre-existing concentration of co-ethnics in the occupation. Degrees, training or work experience from their home countries may not lead to similar employment in the United States, so they may take up occupations that require little to no training (Reitz 2011). Examples: stocking shelves in stores or washing dishes in restaurants. There are, of course, some professional degrees that do provide gainful employment in the United States. Apart from immigrants with medical and engineering degrees, the waves of immigration after 1965 also included nurses from the southern Indian state of Kerala. Female nurses found jobs in local hospitals and their husbands and children followed (George 2005; Melwani 2005).

The lack of fluency in English might lead to work in fields or shops in immigrant neighborhoods, where the immigrant has little need to interact with the English-speaking public. Two examples are Mexicans who dominate mushroom-picking outside Philadelphia, and Vietnamese or Chinese immigrants in South Philadelphia and Chinatown, respectively. Immigrants who arrived on work or student visas might have more resources than, say, refugees, who might have arrived with few personal possessions. However, contemporary immigrants do the same low-paying, unskilled jobs that older immigrants did (Foner 2001; Waldinger 1999).

Immigrants also tended to prefer to be self-employed. The 2000 Census reveals that immigrants made up 7 percent of the workforce but 12 percent of the self-employed entrepreneurs in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. After making the initial investment (for example, purchasing a taxicab), they could be their own boss. They felt that it shielded them from hostile supervisors as well as the potential discrimination and barriers imposed by their legal status and language ability. My own experience working with newly-arrived refugees at a non-profit organization in Philadelphia showed how new arrivals often lack the 'soft skills' that enhance their employability. Social and cultural capital --- ranging from familiarity with American slang to knowledge of local sports teams --- profoundly affect employability, even in simple jobs like stocking shelves in grocery stores or clearing sawdust and other debris from a woodworking studio. Finally, apart from employers' lack of information about foreign qualifications and their American equivalencies, immigrants also lack the professional connections to network effectively for higher-paying jobs.

Drivers helped co-ethnics in little and big ways on a regular basis. For example, despite the PPA's strictures against using cell phones while driving, all drivers used them extensively to help each other. They called friends to a particular pick-up spot in the city if they noticed a lot of business in the area, or asked them for directions to a particular destination or warned them if they spotted police or PPA activity in an area. Drivers often joked that they had their own personal dispatch network, which was always free of cost and sometimes worked better than the company dispatch radio. In fact, Griffith Williams (2012) argues that communication technologies like cell phones have greatly empowered

taxi workers by enabling the creation of a community, which can provide assistance and a sense of rootedness, even though their job is solitary and requires constant movement.

Drivers also helped each other monetarily, and established business relationships with co-ethnics. For example, they provided interest-free cash advances to friends and relatives (who might wish to purchase a taxicab) or pooled their resources for a joint venture. Mushtaq Khan and his brother bought their taxicab together, and split the shifts to maximize use of the cab. They alternated shifts so that both shared the dangers of the night shift equally. Such practices [joint purchases] were common across immigrant groups. Two Malian drivers, unrelated to each other, who arrived in Philadelphia in the early 1980s reported doing the same. They were able to jointly purchase a medallion soon after the medallion system was instituted in 1990, a fact they attribute to their savings, substantial loans from other Malian friends, and luck. Not one of the drivers interviewed declared applying for or receiving a loan from a bank. The overwhelming sentiment was that bankers could not be trusted because they were strangers, asked too many questions, and were only looking out for the bank's profit. Further, dealing with institutions required far too much paperwork, and not every driver had the legal documentation to warrant loans from commercial banks.

This system of informal loans is common across immigrant communities, and is not restricted to financial help alone. Relatives and co-ethnics provide their free or cheap labor to run businesses and also provide a customer base. These business transactions are underwritten by the parties' trust in each other, and the fear of social censure should they break that trust. Such ethnic economic activity can help revitalize entire neighborhoods

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even though they may use discriminatory practices such as not hiring individuals outside their own ethnic groups or depending on unfairly compensated or unpaid labor. In fact, Satpal Singh noted that lease drivers often shared a taxicab with a friend. If one driver signed up for the day shift, for example, dispatch companies were content to let him recommend a friend for the night shift. This eased dispatch companies' responsibilities, and allowed members of social networks to assist one of their own. This trend has been noted by Mitra (2003), too.

However, Menjivar (2000) cautions against assuming that such social networks are an unfailing buffer for immigrants, always ensuring that they receive sustenance or support. She argues that these networks can fail the immigrants who constitute them --- not necessarily because of the adoption of American "individualism" or personal traits like selfishness but because individuals just do not have adequate resources to sustain themselves and also meet the needs of all those who make claims on them. It is, therefore, far too simplistic to think of networks as merely 'strong' or 'weak' (Lim 2012; Marsden & Campbell 2012; Menjivar 2000). Networks are dynamic processes, which are influenced by the larger structural and historical context in which they are embedded as well as the resources and social position and opportunities of the individuals who are part of the network. This observation is particularly valid in the case of South Asian immigrant taxi workers. While most drivers reported relatively harmonious relations within their immediate social networks, the ties were frayed when competing taxi workers' alliances began demanding support from the immigrants. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Having entered the occupation because someone or everyone they knew was in it, South Asian immigrant drivers often talked to their compatriots about the difficulties they faced every day. They reported sitting in their homes with fellow-drivers, or huddling together in their cliques at the airport parking lot or local eateries, talking about the problems with the job, with life, with the world. Some admitted that relatives and taxi workers in New York City had talked about a union for taxi workers, but they were waiting to see what came of it and did not seriously consider a union for themselves. A few others, almost entirely Pakistani immigrants, whose residences and places of worship were concentrated in immigrant neighborhoods in the northeast of the city, admitted to a faint loyalty to an existing group: The Brotherhood of United Taxi Workers. The organization was the first to have tried, they said proudly, to unite taxi workers and give them some strength to bargain with the PPA. They had organized a few strikes, fought the PUC over airport fees and campaigned for fare increases. They were the first, and though they did not have many victories to their name, they were sincere, drivers concluded generously.

Drivers continued their backbreaking work, alternately railing against the unfairness of the medallion system, developing inchoate demands for the right to better working conditions, and resigning themselves to struggles as unskilled immigrants in exploitative jobs. Things began to change at the turn of the century, however, when a new organization sought to mobilize taxi workers and improve their working conditions, and bring more cohesion to their demands. The next chapter will discuss this new entrant and the formation of another taxi workers' alliance in Philadelphia, the eventual merger of

different groups into a united alliance, and the role of South Asian immigrants in this specific example of labor organization. It will detail their mobilization and outreach, the specific issues tackled, and discuss the influence of non-profits on the rhetoric and strategies of this new workers' alliance especially in how they constructed their demands for the rights of a diverse, immigrant-majority, unskilled laboring population. Further, while social networks were crucial in providing access to immigrant drivers, the taxi workers' alliances and non-profit professionals provided valuable logistical support and links to important resource persons outside immigrant networks.

Chapter 4 – The Development of Taxi Workers Alliances

"Yeh *union* nahīn hai, bétā. Hum *union* nahīn banā sakté. *Allowed* hī nahīn. Amrīkā mein hum *driver*on kā *union allowed* hī nahīn. … Kām *union* kā hai, bas *union* keh nahīn sakté."

[This isn't a union, my child. We can't unionize. It isn't allowed. Taxi drivers are not allowed a union in America. … It does the work of a union; we just cannot call it a union.]

- Satpal Singh and Baadal Singh
dues-paying members of the United Taxi Workers' Alliance

"The unorganizability of undocumented workers … has become a 'pseudofact.'"

- Hector Delgado (1993: 10)

The taxi workers' mobilizations today are a marked change from union activity in the taxicab industry through the late twentieth century. [In fact, most of the trends noted in this industry are a consequence of global economic and political shifts towards increasing deregulation, and are similarly experienced by other industries.] Local chapters of taxi workers' unions, which had been active during the 1930s and 1940s (Milkman 2006), disintegrated during the 1970s and 1980s due to a variety of factors. Firstly, this was due to the fundamental structural changes to the taxicab industry itself. The shift to the medallion licensing of vehicles and the independent contracting of drivers drastically reduced the pool of workers who were allowed to unionize. Secondly, national unions were guilty of benign neglect of their dwindling taxi worker constituents, in large part due to these workers' new status as independent contractors. In fact, most unions were weakening in numbers and influence due to the hostile political environment in the United States in the late twentieth century (Delgado 1993; LeBlanc 1999; Milkman

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2006). Finally, the late twentieth century saw increasing immigration from Asia and Africa, and a large proportion of these immigrants were unskilled, non-professional workers (Das Gupta 2006; Khandelwal 1995, 2000; Lal 2008; Leonard 1992, 1997; Lessinger 1995; Prashad 2000). The taxicab industry absorbed many of these newer arrivals. Close to two thirds of the research subjects in this study, for example, arrived after 1986. [Refer to Table 3.4.] These recent arrivals struggled to make ends meet in a backbreaking occupation, and did not immediately have the wherewithal to mobilize (Das Gupta 2006; Mathew 2005). Unions have a longstanding history of tension with immigrants, including their well-known advocacy in favor of restrictive immigration policies dating as far back as the late nineteenth century, when unions on the West coast actively lobbied the United States Congress to pass restrictive immigration laws (Briggs 2001; Haus 1995; Milkman 2000, 2006; Ngai 2004). Some unions broke away from the behemoth AFL-CIO in the 1980s to form immigrant-friendly unions (like Change to Win) and organize Latino workers, and the AFL-CIO itself finally reversed its anti-immigration stance in 2000 (Briggs 2001; Milkman 2000, 2006). Specifically, in the taxicab industry, established unions made little to no attempts to court the growing ranks of immigrant workers (Hodges 2007; Mathew 2005; Vidich 1976).

There exist organizations today, in the twenty-first century, which are fighting for taxi workers' rights to better working conditions. Their activities are entirely peaceful: legislative campaigns, direct negotiations with other stakeholders (medallion owners and governmental regulatory authorities), and a handful of nonviolent strikes (Das Gupta 2006; Mathew 2005). All of these are notably less violent in comparison to union activity

in the twentieth century (Hodges 2007). In fact, in its most violent years in Philadelphia, in the 1920s and 1930s, national newspapers reported that taxicab strikes occasionally involved the destruction of vehicles ('48 Taxicabs Wrecked,' 1922: 9).

The previous two chapters discussed, separately, the history of the taxicab industry in Philadelphia up to the institution of the medallion system, and the history and lives of the taxi workers. The present chapter picks up those two narratives, and discusses the formation of organizations advocating for the rights of taxi workers, and how South Asian immigrants were sought out and contributed to the outreach and campaigns of the organizations. It traces the historical development of one such organization, the Taxi Workers' Alliance of Pennsylvania [TWA-PA], which is fighting for taxi workers' rights in Philadelphia today. This account details the organization's outreach and mobilization tactics and the role and involvement of South Asian immigrant taxi workers, especially the crucial role of their social networks in facilitating outreach. I argue that both organizers and drivers were acutely aware of the myriad differences between drivers --- religious, racial, language, national origin and legal status, to name a few --- and the disruptive potential of these differences, and that their outreach and mobilization activities reflected this awareness. They did not try to decouple identity politics and class politics. Instead, as their use of social networks shows, they used one to bolster the other. Lastly, the chapter considers the role of non-profit and social justice organizations and other 'experts' in this mobilization. I argue that they provided logistic support and also influenced the politics and rhetoric of the taxi workers alliance.

Political activity in the taxicab industry

     Satpal Singh could not recall any single moment of epiphany when he realized that he and other taxi workers could benefit from some form of organization. *"Kab samajh āyā? Iss mein samajhné kī kyā bāt hai? Bas, mālūm thā."* ["It's so obvious," he laughed, "Why would there be just one moment?"] His involvement with the individuals who were coming together to form such an organization grew rapidly, after a chance encounter with a stranger. An African American taxi driver walked up to him as he was waiting for a fare at the Amtrak train station in early 2005, and, proffering a handshake, introduced himself: Ray Brown. Brown had been driving taxis off and on for close to two decades, and he was surveying fellow drivers to gauge their interest in joining a union. Wary of speaking with a stranger, wanting to mind his own business, and with an eye on the slow-moving queue of taxis in front of him, Satpal Singh had listened quietly as Brown talked about their working conditions. Checking off each item on his left hand, Singh repeated to me what he remembered of that conversation: no readily accessible restrooms, long hours, and chronic back pain. Singh was stoic about these problems. *"Āsān kām nahīn. Āth-das ghanté baithé réhné sé tabiyat par asar hotā hai. Lékin har job mein taqlīf toh hotī hai, kīsī sé bhī poochh kar dékho, āp. Har kīsī ko kuchh nā kuchh taqlīf to hotī hai."* [It's a difficult job. Sitting in the seat for 8-10 hours affects one's health. But ask anyone, all jobs have their own problems. Everybody is affected in some way or the other.] Other complaints, however, struck a chord with him: the inadequate take-home pay, exorbitant fines and soaring gas prices, the popular perception of taxicab drivers as dishonest and undocumented, and having to deal with offensive passengers. *"Koī driver hain aisé, jo tamīz sé bāt nahīn karté, jin kī taxi kharāb hotī hai. Lékin*

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zyādātār to sab imāndāri sé kām karté hain, sab rule follow karté hain, unn 20-25 driveron kī sazāh hamein kyon?" [There are drivers who are rude, whose taxis are in bad condition. But most of us do honest work, follow all the rules. Why should we suffer for those 20 to 25 drivers?]

