

