The Taxi Workers' Alliance of Pennsylvania [TWA-PA] was set up in 2005 with the intention of improving the daily working conditions of Philadelphia's 3,000 to 3,200 regular taxi drivers. If you include the numbers of drivers who are licensed, and drive or used to drive sporadically, this number jumps to 5,000. However, the TWA-PA was not the first organization to attempt this. Up to 2005, the Brotherhood of Taxi Workers [BUTW] was the only organization fighting for taxi workers, and their most recent President, Mohammad-bhai, reported a roster of 400 members when the organization disbanded in 2007. The organization had a mixed record of successes and setbacks. Soon after the medallion system was instituted in 1990s, the BUTW called a series of strikes to protest the condition of the taxicab industry. In 1993, they organized a strike to protest the poaching of their customers by limousine companies [flat-rate, unmetered van services and chauffeured cars] at Philadelphia International Airport. The BUTW admitted that taxi drivers were partly to blame for passengers' increasing use of limousines. Their service and their vehicles were in shambles but the BUTW pointed out that reducing their income would help improve neither. The strike had no noticeable impact on passengers, and limousine companies appreciated the reduced competition for fares. In 1994, the PUC determined that the ride from the airport to Center City (or reverse) would cost passengers a flat rate of $20. At the same time, airport officials instituted an 'airport

departure fee' of $1.50 to be paid by drivers each time they picked up passengers at any terminal (Belden 1994; "This Ain't London," 1994). The BUTW called another strike in May 1994: 250 taxis boycotted the airport in protest of the fee and flat-rate (Caba & Gelles, 1994). They argued that while the flat-rate netted them more money than a metered ride, the higher price would push passengers towards limousine services (vans), and so they wanted the flat-rate revoked. The BUTW agreed, however, that drivers often overcharged passengers, especially visitors from out of town, and Philadelphia residents and even some taxi drivers were in favor of the flat-rate. This second strike failed, too. The BUTW's demands were not met and, meanwhile, limousine companies and public buses and trains [run by SEPTA, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority] enjoyed greater patronage. In response, a third strike was called two days later. Taxi workers planned to strike all over the city, expecting that the disruption would make airport officials revoke the $1.50 fee as well as the flat-rate. The strike lasted 5 days and ended, once again, with no concessions on the part of city officials. The President of the BUTW gamely summarized the situation thus: Even though their demands were not met, the unified strikers had achieved solidarity and visibility that had not existed previously. PUC officials did indeed credit the BUTW, barely over a year old itself, with unifying multiple taxi worker organizations in the city (Caba 1994).

Oversight of the taxicab industry was transferred from the Public Utilities Commission [PUC] to the Philadelphia Parking Authority [PPA] in 2004, and the PPA took over day-to-day operations in 2005. While working conditions had always been tough, the change in management and a spate of rules that were seen to work against the

drivers' interests, rallied drivers more than seen in recent history. Some of the grievances were long-running issues while others were more immediate. [Issues will be discussed in detail a little later into the chapter]. One widespread and long-running grievance was the fact that the base fare had not been increased in almost fourteen years even as gas prices and inflation had both skyrocketed. [The PPA was sympathetic to an increase, which initially led to taxi worker support.] An immediate issue was the fact that five taxi drivers had been murdered on the job over 12 months spanning 2004 and 2005, with no public outcry or speedy justice for the victim's families. Another immediate grievance was the transfer of oversight over the taxicab industry from the PUC to the PPA in 2005. Drivers were chafing under larger and more arbitrary fines. They complained that the PPA inspectors slapped fines on drivers at the first instance, without giving any warnings or without granting any probationary period. One driver, Shaqeel Khan, narrated an encounter with a PPA inspector who had first pulled him aside for a missing hubcap. As Khan waited by the side of the road, he methodically inspected the vehicle, piling up fine after fine for all that did not meet the PPA's code: A 'dirty' interior, a tear in the upholstery on the passenger seat, and a loose seatbelt. Khan, who owned the vehicle but leased a medallion, was fined $700. Satpal Singh, who owned his taxicab and a medallion, complained that PPA fines were the largest in the history of the local taxicab industry. Other drivers reminisced about working under the PUC's oversight, almost waxing lyrical about those times. PUC inspectors had limited their fines to double digits, and they had not fined as frequently and furiously as PPA inspectors did. Only in cases of severe offenses, some drivers recalled, would the PUC inspectors place an "Out of Service" sticker on the vehicle, and take the vehicle off the road till the required

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maintenance was done and/or the fines were paid. "And that was alright," seemed to be the general sentiment. Charging between $100 and $150 for not wearing a seatbelt or $200 for a malfunctioning air-conditioner was, however, considered outrageous. Even after accounting for the fact that drivers and organizers might use hyperbole when speaking of "the largest fines in history," what was undeniable was the drivers' anger with the PPA's management. The PPA, charged with cleaning up the lax and corruption-ridden management, was beginning to enforce already-existing laws, impose tougher penalties, and was ostensibly trying to update the industry's standards. The drivers, long-used to a more disinterested and decrepit overseer, were resentful of the change. The organizers of what would become the Taxi Workers' Alliance of Pennsylvania [TWA-PA] seized upon this sentiment.

Some founder-members of what would become the TWA-PA were initially involved with the BUTD but were disillusioned with that organization's methods and lack of success. In fact, respondents reported that a few years prior to the PPA takeover, the BUTW was essentially inactive. The President preceding Mohammad-bhai was reputed to have quit his post to work for one of largest medallion owners in the city. Satpal Singh recalled that his first meeting with Brown had barely piqued his curiosity. It was unusual to have a veritable stranger walk up to him and talk about drivers' problems, but he did not think too much about it. Other drivers, Sikhs like him, mentioned their own encounters with Brown as they shared their Sunday lunch at the gurudwara. And he noticed Brown returning to the taxi stand to talk to drivers every few days. He strolled over to Brown, and listened to him talk to other drivers about how he had heard that taxi

workers in New York were fighting the TLC. Singh was impressed. This man was a driver himself, was talking to drivers on his own time, and he knew about the New York drivers organization. Brown floated the idea of forming a new alliance as an alternative to the BUTW. He told Singh that he knew a handful of drivers who were interested in doing something about the PPA and their new rules, and suggested that this group meet.

These interested individuals were Kinfe Zenawi, Mushtaq Khan and Paul Olubumni. Three of these men, Brown (an African American native of Philadelphia), Khan (a first-generation Bangladeshi immigrant) and Olubumni (a first-generation Nigerian immigrant) had been driving for years but did not own a medallion. Brown had been driving sporadically since 1983, Khan and Olubumni had been driving full-time since 1981 and 2002, respectively. Zenawi (a first-generation Ethiopian immigrant) and Singh himself (a first-generation immigrant from Punjab) owned their taxis and medallions, and were full-time drivers since the late 1980s. These men were not friends before they became collaborators. Brown had met Singh and Khan by chance --- when he approached them at taxi stands. However, though their personal trajectories varied, they shared a few common characteristics. Three of the five [Singh, Khan and Olubumni] were immigrants with some experience of political or social organization in their home countries, which will be discussed later in the chapter. They were also quite deeply embedded in their own immigrant networks, and their age and/or education had accorded some of them clout within their social circles. They had all been discussing the sorry state of the taxicab industry with their friends (all drivers within their ethnic or immigrant circles). While Brown did not have direct political experience prior to his involvement

with taxi worker alliances, his father had been a union worker in the city's sanitation department. After almost two decades of taxi driving, he had, literally, had enough. "*The system is crazy,*" he said in our very first interview. *"We [drivers] know it doesn't work. We have to change it ourselves, nobody else will do it for us."* Charles Smith, a native Philadelphian lease driver, joined this group of core collaborators later. A heart attack had recently forced him to stop driving, but Smith, worrying about the mounting medical bills, rushed back to work too soon and suffered a second heart attack. He took time off from taxi work (and his spouse's income ran their household) and got actively involved with the Alliance. Two of the core organizers (Singh and Brown) had heard of the New York Taxi Worker Alliance (NYTWA) from their friends and relatives in New York City, and their organizing successes gave them a sense of what was possible.

They reached out to Bhairavi Desai and Biju Mathew, lead organizers for the NYTWA, for advice. The NYTWA, set up in 1998, is a dues-based membership organization for taxi workers in New York City, and widely considered a role model for taxi workers' organizations nationwide. With their guidance, as well as help from other non-profit and social justice organizations like the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), they registered an organization, the Taxi Workers Alliance of PA (TWA-PA). At the time of registration, the National Labor Relations Board [NLRB] did not allow independent contractors, which is what taxi drivers are, to form a union, and the TWA-PA was therefore registered as a non-profit organization.

By 2006, the TWA-PA boasted a membership of 1,200 taxi drivers (a combination of lease drivers and owner-operators), of which 100 paid membership dues

and the rest were referred to as associate members. Annual dues were set at $120, and drivers had the option of making monthly payments of $10. Only one organizer, Brown, was a full-time employee while the rest contributed to mobilization efforts from personal funds. The organization continued working on its structure for the next two years, sought legal help in framing bylaws, and planned campaigns and outreach activities within the taxi worker community. They worked with the BUTW on some issues and disagreed on others.

The leadership of both the TWA-PA and the BUTW realized that they were wasting precious resources on fighting each other [as discussions later in the chapter will show, these were differences of opinion on strategy], and that the taxi workers would be most benefitted by a united front. Thus, after over two years of overt and passive conflicts, on May 21, 2007, the two organizations officially and legally merged into one --- the Unified Taxi Workers' Alliance [UTWA]. Their first act after the merger was calling an election for the new organization's leadership. The election was a carefully coordinated event. The voting process needed to be efficient so that taxi workers did not lose too much driving time (and the income they could have earned), and it had to avoid even the slightest semblance of foul play or voter intimidation so that the results would have greater credibility. Fliers were distributed at all major taxi stands, the Amtrak train station and the airport holding lot, to spread the word about the election, and volunteers from the National Lawyers Guild and the Media Mobilizing Project oversaw the election and later tallied and verified the votes. Drivers could vote at either the station or the

airport holding lot. While there were four candidates on the ballot, it was a contest between Ray Brown and Mohammad-bhai.

It was close to midnight by the time the votes were counted. 557 drivers had cast their votes (a mere fraction of the approximately 3000 drivers who were eligible to participate), and 361 of those had chosen Ray Brown. Brown's victory established him as the leader of this new unified alliance, and made the UTWA the second largest taxi workers' alliance in the country (second to the NYTWA). After the merger, the President of the BUTW, Mohammad-bhai, convinced many of his supporters to transfer their loyalties to the UTWA.

After the UTWA was formed and elections completed, the core organizers formed a leadership committee (including President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Board of Directors) that was as representative of the various groups within the taxi workers as possible. Singh, Khan, Zenawi, Mohammad-bhai, Smith and Brown were all part of this leadership committee. Only one position was paid and fulltime (President) out of a grant from local non-profit organizations. All other positions were voluntary, unpaid and part-time, though the drivers did receive the occasional honorarium to cover a day's lease if funding allowed it (Chervenka 2012). Brown reported that the UTWA had 350 dues-paying members in 2012, representing close to 12% of all drivers in Philadelphia.

The UTWA, in collaboration with the NYTWA, approached the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations [AFL-CIO] and asked to be included in the labor federation and be granted a national

charter for taxi workers. On August 3, 2011, the current AFL-CIO President, Richard Trumka, authorized a national charter for a National Taxi Workers' Alliance [NTWA], which would serve as an umbrella organization for taxi worker unions all over the United States. The NTWA was asked to form an Organizing Committee [currently consisting of organizers from two local alliances, the NYTWA and the UTWA] to organize new unions of taxi workers and help mobilize workers in cities where taxi workers express interest but no AFL-CIO alliances currently exist. Bhairavi Desai was appointed President of the newly-formed NTWA. The NTWA now officially nationally represents licensed medallion taxi drivers in New York City and Philadelphia, and is organizing in other cities like Chicago, Boston and San Francisco [AFL-CIO website].

This was the first time a new union was chartered in the AFL-CIO in fifty years. The granting of a charter to the National Taxi Workers' Union was significant because a non-traditional labor organization [an alliance of independent contractors] was incorporated within the folds of a traditional labor organization. This is significant also because the non-traditional organization was a niche immigrant occupation (given labor unions' historical hostility towards immigrants). In fact, immigrant membership in unions was rare until after World War II (Briggs 2001; Milkman 2006). In short, for a workforce made up of majority immigrant "independent contractors," this national charter was a historic victory. What comes of it remains to be seen.

Issues tackled by the taxi workers alliances

The United Taxi Workers Alliance [erstwhile TWA-PA] began negotiations with the regulatory authority, the PPA, about fairer rules and regulations, transparency in

decision-making, and workers' compensation for drivers. The important issues are discussed in this section. [A quick note on terminology: When discussing the taxi workers' alliances, the word "Alliance" is used (as opposed to TWA-PA and UTWA) when campaigns were begun under the TWA-PA but continued under the UTWA or were begun exclusively under the UTWA.]

GPS and credit card machines: One of the first actions of the PPA was to mandate the installation of a credit card swipe machine and a Global Positioning System (GPS) device in all medallion taxicabs. The PPA claimed that diversifying payment options would increase taxi usage and benefit the taxi drivers, too, after vehicle owners had paid for the costs of installation ($2,500). However, the PPA struck what was widely seen by taxi workers as a backroom deal with VTS Systems, a GPS service provider, and established a monopoly for VTS in Philadelphia. Even a company that had another GPS system installed, Yellow Cab Company, had to change to VTS. Taxicab owners resented the lack of transparency, and were frustrated that they had no choice in which service provider to use.

This fundamental problem was exacerbated by several related others: (a) the meter was now linked to both the GPS and the credit card swipe machine. This meant that if the GPS lost reception (called "black-outs"), the other two devices were affected, too. Drivers complained that while the credit card swipe machine could sometimes function despite a few seconds of disruption, meter readings were immediately affected by black-outs, which lead to a loss of revenue for drivers. Passengers were distrustful of malfunctioning equipment, and also greatly inconvenienced. In the first few months of

using VTS, drivers reported facing this problem incessantly in Center City; (b) Credit card swipes meant that drivers received cash payments a week after they filed their credit card receipts. For lease drivers, who had to pay for the taxi and medallion rentals in cash each day or each week, delayed payments (from the credit card company) immediately affected their ability to lease a taxicab and earn their livelihood. The loss or disruption of signal mentioned earlier often led to stalled credit card machines and double-charging on passengers' credit cards, which further upset both passengers and drivers and delayed cash payments to drivers. Further, if a card showed up as stolen or if payment was eventually declined after the passenger had left, there was no way for drivers to recover their dues; (c) Drivers had to forego 10% of every fare when a passenger used a credit card. 5% was paid to the dispatch company and the other 5% was shared by VTS and the bank. And finally, (d) though eventually proved to be unfounded, there was a strong suspicion amongst drivers that installing a GPS system that was linked to their meter was a ploy by the Internal Revenue Service to track their income and tax them accordingly. Many drivers opined darkly that the GPS was another means for the government to steal money from a poor man, and that, in doing so, it was only continuing what the big corporate medallion owners and PPA were already doing. While this suspicion eventually withered away, and drivers stopped repeating the rumor in conspiratorial tones in a few months, it is true that the GPS and the paper trail of credit card payments would, were anyone to ask, reduce their ability to underreport their already meager daily income. The initial challenge to VTS installation was led by the BUTW, which organized a rally in early 2006. While the TWA-PA did not attend this first rally (Brubaker 2006: B01), they responded later in public hearings about the installation of VTS equipment and the

problems with the equipment. The TWA-PA worked with the BUTW and organized a protest on December 13, 2006 to oppose the forced acceptance of credit cards, and 98% of taxis were off the streets that day. They were unable to prevent enforcement but took some heart in the evidence that they could organize and rally members to their cause. Some of the more vocal organizers, like Brown and Smith, also pointed to the fact that the PPA consultant who had promoted VTS's services had joined VTS itself as an employee soon after the PPA signed the contract. The PPA withheld $1 million out of the $4 million due to VTS till the problems were fixed. The TWA-PA organizers pointed out that while fair, this did not help the taxi drivers themselves in any way. In December 2011, the PPA renewed their contract with VTS, and drivers, while not pleased, reassured themselves that VTS's service had improved in the five years it had been in operation.

Better waiting zones: Another immediate demand was for the PPA to work with the city of Philadelphia to provide better waiting areas and restroom facilities at major queuing zones, such as at the Amtrak train station and at the International Airport. This was a minor success: restrooms were installed near the train station queuing zone.

Driver safety was another important issue. Drivers have suffered attacks and robberies (Fazlollah 1997) since the beginning of the industry, though, to be fair, in the early twentieth century, they were as often the perpetrators of the crimes (Hodges 2007). *The New York Times* wrote about safety concerns for taxi drivers as far back as November 1988, when five taxi drivers were brutally murdered on the job ('Philadelphia Cab Drivers,' 1988: 52). The NYTWA's agitations began after the gruesome death of a taxi driver in 1998 (Mathew 2005). The PUC did not, at that time, require bullet-resistant

shields or any sort of a partition between the driver and passenger in any of the city's 1,532 licensed taxicabs (Ibid.). Today, partitions are required in all medallion taxicabs, and taxicabs are also required to have panic buttons. While the PPA requires that the interior of a taxi carry warnings about the penalties for assaults on taxi drivers, respondents reported that they were regularly threatened, robbed, and their vehicles vandalized. Most minor assaults usually went unreported, in large part because it took too much time out of the work day to report assaults. Drivers also narrated stories about 'a friend of a friend' who pressed the panic button but did not receive any help at all, and was robbed of his day's earnings. Newspaper archives suggest this to be fatally true in at least one case (Kinney 2008).

Driver health: As mentioned previously, drivers report suffering from chronic back pain, but they were also prone to stress and isolation on a regular basis, and were likely to get hurt or even murdered on the job. The fact that they worked in an industry where most payments were usually made in cash, their late hours, the solitary nature of the occupation, and their work in sometimes dangerous neighborhoods all contributed to a more stressful and dangerous job. A NIOSH report (1995) determined taxi driving was the most dangerous occupation in the United States.

Workers' compensation: The previous issues [health and safety] are linked with this one, and should the Alliance successfully negotiate or litigate this issue, it will fundamentally change the terms of the debate and the structure of the industry. The Alliance began campaigning for workers compensation from 2008 onwards. As mentioned previously, taxi drivers are "independent contractors" and are not eligible for

workers' compensation. However, the term "independent contractor" has also been misused by employers to cut costs. On March 19, 2010, a public hearing was conducted at City Hall on the provisions of House Bill 1914 [HB 1914]. This Bill was introduced to the Urban Affairs Committee of the Pennsylvania General Assembly by State Representative Mark Cohen at the urging of the UTWA and their supporters, which would require medallion owners to guarantee a minimum wage and provide workers' compensation for taxi drivers. [The Bill also included a provision to set up wheelchair accessible taxicabs but this will not be discussed here.] Giving testimonies in favor of and against this Bill were taxi workers and medallion owners, respectively. Using the "right to control" test, used by the Department of Labor to determine whether an individual is an employee or an independent contractor, various stakeholders made somewhat predictable but important points. The Greater Philadelphia Taxi Association, a trade association for medallion owners, argued that taxi drivers were independent contractors who controlled their own hours, earned their income from the passengers, and chose their own routes, dispatch companies, and areas of operation. These factors showed minimal control on the part of medallion owners or dispatch companies, and thus made the drivers independent contractors who were ineligible for workers' compensation. The Alliance countered the statements saying that they were misclassified as independent contractors because, in fact, the dispatch companies and medallion owners exerted a great deal of control over their work hours, similar to the ways in which an employer would exert control over an employee. For example, drivers could not choose to switch the dispatch radio off or on, and they could not nap in the middle of a shift. The State Legislature has not come to any decision yet.

Medallion system: Though no legislative action or litigation has taken place regarding this issue, this is another issue that fundamentally questions the structure of the taxicab industry, and the UTWA is a vocal critic of the medallion system. Critiques of the medallion system are common in meetings, at public hearings and rallies, on online forums and in Alliance newsletters.

Such peaceful negotiations are a marked change from more violent union activity a few decades ago. The other significant change in contemporary mobilizations is their 'immigrant intensive' nature. The next section will discuss this in detail.

Taxi worker organizations' use of social networks to reach out to immigrant drivers
Immigrants, especially poorer immigrants and those lacking legal documentation, have been wrongly stereotyped as 'unorganizable.' Given their often arduous journeys to the United States, their precariously-balanced existence in low-paying occupations, and the understanding that their current situation is preferable to the one they left behind in their home countries, it is easy to assume that such groups would be uninterested in political engagement (Delgado 1993; Milkman 2006). Language barriers might further hamper outreach to such groups. Milkman (2006) argues, however, that the low visibility of politically engaged immigrant labor is for two reasons. They are both overrepresented in the informal economy or in industries that depend on 'independent contractors' and underrepresented in unionized sectors. The taxicab industry is a good example of an industry which depends on immigrant independent contractors, and the contemporary industry in Philadelphia is a good example of how immigrant labor can be politically engaged.

Grannis, Smith & Stepan-Norris (2008), in their examination of union leadership, argue that effective leadership must engage with union members both as a 'town hall' and as an 'army.' In other words, leadership must be able to democratically conduct a town hall meeting of *peers*, direct the members with *authority*, and then *represent* their concerns to management. Their research shows that leaders who emerge from 'rank and file,' and whose legitimacy is bolstered by social networks on the shop floor, are able to perform these functions better than those who come from the outside. However, there are instances of union leadership functioning more like 'benevolent dictators' and not trusting the rank and file to make decisions (Milkman 2006: 48), and of national unions, like the SEIU, seeking outside leadership to refresh or energize campaigns (Ibid). The leadership of the Alliance was guided by both these philosophies.

When core organizers came together to form the TWA-PA, they soon realized that their first challenge was the tremendous diversity among taxi workers. Keeping the needs of its immigrant constituency in mind, the TWA-PA followed a 'dual track program.' Some of its activities were designed to improve working conditions for all taxi workers while others responded to the specific needs of immigrant drivers. Ray Brown was the first of the core organizers to talk to drivers at taxi stands (at the Amtrak train station and the airport) about a workers' alliance. It was during such outreach expeditions that Brown met Satpal Singh and Mushtaq Khan, two men who would soon join Brown in outreach activities. Such immigrant drivers, who were comfortable in English as well as their mother tongues, reached out to co-ethnics to introduce the Alliance's campaigns to them. Immigrant organizer-drivers had the primary responsibility of speaking with co-

ethnics wherever possible, not just at social events but also while they were working or waiting to pick up fares at major taxi stands like the Amtrak train station or in the holding lots at the Airport. Membership drives were organized around community gatherings or commonly-frequented establishments, for example, at the local gurudwara or mosque or at specific *halal* restaurants. Mobilization was clearly facilitated by, but not exclusively organized along, ethnic and religious lines.

Immigrant driver-organizers, particularly Mushtaq Khan, stated that this strategy (of using ethnic ties to organize labor) was intentional. The core organizers had invested in the Alliance for personal reasons. However, both immigrant and native-born organizers realized that, in most situations (where individuals did not have an inherent personal motivation to join the Alliance) *community* participation was necessary to facilitate the participation of *individual workers*. Many immigrant drivers might be wary of complete strangers, might worry about getting into trouble or not know about their rights. However, the same drivers might be more receptive to speaking with an acquaintance or someone who had been vouched for by a co-ethnic. Scholars on political participation within social networks have theorized upon precisely such behavior (Milkman 2006; Siegal 2009). Conversations with immigrant drivers showed this to be largely true. Barring a few core organizers, who had crossed ethnic lines in their collaboration, most drivers were approached by an acquaintance from their own national or religious community, who spoke to them in their mother tongue, and was available for follow-up questions. The issue of language ability and how it facilitated mobilization will be discussed momentarily.

Table 4.1: Summary of outreach to South Asian immigrant drivers [N=63]

Driver's mother tongue [and total # of speakers]	# who reported fluency in English	# who were first approached by co-ethnic	# who were first approached by a stranger	# who reported active* engagement with the Alliance
Bengali [17]	12	15	2	9
Punjabi [32]**	21	31	1	20
Urdu [10]	7	9	1	9
Hindi [4]	1	4	0	1

Source: Primary data
* Active meaning attending more than one meeting, rally and public hearing
** Of the 32 drivers who reported Punjabi as their mother tongue, 19 also reported fluency in Hindi or Urdu.

Table 4.2: Sites for first attempt at outreach to South Asian immigrant drivers*

Site	Number of drivers
Amtrak train station	12
Airport holding lot	34
Stands in the city (outside hotels or along streets)	0
Eating establishment	6
Dispatch companies	0
Community events	9
Private residence	2

Source: Primary data
* Total = 63 drivers

Drivers reported that organizer-drivers had reached out to them on multiple sites, and the majority reported at least one conversation with organizer-drivers at either the Amtrak train station or the airport holding lot. Drivers reported discussing the taxicab industry and the Alliance in all the locations listed in Table 4.2 except outside dispatch companies (while daily shift drivers waited to be assigned a taxicab).

Mushtaq Khan credits this strategy --- of concerted outreach to immigrant groups --- for the growing participation of immigrant taxi workers in meetings, rallies and strikes. Drivers appreciated the fact that non-immigrant drivers were reaching out to

immigrant communities, and reciprocated the interest. Brown and Smith were invited by Khan and Hassan to introduce themselves and the Alliance at some of the Bangladeshi drivers' social gatherings at halal restaurants in West Philadelphia. Brown had also visited Satpal Singh and Charanjeet Singh near their gurudwara in Millbourne and talked to their friends (Sikh drivers) there, and Aslam Khan was the main 'insider contact' for some Pakistani drivers residing in Upper Darby.

Attendees at the Alliance's meetings discussed ongoing campaigns and issues, cultural differences amongst taxi workers and within immigrant groups, and also economic issues (like how owning a medallion lowered the stakes for some drivers). That is, owner-operators did not struggle to make ends meet as the lease drivers usually did. Sometimes the meetings turned into occasions to let out some steam about particularly bad workdays, unfortunate or heavy fines by the PPA or quick discussions with fellow-drivers about swopping shifts or leads on taxis for sale. In one meeting, a group of drivers grumbled about 'New York,' and blamed the city for some of Philadelphia's problems. New York City's Taxi and Limousine Commission disallowed vehicles older than 5 years to operate as taxis, and these secondhand cars were known to end up on Philadelphia's streets. These rundown, cheaper vehicles [usually purchased by independent drivers such as those attending the meeting] gave the entire industry a shabby reputation, they grumbled. Along with these cars, they said, came disgruntled drivers who were unable to afford living and working in New York. These drivers would increase competition and raise the costs for everyone in the taxicab industry in Philadelphia. Many respondents had reported relocating from New York City to Philadelphia for exactly these reasons but this

did not prevent some of them from expressing hostility towards later arrivals. This hostility was not directed at specific individuals; it was more of an abstract resentment of later arrivals and of 'New York.' Gurdeep Laroya, who had commented about the disparate purchasing power of white and black individuals, summarized this inchoate resentment thus: Everybody had taken their time to come to Philadelphia, and had charted their own way. But now they were here, they had to fight together. Mushtaq Khan sounded exasperated when I asked him about these complaints. "*Some people will complain about anything!*" The core leadership of the Alliance, he said, did not pay much attention to such complaints.

All respondents appreciated that someone from their particular ethnic group was present at Alliance meetings, not just to represent their particular concerns but also to share the minutes of the meeting in vernacular languages. [Issues related to language facility and its impact will be discussed momentarily.] In the meetings observed, Mushtaq Khan made it a point to discuss the exploitation of the lease driver, especially when he knew that an attendee was himself a medallion owner. He was careful to place the blame at the feet of the large dispatch companies (and not individual owners). "*Make it clear to the medallion owner --- we all want to be like you. We are not fighting you. We all want to be successful like you, and the PPA is stopping us, not you. You can help us,*" he summarized, when asked about his discussion of the medallion system during such meetings. Knowing that independent contractors such as themselves could not technically unionize, all the organizer-members were careful to talk about their organization as an *alliance*, but their mobilization, rhetoric, outreach and goals were the same as a union:

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economic justice for taxi workers. Singh, Zenawi, Brown and Khan regularly participated in public meetings and rallies and interacted with members of the press or other stakeholders (medallion owners or the PPA). During such interactions, they took care to speak of the men they were representing as hardworking taxi drivers or taxi workers, and consciously downplayed socio-cultural and legal (immigrant/citizen) differences between them.

This was not the case with Alliance meetings, when differences between drivers were aired and discussed openly. Apart from discussing the organization's campaigns and listen to drivers' responses, the Alliance also used these meetings to get an idea of drivers' needs and plan programs accordingly. For example, it approached Nationalities Service Center, a local non-profit organization, to organize an "Immigrant Rights Workshop" and provide information on law and order mechanisms in the United States (the police, the Department of Homeland Security, deportation and suchlike). [The Nationalities Service Center is a non-profit organization working with refugees and immigrants since 1921, providing them with legal help, English language classes and other services for their target population.] It attempted to organize a lecture on the set-up of the taxi industry in Philadelphia (including driver/owner rights and responsibilities), and organized a workshop on landlord-tenant issues. These topics could also be of interest to non-immigrant drivers, who were welcome to attend.

Other programs were envisioned for all taxi workers, such as General Education Development (GED) classes, so that both immigrant and non-immigrant drivers could get, at the very least, one American educational qualification. They also arranged training

workshops for current and potential organizers with the help of Jobs with Justice, affiliates of the AFL-CIO and the SIEU local chapters. Of all the respondents, only Charles Smith reported attending these workshops, and even paid for short courses on labor organizing at St. Joseph's University. Only half a dozen South Asian immigrant drivers expressed any interest in these workshops. Some, like Abdul Khan, Mahmud Hassan and Satpal Singh, expressed concerns that they were not fluent enough in English. Others, including Mushtaq Khan, whose contributions to newsletters revealed an excellent command of written English, stated that they had no time to spare. The Alliance also organized health fairs and donation drives, and advertised these in their newsletter, *The Waiting Times* [details follow]. The health fairs, and a call to start a 'health fund' for drivers, both arose out of the personal experiences of several drivers who suffered from broken limbs, high stress, chronic back pain and even heart attacks while on the job but were unable to afford the time or money for treatment (Chervenka 2012).

Language**Error! Bookmark not defined.** use and ability were important factors affecting mobilization. The majority of South Asian organizer-drivers were able to communicate with other immigrant groups in English. As Table 4.1 shows, most South Asian immigrant drivers reported fluency in English. This meant that they were able to follow and participate in meetings organized by the Alliance, which were always conducted in English, and those with less fluency depended on co-ethnics for translation. Some, like Mahmud Hassan and Charanjeet Singh, said they tried to ensure their friends were around to translate, if necessary. Many others, like Shaqeel and Abdul Khan [no relation], found the situation manageable: the English was not very complicated, and

there were co-ethnics to 'pool' language resources with. Of the 32 drivers whose mother-tongue was Punjabi, 19 also reported fluency in Hindi or Urdu. Thus, this group of South Asian immigrant drivers could communicate using multiple languages with each other. Only two Punjabi speakers and all Bengali speakers in the research sample were not fluent in Hindi or Urdu.

Outreach was carried out through newsletters and blogs [all in English] as well as a video, which was produced with the logistic help of social justice organizations. One organizer-driver also participated in internet forums run by stakeholders in the taxicab industry [such as "Taxi List" on Yahoo groups] and commented on news articles about the industry or the Alliance online. Others contributed to the organization's materials (newsletters and fliers). The Alliance had started a newsletter in English (called *The Waiting Times*) and solicited material from all drivers in English on issues ranging from worker's compensation to health fairs for drivers. Thus, a newsletter could include an article about an on-going campaign or an interview with a stakeholder [organizers, drivers, non-profit professionals], and advertise the next public meeting or workshops organized for taxi workers [such as health fairs]. Garages sometimes advertised their services and there were biographical and informational articles, too, about individuals either active in the campaign (for example, one of the core organizers) or who served as inspirations (for example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.). Though not produced on a regular basis, each newsletter was an informative and sophisticated product, and the organizers in charge of producing it mentioned spending significant time drafting and editing their articles to keep them short, educational and comprehensible (because English was not the

first language of the majority of their target audience). Mushtaq Khan and Charles Smith were frequent contributors to the newsletter. Ray Brown repeatedly admonished them when he felt that their language was too complicated because it was important that drivers with varying levels of English fluency could understand the contents. However, Aseem Bhatti declared that many drivers did not read *The Waiting Times* themselves; some, because they could not be bothered and others because they could not. Such taxi workers depended on co-ethnics with English fluency to inform them of worthwhile news. "Waiting Times *ké liyé time kahān hai!*," Bhatti exclaimed, pleased with his little joke. "*Ahm khabar driver-log ék doosre ko batāté hain, koī padhtā nahīn.*" [Who has the time for *Waiting Times*! Drivers share important news with each other; nobody reads it.] Mushtaq Khan and Charles Smith, however, both strenuously disagreed. Being prolific contributors, they echoed Brown when they argued that the newsletter gave the Alliance an air of seriousness and purpose. Copies of newsletters were records of their accomplishments and advertisements to attract new members. This is reminiscent of Anderson's analysis (2006) of the advancement of print and publication technologies enabling the creation of an imagined community.

Finally, one major outreach initiative of the UTWA was a survey of the drivers' schedules, health, income, problems with and experiences of lease driving. This survey was spearheaded by Smith, who reported not having much contact with immigrant drivers before he began conducting the survey in 2006. The survey was conducted in English, and Smith reported that most drivers understood the questions and were able to answer them. In cases where the language was too difficult for drivers, there was usually

another driver around who could translate for the survey-taker. Most potential respondents were approached at the airport holding lot because it was the only place where drivers were likely to have the time to answer questions. The data were meant to be used to determine the issues that the Alliance should tackle, and were supposed to be handed over to a group of university-affiliated students to analyze. However, core organizers (including those who administered the survey) were unsure of where the treasure trove of data had been stored. Taxi workers reported, according to the organizers and survey administrators, long hours, chronic back pain, constant stress and low income.

Organizer-drivers presented a unified front of occupational solidarity when speaking with the PPA or medallion owners. Despite such strategic intentions, the taxi workers were not a free from internal divisions and strife. Apart from the socio-cultural differences between immigrant groups, there were other potentially divisive issues, too. Smith and Brown reported that there was talk amongst native-born drivers (who constituted a minority within the taxi driver population) that blamed the influx of immigrants for the industry's problems, and that immigrant drivers were aware of this thinking. There were also economic differences between taxi workers. Philadelphia has one of the higher rates of individual medallion ownership. That is, close to one quarter of its 1600 medallions are owned by individual drivers and not dispatch companies or corporations. Such owner-operators, who saved thousands of dollars each month in medallion rental fees, had less economic incentive to mobilize than the lease drivers (who were the majority of the taxi workers). Dhingra (2012) notes a similar trend in another

immigrant enclave, the motel industry. Thus, internal economic disparities did affect ethnic or occupational solidarity and cohesiveness.

Other differences between taxi workers were germane to the industry's structure. The first was the work schedules of the lease drivers. Organizers realized that night-shift drivers were often less informed about the Alliance's activities because of their work schedule. They were resting during the day and therefore missed public hearings, rallies and Alliance meetings. All of these were held during the day for a variety of reasons: Other stakeholders, like the PPA, were only available during the conventional workday, and rallies held during the day received greater publicity. Organizers began scheduling meetings at times more convenient to night-shift drivers, too.

The second industry-specific difference between taxi workers was their primary site of operation. As detailed previously, taxi workers developed strategies to maximize business, and one of these was choosing which areas of the city to focus on. Some focused almost exclusively on airport traffic, and could be found in their cliques in the airport holding lot while they waited to be called by the dispatch to pick up passengers at the different terminals. Many drivers estimated that it was a wait of up to two hours, so drivers had significant opportunities to get to know each other and develop serious friendships. Respondents noted that airport driving was different from city driving. City driving involved some competition between drivers to respond quickest to street hails or to know which area to cruise in to maximize their chances of finding passengers. These drivers had very little time to interact with each other in person while on the job. They used their cell phones to connect with friends or relatives and waved to each other in

passing, and interacted in person at eating establishments or while they waited outside

dispatch companies or taxi stands. In effect, most drivers led solitary lives during the

workday. The situation was quite different in the case of airport drivers, and organizers

had to use different methods to reach out to these different groups. Satpal and Charanjeet

Singh, Mohammad and Mushtaq Khan, Aseem Bhatti, Charles Smith and Ray Brown all

reported that airport drivers socialized in tightly-knit homogenous immigrant enclaves.

These drivers shared greater similarities in their daily routines than city drivers, and spent

more time together in person during the work day (up to two hours each day, waiting in

the holding lot). Their schedules were closest to those of traditional labor with relatively

fixed arrival times, a common 'supervisor' (the airport officials and dispatchers), a

common space for interaction (the holding lot), and relatively predictable wait times and

work days. This was different from city drivers, who had more independent daily

schedules. Airport drivers' lives tended to be more enmeshed with their cliques.

Organizers noted that while breaking into these cliques was difficult, once 'in', their

message spread like wildfire. The BUTW had particularly loyal support amongst airport

drivers.

Organizers, primarily Brown, took the initiative to reach out to medallion owners

and unite with them in a fight against the PPA, and also reached out to local labor

activists and non-profits, which was to have crucial influence on the Alliances' rhetoric

and access to resources (financial resources, and access to media and political

representatives, for example). This section just discussed how the Alliance reached out to

immigrant drivers in its institutional capacities. The next section will discuss how some

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individual immigrant drivers got involved and joined the core leadership of the Alliance, and how they involved co-ethnics in the Alliance.

Immigrant involvement in taxi workers' alliances

Mushtaq Khan was usually soft-spoken, an observation that was confirmed by drivers and organizers. I have only seen him angry once, right after a public hearing in 2005 where the PPA listened to drivers' complaints but pushed through the VTS deal regardless. Striding off towards his taxicab after the hearing came to a close, punching numbers into his phone, he responded gruffly when I asked to speak with him. *"What do you want?"* He visibly calmed himself down in quickly and by the time I had introduced myself and explained my interests and background, he had agreed to an interview in two weeks. Khan narrated similar reasoning for his involvement in the alliance as the other South Asian organizers. The BUTW had been trying and failing to win basic rights for the drivers, and now, Ray Brown had given the movement a second wind. Khan was particularly impressed with Brown's leadership skills, an assessment many others repeated over the course of my research. Brown was seen as a committed organizer who had the imagination and the resources to expand membership. He had sought out the help of non-profit organizations, he was comfortable speaking with the media, and he was proactively working with the NYTWA to learn from their successful organizing of taxi workers in New York City. *"So good"* was Khan's assessment of Brown's energy and drive. *"We* [meaning drivers not active in political mobilizations in Philadelphia, including the BUTW] *did not think of all these things before."*

Some South Asian organizer-drivers had personal reasons for their involvement. When the TWA-PA began mobilizing, each medallion was priced at almost a quarter of a million dollars. Satpal Singh (and Kinfe Zenawi, too) and others like him who owned their medallions would be able to afford the extra fees being imposed by the PPA without too much stress on their income because they did not have to pay medallion rental fees each month. When asked about his involvement in the fledging organization, even though he himself was financially secure, Singh retorted, *"Sab kuch paisé aur fãidé ké bãré mein nahīn hai. PPS kī soch hai yeh: paisā, paisā, paisā."* [Everything is not about money. This is the PPA's mindset: money, money, money.] But, immediately after, he spoke again:

> Yeh sirf méré fãidé kī bāt nahīn hai. Mérā medallion hai, mehnat kī kamāī hai. 10 sāl kām karné ké bād… Government ké kāydé garīb logon ké khilāf kām karté hain. PUC yā PPA nājāiz hai. Woh thīk sé bartāv karté to medallion kharīdné ké liyé itné sāl nahīn lagté. Aur zyādā driveron ké pās medallion hotā. …Yeh kām méré bachhon ké liyé nahīn hai. Woh kuch aur karén, padhāī kar ké achhī naukrī karén. Lékin hum sab driver log jo iss dhandé mein phas chuké hain, yā phir jo nayé driver log āyengé, unhein bhī toh taraqqī kā maukā milnā chāhiyé! Yeh PPA to bas apnī khud kí sochtī hai."

> [This is not about personal benefit alone. The medallion I have, I earned it through hard work. Ten years of work. If the rules were fairer, I would have got it sooner, for cheaper. [He paid close to $80,000 for his medallion]. More drivers would have their own medallion. …This [political engagement] is not for my children. I hope they keep away from this dirty business. But whoever is already in this business, they should get a chance to succeed.]

Thus, there was a small but significant number of drivers who believed strongly in the purpose of the campaign even if they were not its worst affected constituents. Passy and Giugni (2001) note that an important factor in individuals' decisions about whether to participate or not is their assessment of their contribution and of the benefits to the

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group. Singh's comment affirms this. He conceded that he was in a more secure position than all the lease drivers but also realized that his involvement would be directly beneficial to all drivers, especially his fellow Sikhs. Charanjeet Singh had spoken of how indebted he was to his fellow Sikhs in Millbourne for their help when he first arrived in Millbourne; Satpal Singh was one of the persons he had specifically named. The personal involvement of such individuals (owner-operators who had some clout within their social networks) was crucial to the success of the Alliance. Such individuals had the financial resources to take time out of their shifts to attend meetings and rallies, and to speak convincingly to co-ethnics about the need for taxi workers' involvement. Others, like Mushtaq and Aslam Khan [no relation] did not own medallions, and thus were not as well off as Singh and Zenawi. However, they were well respected social elites within their immigrant groups. Mushtaq Khan was widely-perceived as a well-educated man and his English ability was impressive. Aslam Khan was admired for his connections with political parties in Pakistan, and within local political circles.

Another reason for immigrant taxi workers' involvement was their personal experience of political mobilization. Gurdeep Laroya reported being involved in a student union on his college campus in India, and Mushtaq Khan had been inspired by the nationalist movement in Bangladesh. Satpal Singh's personal involvement grew out of his experiences in the Indian Punjab during the height of the secessionist Khalistan movement, a movement he strongly supported, when he experienced intimidation and repression by agents of the Indian State. Watched around the clock, paid visits by State agents, called for questioning, watching friends and neighbors being harassed, and

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hearing about the disappearances of young men, Singh was convinced: *"Nā-insāfī bardāsht karnā mushkil hai aur uss ké khilāf kuch kehnā, āvāz uthānā, kuch karnā, woh to aur bhī mushkil hai. Lékin karnā toh hai, hain nā? PPA āsāni sé hār nahīn mānégī. Kyon karégī? Ladhnā padtā hai."* [It is difficult to bear injustice but more difficult to fight injustice, to raise your voice or take action against it. The PPA will not concede defeat easily, why will it?! You have to fight it.] As mentioned in the previous chapter, several other drivers, who also participated in the Alliance's activities, also reported such political activity in their home countries, suggesting that previous political engagement did positively influence their current involvement.

These organizer-drivers, their own commitment to the Alliance solidified, reached out to drivers from within their own social networks. Thus South Asian immigrant drivers who were active in the Alliance's efforts, such as Mushtaq Khan and Mahmud Hassan (Bangladeshi), Satpal Singh (Sikh), Gurdeep Laroya (Hindu Punjabi) and Aslam Khan (Pakistani) represented the organization at their community's social events. Satpal Singh convinced Charanjeet Singh and Baadal Singh to get involved with the organization during a *langar* at the gurudwara on a Sunday afternoon. Charanjeet Singh remembered trying, at first, to talk his way out of it, and suggesting that Satpal Singh attend all the events and update him later. However, learning that "a dozen" of his acquaintances were getting involved, that he did not have to attend the meetings in order to participate in the rallies or public hearings, and that the public hearings and rallies themselves were rare events (and thus took little time away from lease driving), he agreed to participate more. Charanjeet reported 'active engagement' with the Alliance. He attended several meetings,

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one public hearing (about handicap-accessible taxis) and one rally (in solidarity with security guards' campaigning at Temple University). He noted that the active presence of friends and acquaintances served a dual purpose: He had company if he chose to attend, and he would get information from his friends when he couldn't attend. His friend, Baljit Singh, mentioned quietly (so as not to embarrass him) that Charanjeet was reassured by the presence of his friends who could translate the fast-spoken English to him, if necessary. Apart from such logistic concerns, scholars have also shown that social networks encourage individual participation when other individuals within the same network (especially elites) participate, too (Siegal 2009).

Taxi workers complained about not having workers' compensation or paid sick leave or vacation days --- of not having the rights that other American workers did. The better-informed drivers knew that their status as independent contractors denied them these rights. Aslam Khan spoke of drivers' rights in a moral sense. *"Bhīkh nahīn māng rahé. Kām karné ké liyé tayār hain, roz mehnat kar rahé hain. PPA hamein "ambassador to the city" bulātī hain, lékin ambassador kā kām mufat mén karvānā chāhtī hain."*[We're not asking for charity. We're ready to work, we work hard every day. The PPA calls us 'ambassadors to the city' --- as part of their drive to spruce up the city as a tourist destination --- but wants us to do the work of ambassadors for free.] Drivers, in conversations with each other and with me, had often spoken of their right to decent working conditions and adequate remuneration. They often spoke of wanting to be treated respectfully, and not having to deal with angry, racist or drunk passengers. They now saw fellow drivers, fellow desis, Punjabis, Sikhs and Muslims, vocalizing these

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thoughts outside their personal networks. Many drivers quoted individuals who could be considered social elites within their own immigrant networks. Bhatti and his friend, Zulfiqar, spoke about their current working conditions as being unfair and knew of a time when conditions were different. *"Rehem karo---"* began Zulfiqar [Have mercy------] but Bhatti interrupted, *"Hamārā haq bantā hai --- din-bhar ké kām ké munāsib paisé milné chāhiyé! Bīs sāl pehlé driver mulāzim thé, dispatch company unhén har mahīné tankhuā détī thī. Mohammad-bhāī batā rahé thé. Ab system badal gayī hai. "* [It's our right…to get fair compensation for a day's work! Drivers were employees twenty years ago, and dispatch companies paid them monthly wages. Mohammad-bhai was telling us about this. The system is completely different now.] Mohammad-bhai was the President of the erstwhile BUTW. Zulfiqar did not wish to continue his thought after Bhatti's interruption. *"Mohammad-bhāī sahī kehté hain. Driver logon kā haq hai, rehem ki bāt nahīn."* [Mohammad-bhai is right. Drivers have rights, it is not a question of mercy.] The role of social elites, like Satpal Singh, Mushtaq Khan, Aslam Khan and Mohammad-bhai, in convincing lease drivers to participate in the Alliance cannot be underestimated.

Drivers also often commented that if there was any place where they could reasonably expect to be justly rewarded for hard work, it was America. Immigrants are often firm believers in the possibility of upward mobility, and can toil endlessly in backbreaking occupations to achieve that goal. Thus, medallion owners and the PPA do not need to put apply pressure to make the medallion system function to their benefit. Taxi workers have internalized the logic of the system well enough to perpetuate it (Burawoy 1979). However, problems arise when the overseers apply too much pressure

(in this case, the PPA's ever-increasing fines and the medallion's ever-increasing price), which can lead to workers questioning the system. As Mohammad-bhai asked, *"Ab to yahī ghar hain. Ladhnā jhagadnā nahīn chāhtā, par yeh PPA to humein loot rahī hai. Kām kartā hoon, do bachhé hain school mén, PPA kyon tang kar rahī hai? Unkī harkatein ghair-kānooni nahīn hain sirf iss liyé ké woh khud kānoon banāté hain!"* [This is where I live now. I don't like to fight… but the PPA is trying to cheat me. I work hard, I have two children in American schools, why are they [the PPA] harassing me so? The only reason what they are doing is not illegal is because they are the ones making the laws!]

In the case of taxi workers, their underlying belief in the American Dream combined with a growing sense of rightful entitlement was refined by interactions with seasoned organizers from the NYTWA. Kinfe Zenawi and Ali Sheikh both spoke of how blessed they were that they owned their medallions and were naturalized citizens, but noted that every lease driver worked hard and that their legal statuses did not make the rude passengers or predatory PPA inspectors disappear. If all drivers, whether owner-operators or lease drivers, were going to be affected by the same rules and problems, it made sense that they benefit from the same rights. Not every driver was as generous. Smith reported meeting medallion owners, financially secure drivers, who glorified independent contracting and refused to get involved with the Alliance. However, most immigrant drivers were appreciative that their privately-expressed ideas (about deserving a better deal in their occupation) were receiving organizational support from the Alliance.

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Thus, the core group of South Asian organizers was not just invested in the political necessity of mobilization but they were also variously equipped to execute it: English language fluency, relative financial security, and access to sprawling immigrant networks. Thus political engagement of South Asian immigrants is influenced by such factors and not, as the 'model minority' myth suggests, by their inherent political passivity (Das Gupta 2006; Prashad 2000). Economic or strategic differences were sometimes couched in ethnic terms, and ethnic affiliations in turn enabled or constrained economic or strategic positions. However, whether helpful or hindrances, South Asian immigrants social networks and ethnic identities were crucial to their involvement in labor or other political mobilizations.

Finally, some drivers chose to or were unable to get involved with either or both organizations. Some of these non-participating drivers had arrived very recently (one as recently as 2005). They did have family in Philadelphia and ethnic contacts within the taxicab industry but rebuffed organizers who canvassed for their support, and preferred to lay low and save money. Their reasons were often financial. They were unable to take time out of their shift for campaigning, thus revealing significant economic disparity within immigrant groups, and challenging the idea that immigrant groups and networks were homogenous and harmonious support groups (Menjivar 2000; Wierzbicki 2004). However, most of these drivers did not spend too much time discussing reasons for their non-participation, saying only that they did not have the time to spare or that they were 'not interested.' Yaqub Qureishi analyzed them thus: They were new arrivals and still believed that they, unlike all the others around them, could make it big by dint of hard

work. *"Khud-ba-khud samajh jāéngé,"* he commented grimly. [They would learn on their own soon.] Other drivers who refused to participate in the organization were usually medallion owners, some owning as many as four medallions (according to drivers' hearsay). Chervenka (2012) reported listening to medallion owners extolling the virtues of hard work and merit, and claiming that independent hard working drivers had no use for unions. Most of these drivers were Eastern European immigrants. These were reportedly individuals who had immigrated to the country earlier, and were, by the present day, owner-operators. That is, they owned at least one medallion, which they used to drive their vehicle, and thus saved significantly on monthly rental fees.

Another important reason for the success of this political mobilization of taxi workers is the role played by non-profit organizations.

Role of non-profit organizations: Resources and rhetoric
Non-profit and social justice organizations played a very important role in this political mobilization because they contributed valuable resources to the Alliance. One of the most helpful organizations was the Media Mobilization Project [MMP], founded by graduate students and activists in Philadelphia, and specializing in using various media and technologies to enable social justice movements. MMP helped provide access to media to publicize the taxi workers' causes. They produced a video in 2006 about the taxicab industry, which was widely used during mobilization drives and meetings, and helped gain access to reporters from mainstream newspapers. They enabled contact with political figures and legislators, most notably in the case of a bill calling for workers' compensation for taxi workers and the introduction of handicap-access taxis in

Philadelphia. In 2010, MMP and the Alliance worked with a State legislator to present such a bill for debate in the State Legislature. Over the years, they also provided logistic and organizational help like providing the space to hold the meetings, recording minutes at meetings and overseeing the first election for the newly formed Alliance. Finally, working with the MMP allowed productive collaborations with other social justice organizations like Jobs with Justice, Philadelphia Student Union, Asian Americans United and others, who supported the Alliance during rallies and public hearings.

Most of the Alliance's early funding came from a *Bread and Roses Community Fund* grant as well as from grants from local religious charities. [The *Bread and Roses Community Fund* is a local organization of activists and donors which gathers and allocates funds for social justice initiatives. The Alliance successfully applied for funding for its workers' compensation campaigns in 2008 and 2009.]

The other major non-profit was the New York Taxi Workers Alliance [NYTWA]. The NYTWA helped refine the organizers' understanding of their rights by showing them a successful example of organized immigrant workers. The NYTWA influenced the Alliance's demands for rights as workers regardless of citizenship more than any other external influence. [Organic inputs came from immigrant drivers themselves, of course, as they advocated for ethnic representation among organizers and in the core leadership.] In her case study of the NYTWA, Das Gupta argues that immigrants are now constructing *"a transnational complex of rights,"* (Das Gupta 2006: 4) wherein these rights are mobile and are not rooted in citizenship or national membership. The Alliance's attempt to change the status quo and claim rights as workers (regardless of

citizenship or any other singular or overarching identity) was inspired by the NYTWA. But this claim cannot be seen as merely transformative. While it does indeed challenge prevailing conceptions of belonging as well as the rights that accrue to those who can claim citizenship (Das Gupta 2006; Mathew 2005; Marshall 1949), the Alliance's political mobilization is simultaneously a move towards assimilation and integration into the American mainstream. When drivers like Zulfiqar, Mahmud Hassan, Gurdeep Laroya and Aseem Bhatti demand the right to adequate remuneration, they justify this demand by invoking ideas of American meritocracy. That is, honest and hard work should allow upward mobility.

A good example of the MMP's and NYTWA's work with the Alliance is the case of the HB1914 bill about workers' compensation for taxi workers and handicap-accessible taxis. The PA State House Committee on Urban Affairs conducted a public hearing in March 2010 to debate the bill, and the hearing room was packed with taxi workers. Alliance organizers, NYTWA organizers and Liberty Resources (advocates for the disabled community) made compelling arguments for introducing handicap-accessible taxicabs in the city. They also petitioned the Committee to hand out the new medallions for these taxicabs judiciously so that not all would be bought by the big dispatch companies. This decision, to partner with another advocacy organization was the sort of 'intellectual and political cross-pollination' that non-profit professionals enabled. The taxi workers' petition (for workers' compensation) was strengthened --- from a crass political point of view --- by the fact that they were working in solidarity with another marginalized group. This sort of mutually beneficial collaboration was smart strategy,

and the Alliance consistently collaborated with other advocacy groups in Philadelphia. Brown, Smith and taxi workers like Zulfiqar, Abdul Khan and Gurdeep Laroya were openly appreciative of this strategy. The Alliance collaborated with groups whose interests were at least tangibly related with their own. Apart from working with Liberty Resources over handicap-accessible taxicabs, they also supported the union bid of security guards at Temple University, and protested against the deportation of Cambodian refugees without a fair trial (Matza 2011).

Milkman (2006) notes that unions (particularly those like the SEIU, which are organizing in the service industries) have successfully recruited organizers from colleges and universities (that is, intellectuals and 'outsiders' who did not rise from rank and file and had no shop floor experience). The idea behind such recruitment was to encourage leaders to have a larger vision for the union, which included organizing workers beyond their own specific industry. This certainly seems to be the case with the Alliance's collaboration with other advocacy organizations.

Not all taxi workers were comfortable with the involvement of these social justice organizations, in particular the involvement of MMP. Many drivers wondered openly, *"Unhén kyā mālūm? Unn mén sé kīsī né taxi chalāī nahīn."* [What do they know? None of them have ever driven a taxi.] Others seemed puzzled about their intentions. Why were they helping taxi workers and what did they stand to gain? A few drivers dismissed them as opportunists, and the leadership of the BUTW was resentful of the help they provided the UTWA. A smaller number of drivers added: *"Angrezī mén bāt kartén hain. Unn kī bāt humein toh samajh nahīn ātī."* [They speak in English. I don't understand what they

are saying.] However, for the most part, the criticism was mild and drivers were not dissuaded from participating in the Alliance's activities.

Thus, essentially, while the initial organizer-drivers provided the personal experience and expertise of taxi driving as well as contacts to other taxi workers, members of the NYTWA shared their experiences and insights from organizing taxi workers in New York City, and MMP and other non-profit organizations provided valuable logistic support. Immigrant organizer-drivers provided crucial access to their social networks, which encouraged more immigrant drivers to participate in the organization. It is this productive combination, as well as the circumstances of management transfer, and long-term grievances of the taxi workers that made it possible to finally register and formally recognize a taxi workers' alliance in 2005, and for their political mobilization to continue to the present day. The next section looks at how social networks impacted this political mobilization.

Social networks: Conflicts and collaborations
Charles Smith, Ray Brown and Kinfe Zenawi estimated that close to 85% of contemporary drivers were first-generation immigrants, many of whom spoke enough English to do their jobs well. Over the time they had spent canvassing for potential members, they had developed estimates of group cohesion and sizes. Sikh and Bangladeshi drivers were seen as being the most organized; Sikh drivers were also estimated to be the largest group. Bangladeshi drivers did not have any dominant cultural or religious organizations [like the Sikhs' Philadelphia Sikh Society] to unite them. They did not worship at the same mosque, and regularly met, instead, in individual drivers'

houses in West Philadelphia or Upper Darby. The majority of Sikh drivers met on a regular basis at their gurudwara in Millbourne to 'talk shop.' Pakistani drivers residing in Upper Darby were also quite active, and one of most active drivers, Aslam Khan, and his friends often met other Alliance organizers at a halal restaurant in West Philadelphia. The organizers estimated that, of all the South Asian drivers, the non-Sikh Indians were the least organized group. This assessment was based on the TWA-PA's inability to penetrate their immigrant social networks: None of the core organizers was a Hindu Punjabi, and thus, they had no 'insider contacts' through which to approach this group of immigrants. Gurdeep Laroya was the sole Hindu Punjabi among my four non-Sikh respondents of Indian origin who was active in the Alliance. He brought one friend to our interview but did not seem to have involved others in the Alliance itself. The other seemingly inaccessible immigrant group was Pakistani drivers who supported the BUTW. The merger of the BUTW and the TWA-PA into the UTWA is a good example to discuss the use of and problems with social networks.

My introduction to Mohammad-bhai and other BUTW members was under tense circumstances, at a public hearing about the faulty GPS machines in all taxicabs. It was obvious to me that the taxi workers were divided amongst themselves on this issue, and two distinct positions were charted out during the public hearing and testimony. The TWA-PA wanted the GPS rule revoked, pointing out that the equipment did not work well, that the PPA had made a backroom deal with the service provider, and that the drivers were not given a say in the choice of the software or the service provider. The most vocal and visibly agitated individual amongst a group of drivers dissenting with this

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position was Mohammad-bhai. When approached, he was hostile to questions about his position (judging me, as it was made clear in later meetings, to be one of the many students who were "working for" the TWA-PA) but as leader of the BUTW, he made his position clear during the testimony: The BUTW was supportive of the PPA's management of the taxicab industry, for reasons explained shortly, and did not wish to align itself with the confrontational TWA-PA. Mohammad-bhai and the BUTW publicly voiced support for the PPA's programs, and he also accepted the PPA's invitations to attend their closed-door meetings (meetings to which the TWA-PA was not invited). Many drivers accused him of being 'close' to the PPA, and were critical of his decision to side with the PPA and consequently weaken the TWA-PA's fight for taxi workers. Some months later, Brown was tangled up in wrongful lawsuits. A passenger accused him of assaulting her after a disagreement over payment of the fare for the taxi ride. One of the five charges against him (aggravated assault) is a felony. If convicted, he would lose his license, and would probably also lose leadership of the TWA-PA. This lawsuit, thrown out by the courts, was widely seen by taxi workers as a PPA ploy to distract Brown from his goal of organizing. The BUTW's public support of the PPA during these times turned the larger taxi worker community against them.

Yet, drivers acknowledged Mohammad-bhai's previous attempts to collaborate with the local Teamsters to safeguard drivers' access to passengers at the airport (a fact also recorded by Chervenka, 2012). The BUTW's outreach to the local Teamsters had made sense because the Teamsters, a truckers' union, had emerged out of an "occupational culture" (Milkman 2006: 27) of solitary, long-distance laboring, wherein

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each trucker worked alone but each trucker's experience and problem was the same as every other. This sort of "occupational unionism" (Milkman 2006: 28) was very similar to the experiences of taxi workers, and the two workers were natural allies. In fact, truckers' aim to become owner-operators [that is, own and drive their truck] is similar to lease drivers' wish to own their own vehicles... [Mohammad-bhai and Ray Brown both noted that by the turn of the century, however, the local Teamsters withdrew support from taxi workers.] Mahmud also acknowledged Mohammad-bhai's successful attempts to petition airport officials for restrooms at the airport holding lot. Drivers usually waited for fares for up to two hours a day but had no access to restrooms. *"He also got us clean water for prayers,"* he added. [Ritual cleansing or 'wudu' is necessary before prayers.] So, even drivers who did not support the BUTW were aware of Mohammad-bhai's attempts to improve working conditions for all drivers. So how did the GPS hearing come to be seen as an 'ethnic' vote? One possible explanation lies in the social networks from which Mohammad-bhai emerged as leader, and which bolstered his legitimacy as the representative of all drivers.

The BUTW leadership initially supported the PPA's GPS program because they wanted to give the PPA (still new management) time to prove itself. After its collaboration with the Teamsters failed, and with a history of relatively unsuccessful strikes in the mid- to late-1990s, the BUTW had chosen to work with the authorities. Mohammad-bhai was also personally convinced that offering credit card payment options would indeed increase overall use of taxicabs, and that taxi workers would indeed benefit from this. Finally, used to being the sole representative, the BUTW leadership was taken

aback by the fast-growing popularity of the TWA-PA, and it is safe to say there was some personal resentment about this among many BUTW supporters, such as Zulfiqar. Even TWA-PA supporters, like Smith and Zenawi, admitted that Brown could be an aggressive negotiator when dealing with the PPA and Mohammad-bhai reported an instance of Brown storming out of a meeting with PPA officials. [Brown would differ with their assessment of his aggression, though he did not contest the incident about storming out of the meeting: *"I am polite. You want me to be nice with them?"*]

However, eventually, a range of factors convinced him to talk with the BUTW and TWA-PA leadership about a merger. Firstly, he was driving full-time to support a family, which limited the time available for alliance activities. Secondly, he was not completely comfortable speaking in English, which caused communication problems. The TWA-PA did not have this problem, at least not to a similar degree. Not only was Brown an articulate native speaker of English, the TWA-PA also benefited from assistance from volunteers from local non-profits, who were often college-educated individuals with advanced language abilities. The BUTW did not collaborate with any such individuals or organizations. And thirdly, the growing effectiveness of the TWA-PA was undeniable. It was obvious that they would be more successful if they pooled their resources. In a later conversation, Mohammad-bhai noted:

> Hamārī aur Ray Brown kī ladhāī kis par thī? Woh keh rahā thā, PPA ké sāth kām mat karo, unse ladhāī karnā behtar hai. Aur hum keh rahé thé, unhein thodā waqt do, phir āgé dekhté hain… BUTW ké leader itné sālon sé taxi driver ki madad kar rahé hain, kyā hum bewaqūf hain? TWA wāle university student logon ki salāh lé rahé hain. Woh kyā jāné, taxi chalāné ké bāré mein? …Aur iss beech mein Pakistani driver ke khilaaf baat ho rahi hain.

[What was our disagreement with Ray Brown about? He said, let us not work with the PPA, it is better for us to fight them. And we were saying, give them some time, let's see what happens. … The BUTW has been helping drivers for so many years. Are we fools? The TWA are taking advice from university students. What do they know about taxi driving? …And in the midst of all this, the Pakistani driver is being criticized.]

He was particularly angry that Pakistani drivers were being accused of not wanting the good of all drivers, especially when the BUTW was supporting the PPA because they felt it was best for all taxi workers. He noted that the two organizations had fought "like brothers." Temporary misunderstanding and differences of opinion could not cause permanent divisions because they were fighting for the same people.

This example suggests a few characteristics of social networks and political participation. The most loyal core of the BUTW's membership consisted of Pakistani immigrants who were 'airport drivers.' As mentioned previously, airport drivers were perceived by organizer-drivers to be more clannish [or more loyal, depending on who was speaking], and when faced with the TWA-PA's growing popularity, these drivers drew even closer together. Support for the BUTW among Pakistani immigrant airport driver ran wide and deep, and this created the impression that the organization was a group of ethnic loyalists, instead of an inclusive taxi workers' organization. In comparison, as mentioned previously, the TWA-PA was actively and consciously recruiting diverse immigrant drivers. The comparison did not help the BUTW. However, much credit for this outreach goes to the non-profit organizations assisting the TWA-PA, such as MMP and the NYTWA; the South Asian drivers who supported the TWA-PA cannot be assumed to be inherently more inclusive and less ethnocentric. [In fact, their ethnic ties were precisely what were used to engage them in the TWA-PA.] Thus, the rift

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between the BUTW and TWA-PA can be better understood as a difference in political strategies rather than as a difference in ethnic membership. The TWA-PA's broad-based solidarity combined with targeted canvassing by social elites among their social networks is a more effective strategy for contemporary mobilization.

It is worth asking if the BUTW's initial resistance to the TWA-PA emerged out of the contemporary history of India-Pakistan conflict, which might have carried over into South Asian lives in the United States. While possible, this is not likely. The majority of drivers of Indian origin who were active in the Alliance were not Indian nationalists. A significant number of these taxi workers supported the Khalistan secessionist movement in India, and had emigrated to the U.S. to escape the Indian state's repression. These individuals were unlikely to engage in a very serious India-Pakistan rivalry.

Thus, the conflict before the merger provides a cautionary tale when discussing the role of social networks. The social networks facilitating the process of labor mobilization could hamper the very same process. Social networks are known to provide its members with access to various resources, help in the formation of ethnic economies, and facilitate political mobilization. The national or ethnic identities of immigrants spur collective action, and political mobilization can be viewed as means of collective advancement. Using the same logic, if groups feel threatened, the same national or ethnic identities can be mobilized to protect the collective.

Conclusion

The primary obstacles, apart from limited financial resources, to mobilization were as follows. First, the very structure of the industry caused differences amongst

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drivers. Owner-operators, that is, those leasing a medallion with a self-owned vehicle, and lease drivers, who lease both the vehicle and the medallion, sometimes have different interests. Also, the very nature of the industry concentrates wealth and power in the hands of medallion owners, and pits drivers, taxicab companies and medallion owners against each other. In Philadelphia, these stakeholders allied with each other and the PPA as expedient. Language barriers and the tremendous cultural diversity amongst immigrant drivers are the next major obstacle to mobilization. Immigrants are often wary of "causing trouble" and unaware of their rights as workers. Finally, the workforce in the taxicab industry has a high turnover, which makes it harder to inform and organize workers.

During arguments made to the PPA or medallion owners, the TWA-PA used various approaches: Drivers and organizers spoke about how hard they worked, and how it was then natural to expect, especially in America, that their honest and hard work would be rewarded. Given that the city of Philadelphia first began sprucing up its taxicab industry in order to make itself a more viable tourist and hospitality destination, the TWA-PA also spoke of taxi drivers as the ambassadors of the city who would represent its multi-ethnic and international stature. Other than allowing the presence of immigrant diversity in situations when it would likely be viewed as an asset [such as highlighting the global nature of Philadelphia], the TWA-PA was always careful to scrub all of its other public messages of the cultural, ethnic, racial and legal differences in its membership. Each member was presented as a taxi worker. Existing stereotypes of ethnic groups [sometimes perpetuated by organizers themselves], their group size, their

commitment to the Alliance, their wealth, their varying paths to naturalization and suchlike did cause tensions along the way. However, it appears that allowing these disparities, stereotypes and resentments to be aired freely (during Alliance meetings) was perhaps a sophisticated way to deal with differences within the occupational group. That is, the strategy was to acknowledge rather than suppress the differences and simultaneously set up programs to effectively ease the disparities. Another important factor is an appreciation of just how desperate and committed individuals and groups can be when they are battling for their livelihoods. While many drivers were drawn to the alliance despite relative financial security, most others were lease drivers who were directly affected by the PPA's increasing fines.

One cannot discount the tremendously important role played by social justice organizations in supporting the TWA-PA's efforts. They offered logistic and financial help, access to other [sometimes more experienced] organizers, expert academic or policy-specific or legal advice. Finally, it is crucial to discuss the specificity of the historical circumstances when this mobilization was successful. After national behemoths like the AFL-CIO officially presented a pro-immigration stance in 2000, and SEIU engaged in mobilizations of nontraditional occupations and undocumented workers, there were nationwide political mobilizations of immigrant labor. This changing national tide provided important support for nontraditional labor organizations like the NYTWA and the UTWA.

It seems to me that the TWA-PA and its political and intellectual contributors understood that taxi drivers, for all their differences, can be envisioned as a class: "Their

relationships with municipal government, their employers, and unions create a framework in which cabbies can be discussed as a class [even when] cabbies cooperate or compete with each other." (Hodges 2007: 3) Further, while it is common knowledge that several South Asian and other immigrant taxi drivers have graduate/professional degrees from their home country and are overqualified for their occupation, it seems like this slight evidence also complicates discussions of the *social class* of taxi drivers.

While in most other aspects, the growth and development of the TWA-PA has tended to mirror that of the NYTWA [its predecessor by almost a decade], one issue has not been as controversial in Philadelphia as it has been in New York City: the charge that taxi drivers discriminate against African Americans. Though the PPA has clearly stated that refusing to take a passenger to a particular destination or refusing to pick up someone because of his or her sex, race, religion or nationality could result in a suspension of the taxi driver, stories abound [in conversation and print] of taxi drivers in Philadelphia readily admitting to not picking up black passengers or trying to avoid driving to certain neighborhoods at certain times. While drivers and their advocates have explained the reasons for such behavior, given the time devoted by newsprint, activist and academic publications to this issue in NYC, the relative lack of the same discussions in Philadelphia is noticeable.

In summary, the very reasons that drew individuals to taxi driving --- the independence, the sense of being your own boss, the relatively fewer qualifications needed before starting the job, no other option available! --- are also reasons why it is a particularly difficult occupation. Just as getting to keep every cent you make is a

celebration, every cent you don't make can be a big problem. Their race, religion, nationality and visa status affect some specifics of their lives, for the most part, all taxi drivers are, simply put, overregulated and under-protected. The UTWA was successful for a variety of reasons: a charismatic leader in Brown, dedicated immigrant organizers, the decision to proactively seek immigrant drivers for leadership and organizer positions, help from non-profit experts, and, importantly, the changing tide of labor mobilization across the country. However, the strategic decision to use ethnic networks to further an economic or occupational solidarity fundamentally shaped the mobilization, setbacks and successes of the Alliance.

Chapter 5 – Summary and Conclusion

Almost everybody has a taxi story. Taxi drivers have populated stories on celluloid, in print and in conversation and they exist, literally, on the streets in any major city across the world. From casual encounters in the taxicab itself, driver and passenger sometimes physically separated by plexi-glass partitions, to representations in Hollywood, taxi drivers are ever present in urban America. Increasingly, English-speaking drivers have taken advantage of the feasibility and affordability of self-publishing (both print and virtual), and published memoirs about their lives as drivers. They are present, thus, across various landscapes in the quotidian and popular imagination. This is not quite as true within academic literature, which has focused very limitedly on taxi drivers, and most studies have been historical analyses of the development of the taxicab industry.

This dissertation aimed to examine the historical development of the taxicab industry in Philadelphia, and focus on the presence and participation of South Asian immigrants in the present-day era as they sought to organize and fight for better working conditions. The very same immigrant networks that enabled drivers' entry into the industry were used to conduct outreach and mobilize fellow-drivers. This chapter will summarize the history of the taxicab industry and the demographic details of the immigrant drivers who constitute it. After a discussion of their mobilization and outreach strategies, I will summarize the roles of their social networks, the charismatic leadership of organizers, and the assistance of various non-profits and how all these enabled the successful political engagement of an immigrant occupational group. I will discuss the

specificity of this historical time, which also enabled their political mobilization, namely, the contemporary circumstances and revitalization of national unions that also enabled the politicization of this fledgling workers' group. Finally, I will evaluate the merits and limitations of the study, and explore avenues for further research.

The taxicab industry and South Asian immigrant drivers
A few historians such as Hodges (2007) and Vidich (1976) have documented the taxicab industry from its birth in the nineteenth century, when horse-drawn carriages traversed Manhattan, to its present form in the twenty-first, when gas-powered and hybrid vehicles run in all five boroughs of New York City. Apart from discussing the changing structure of the industry (that is, the move to the medallion system of licensing), they have also discussed unionization within the workforce. From membership in national unions in the earliest decades of the twentieth century, unionization amongst drivers declined with the institution of the medallion system. Only in the mid-1990s did non-traditional workers' organizations (like the New York Taxi Workers Alliance) begin to organize taxi workers.

The situation in Philadelphia is structurally very similar. The experiences of the New York taxicab industry and workers were replicated decades later in Philadelphia. Newspaper articles, industry reports and legislative records show that the taxicab industry in Philadelphia, too, began with large companies owning licensed vehicles and employing individuals to drive them. By the mid-twentieth century, the industry was a loosely-regulated mix of fleet-drivers employed by taxicab companies and unlicensed independent drivers who drove 'gypsy cabs.' Taxicab companies provided wages and benefits to their often-unionized fleet-drivers, while the gypsy cab drivers were not

unionized, and notorious for operating decrepit vehicles and charging random and exorbitant fares to passengers. The city's weary residents complained about unreliable service, taxicab companies complained about gypsy cabs undercutting their employees, and gypsy cabs pointed out that they were in business because the companies were incapable of meeting the residents' needs for public transportation.

The institution of the medallion system in July 1990 changed this unhappy status quo to a certain extent. The city government, drawing inspiration from New York City, required all vehicles to procure a license, a medallion, which authorized their use as a commercial vehicle, a taxicab, and to maintain the vehicles up to standards. Initially limited to one thousand medallions, Philadelphia has 1,600 in the present day. The first medallions cost $1,225 each, whether owned by individuals or by companies, but rose to $400,000 in 2012. The medallion system transformed the taxicab industry in two fundamental ways. Firstly, the astronomical prices of the medallion set up a barrier to entry into the industry, and secondly, it allowed the designation of drivers as independent contractors. The U.S. Department of Labor states that independent contractors are self-employed individuals and thus not covered by employment, labor or related tax laws such as the National Labor Relations Act [NLRB] of 1935. Their labor accrues neither social security nor Medicare benefits nor federal unemployment insurance, and they cannot unionize.

However, the system also depends on the labor of the almost three thousand fulltime drivers in Philadelphia. These independent contractors can be categorized upon the basis of their ownership or leasing choices: owner-operators [who own the vehicle and the medallion], vehicle-owners [who own the vehicle and rent the medallion], and

lease drivers [who lease both vehicle and medallion]. Taxi worker alliances report that less than 25% of the 1600 available medallions are owned by individual drivers [who are 'owner-operators']. Approximately 400 drivers fall in the 'vehicle owner' or driver-operated vehicle [DOV] category: they own their vehicle and rent medallions on a weekly basis. Lease drivers make up the largest proportion of drivers, and they rent the vehicle and medallion on a weekly or daily basis. Taxi workers and organizers state that these are the drivers who are the worst affected by the taxicab industry's pricing and payment structure, and that these drivers are growing in number.

While taxi work has carried the idea of personal independence, in that the driver is 'his own boss,' and does not have to report to an overseer, the structure of the industry makes it difficult to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. After paying for lease rentals (medallion and/or vehicle), gasoline, radio fees and the incidental fines, lease drivers report taking home as little as $50 each day. Further, a seminal study by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH, which is overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services] showed that taxicab or limousine drivers suffered the highest rate of occupational homicide among all occupations in America.

Yet, lease driving is a popular 'last resort' occupation for immigrants, and the overwhelming proportion of lease drivers in Philadelphia are immigrants. There are various related reasons to explain this. The nature of the occupation is such that, barring a commercial driver's license, no significant education or training is required to begin the job. Once drivers enter the industry, the 12-hour shifts leave little time to pursue other employment opportunities. In other situations, the immigrant-intensive nature of the

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industry can be explained by the 'taxi driver syndrome' (Reitz 2011), wherein highly-skilled immigrants take up taxi driving due to a lack of employment opportunities in occupations for which they have training. Finally, scholars have noted that immigrants' social networks enable their entry into the field (Mathew 2005; Mohammad-Arif 2002; Mitra 2003), much like social networks enable the development of ethnic economies in various occupations (Dhingra 2012; Light & Gold 2000; Portes 1998; Waldinger 1999). Respondents reported that a friend or a relative, almost always someone from their own religious background or nationality, helped them begin lease driving. Having assisted with entry into the industry, the same social networks enabled their continuance: Drivers share information with each other about available fares, traffic jams and a heightened police or PPA presence.

In fact, most lease drivers in Philadelphia are from West and East African and South Asian countries. This dissertation focused on drivers who emigrated from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. These individuals reported several common trends in their immigrant and occupational trajectories. A notable number of immigrants had lived and worked in other countries before settling down in the United States but hardly traveled within the country. While some moved to Philadelphia from New York, most arrived and settled in Philadelphia. They arrived on various visas (work, student, tourist, diversity, and dependent), which they sometimes overstayed, and every single individual began with a low-paying job in an immigrant-intensive industry, and most businesses were owned or managed by a co-ethnic. These jobs were almost always unrelated to their educational qualifications or previous employment experience. While they struggled to make ends meet, they were helped out by their co-ethnics --- not just with tangibles like

securing employment, housing and loans, but also with a mooring and a sense of community.

This sense of community and dependence on social networks crossed countries and various aspects of drivers' lives. Many drivers reported maintaining close ties with families in their home countries, remitting money for investments into housing, mechanization for agricultural land, or education for younger relatives. Drivers were very clear that they did not want their own children to follow them into the taxicab industry, and the snowball sample did not produce a single second-generation immigrant driver. All drivers' spouses were from the same ethnic or racial group and practiced the same religion (though citizenship varied), and most drivers were quite clear about their expectations that their unmarried children would marry within the religious and national community. Some drivers also expressed the wish that their children marry someone from their [the drivers'] home countries. Drivers used their social networks to arrange their own marriages, and two respondents (one Sikh driver from the Indian Punjab and one Pakistani Muslim) reported using them for their children's marriages, too. They also reported living close to co-ethnics, which allowed the development of ethnic neighborhoods all over Philadelphia, and the flourishing of ancillary businesses, and in turn, attracted newer co-ethnics to settle in the neighborhood.

Drivers, despite clearly difficult circumstances, should not be viewed as simply victims of structural disadvantage. They proactively develop and utilize strategies to improve their socio-economic conditions (Das Gupta 2006; DuBry 2007; Gomberg-Muñoz 2010; Milkman 2006; Ong 2003; Prashad 2000). Much of these strategies involve utilizing their social networks. In fact, these networks also enabled the political

mobilization of this workforce. The next section will discuss the mobilization of and outreach to South Asian immigrant drivers in greater detail.

Mechanics of mobilization: Social networks, non-profit organizations, and the historical context

Taxi workers alliances' tactics to speak to other stakeholders in the industry were multifaceted and clear. They published newsletters and fliers --- in English --- and spoke to sympathetic radio shows and print journalists, conducted rallies outside PPA offices and pushed for public meetings at City Hall. Some campaigns were successful (fuel surcharges and increasing the base fare) and others not (GPS and credit card devices). They also worked very hard to reach out to immigrant drivers, who were the numerical majority of taxi workers in Philadelphia.

The role of immigrant social networks in enabling entry into a particular occupation has been made clear, as has their role in maintaining a network of reciprocal obligations (Bald 2012; Das Gupta 2006; Dhingra 2012; DuBry 2007; Gomberg-Muñoz 2010; Leonard 1997; Lessinger 1995; Milkman 2006; Ong 2003; Stack 1997). In the specific case of the taxicab industry, migrant organizer-drivers served as 'insider' contacts when sharing information about the taxi workers' alliance. Siegal (2009) notes that individuals are more likely to participate when they see trusted individuals also participating in the same activity. This is true for occupations, choice of residential neighborhoods and schools for children, and even more so for riskier decisions, like political participation. The underlying causes of individuals' choice (to participate) can vary from having their networks providing access to compelling information (as immigrant organizer-drivers did to their co-ethnics), imposing social pressure,

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engendering the fear of social sanctions if they refuse to participate and the sense of strength in numbers (as some drivers like Baadal Singh conceded) (Siegal 2009).

There is no need to be acquainted with elite individuals in order to be influenced by them. Many organizer-drivers, both South Asian and others, reported that many lease drivers were positively influenced by Bhairavi Desai, the founder and President of the New York Taxi Workers' Alliance because she was from India. Other organizers, like Smith, Zenawi, Brown and Johnson (all but Zenawi are native-born Americans; Zenawi is a naturalized citizen from Ethiopia), were drawn to the fact that she revealed her interest in baseball and loyalty to a local team, the Mets. So, apart from her obvious political investments in the taxicab industry, interviews with taxi workers revealed that they were also influenced by their mutual membership in other 'networks' --- such as supporting the same local sports team. This reflects Marsden and Campbell's cautionary statement (2012) against underestimating the influence of some ties as compared to others. Occupational or educational dissimilarities may instinctively seem like weak ties within networks; however, as the drivers' rapport with professional organizers from the NYTWA shows, this is not always the case. On the other hand, other drivers were wary of the role of other non-profit professionals [such as MMP volunteers] who were actively involved in the taxi workers' alliances. Some were skeptical of the reasons for their involvement, not believing that their intent was altruistic, others suspected that their politics were too radical and "leftie." Even though these other non-profit professionals were also, like Desai, experts, not everybody accorded them the same credibility.

Menjivar (2000) notes that these networks do not always successfully maintain mutually beneficial relationships: Some persons may not be able or willing to fulfill their

obligations to the group or there might be a difference in understanding what is obligatory. The case of the BUTW's difference of opinion and strategy with the TWA-PA can be seen in this light. The BUTW's Pakistani clique upset fellow Pakistanis in their then-rival TWA-PA precisely because the latter expected all Pakistanis to unite under a common cause. The BUTW's critiques of political strategy were viewed by many in the TWA-PA (both Pakistani and non-Pakistani) through an ethnic lens.

Essentially, social networks are born out of a familiarity or a commonality, such as work schedules (airport drivers versus city driver), or country of origin, religious identities or loyalties to various sports teams! They are an important factor when considering organizing immigrants. Firstly, poorer communities, whether immigrant or not, often have stronger social networks because they depend on them for sustenance in ways the middle- and upper-classes do not need to (Venkatesh 2009; Wierzbicki 2004). Due to the existence of ethnic economics, immigrants' social networks are reinforced in their occupational settings, too. In some cases, immigrants' occupational and social spaces are one and same: examples include family-owned businesses which have living quarters behind or above the publicly accessible fronts (Dhingra 2012; Melwani 2005).

Secondly, cultural organizations often provide alternate spaces (other than residences and occupational sites) for immigrants to share their personal values and discuss the realities of their migrant experiences. When labor organizations (such as the taxi workers' alliances) try to create such spaces, they are successful when they remain cognizant that immigrant workers' realities are different from those of the native-born (Milkman 2006).

Thirdly, immigrants can have experiences of political engagement in their home countries, which they bring to the countries of resettlement. Some immigrants entered the country as political refugees or successfully petitioned for asylum after arriving in the United States. Others, such as Satpal Singh and Baadal Singh, did not enter as members of persecuted groups (and used, instead, tourist and work visas) and did not claim that status, but they had left their home country (India, in both cases) precisely due to political marginalization and harassment. Their experiences in Punjab in the 1980s informed their participation in taxi workers' alliances in Philadelphia in the mid-2000s. This possibility is often overlooked in the prevailing 'model minority' stereotype, which assumes that South Asian immigrants are politically passive (Prashad 2000).

Fourthly, immigrants, regardless of their countries of origin, race or religion, might have experienced a sense of alienation and social isolation in their adopted countries, and might feel a sense of loss even after years of resettlement. These sentiments are likely shared (probably to varying degrees) across immigrant groups, and when individuals from different ethnic groups meet (such as in occupational spaces), this shared experience can serve to unite them. Thus, "[s]eparately and in combination, these dimensions of immigrant life experiences can foster collective organization, balancing and often outweighing the countervailing factors once thought to make immigrants 'unorganizable'" (Milkman 2006: 133-134). Another important factor when considering the political mobilization of taxi workers is the role of individual leaders and non-profit professionals. Ray Brown was widely recognized amongst all drivers to be a charismatic leader, and his ability to approach immigrant drivers as well as non-profit professionals strengthened his credibility amongst drivers. Brown's contacts amongst non-profit

professionals enabled an intellectual and political cross-pollination that helped the taxi workers alliance. While some non-profit professionals provided contacts to the media, others enabled access to sympathetic politicians who could advocate for taxi drivers. By attending the public rallies of different workers' groups (such as security guards at an educational institute), Brown and his non-profit allies successfully increased the 'public profile' of their own workers' alliance.

Finally, when considering the mobilization of taxi workers, the specificity of the historical circumstances should not be underestimated. Nationwide, labor unions have become increasingly more receptive to the idea of organizing non-traditional occupations and immigrants. Millions of immigrants and their supporters flooded the streets in the summer of 2006 in a nationwide call for a fairer immigration policy. Several unions voiced their support, too. While organized labor has historically been hostile to immigrants, the unions began supporting immigrants' rights from the 1980s onwards (Milkman 2000, 2006). In the specific case of the taxicab industry, after the merger of two rival alliances (BUTW and TWA-PA) to form the UTWA, the new leadership of the UTWA approached the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations [AFL-CIO] and asked to be included in the labor federation and be granted a national charter for taxi workers. On August 3, 2011, the current AFL-CIO President, Richard Trumka, authorized a national charter for a National Taxi Workers' Alliance [NTWA]. This institutional support is directly a result of a 'change of heart' on the part of the national unions.

Merits and limitations of the present study and avenues for further research

Having weathered a transition of oversight from the Public Utilities Commission [PUC] to the Philadelphia Parking Authority [PPA] in 2005, the taxicab industry today is somewhat different. A high proportion of drivers own the vehicles they operate, and medallion ownership is relatively dispersed between individual owners and corporate ownership. The PPA has established a single-payer monopoly for credit card services and dispatch and GPS technology, which all vehicles are legally required to use. This study aimed to understand how immigrant drivers' social networks facilitated their political engagement and fight for occupational rights. While the study effectively contributes to literature on social networks and the political mobilization of non-professional South Asian immigrants, there are several avenues for further research.

Light and Gold (2000) note that most studies of ethnic economies have focused on the labor of immigrant men. One rare exception is Sheba Mariam George's study (2005) of immigrant nurses from the southern Indian state of Kerala. This study is guilty of the same: During my fieldwork, I only met and heard of male taxi workers. In 2011, well after the completion of active primary data collection, I heard of a South Asian female taxi driver in Philadelphia. Casual enquires revealed that she was the first female driver in the city, and drivers reported as recently as 2012 that a second female driver [not South Asian] has joined the close to three thousand male drivers in the city. Any future study of the taxicab industry must include the perspectives of these drivers, too, and examine how this itinerant and masculine industry is experienced by them. While other occupations allow for an exploration of how women's direct economic contribution

(such as their work in motels, restaurants and grocery stores), the entry of female drivers in the taxicab industry will soon require a similar exploration.

Another issue that merits exploration is the role of technology in transforming the taxicab industry. A study that focuses on the medallion system (unlike this one, which focuses on the mobilization of taxi workers) will need to examine how "apps" [computer and internet applications] are challenging the stronghold of dispatch companies. Applications such as "Uber" allow passengers to directly call for a cab, circumventing dispatch companies entirely, and enabling passengers to avoid the 'street hail.' City regulators have already turned their legislative gaze on such applications in New York City. Such applications will fundamentally transform the meaning of 'independent contractors' if they are allowed to continue because they will undercut the power of the dispatch radio to solicit and assign pick-ups.

Finally, another avenue for research could be the taxi worker alliances being forged across national borders. Given the recent embrace of non-traditional occupations by American unions, it is conceivable that international workers' organizations will also focus on organizing taxi workers. Fledgling efforts have already begun, as evidenced by the websites of taxi workers' alliances in New York City as well as Philadelphia. Such research would add to this present study of the use of social networks for the mobilization of South Asian immigrant drivers in Philadelphia.

APPENDIX

Interview guides
Guide for open-ended interviews with taxi workers and organizers (one-on-one or group interviews):

Biographical information:

> Name:
>
> Age:
>
> Country of arrival:
>
> Years of arrival in the U.S. and Philadelphia:
>
> Previous residences in the U.S. and elsewhere (excluding country of origin):
>
> Current residence in Philadelphia:
>
> Education:

Employment history:

> Jobs held in home country or other locations:
>
> First and all subsequent jobs in the U.S.
>
> When did you start taxi driving? How and why did you enter the industry?
>
> Did someone assist you with getting this or previous jobs? Can you describe how? Have you helped someone in a similar manner? Is this common practice?
>
> Can you describe an average day?
>
> Details of lease: owner-operator? Lease driver? Time of shift? Days of employment? Dispatch company affiliation?
>
> What do you like or dislike about the job?
>
> How do you decide where to wait? What strategies do you use to make more money? How did you learn these skills?
>
> Have you been fined on the job? Can you describe the circumstance? Did you contest it?
>
> How has the job changed since you first began?
>
> Are drivers competitive with each other? Are some drivers better off than the other?

What is your opinion of the PPA and the PUC?

Values and social interaction:

What is your current residence? Why did you choose this locality?

Do you have family or relatives in the U.S.? Can you tell me about them? Do they live with you? Are you elsewhere? How do you keep in touch?

If you have children, how old are they? Are they or will they join you in taxi driving? What are your aspirations for your children?

Describe your life outside of taxi driving: Who do you spend time with?

Do you interact with drivers on the job? Which drivers? Where? How?

Is there any person or group of persons you feel you can depend upon to help you

out? Can you give me examples of how they might have helped you out?

Political engagement:

Are you aware of the BUTW or the TWA-PA? How did you hear of it or them?

Do you follow their activities closely? What is your opinion on their activities?

How would you describe your level of involvement? Have you attended a meeting or rally? Could you describe what you observed or what you have heard about it? Who told you about it?

Would you share your reasons for participation or not participating?

Do you know other drivers who are active with this organization? If so, how did you meet them?

Would you recommend that other drivers get involved or not get involved with such activity? Do you friends agree with you? Have you tried to discuss this with each other or persuade each other?

Do you think these alliances have been successful? What would you like them to try to achieve for you?

Organizers and non-profit professionals:

What is your affiliation? Can you describe your involvement with the organization(s) and your reasons?

What is your assessment of the interest or involvement of taxi workers? Have you noticed a difference according to their mode of driving (lease or owner-operator) or the communities they are a part of?

What strategies are you using to talk to more drivers?

What is the hardest part about organizing taxi workers? What unexpected challenges did you face while organizing drivers?

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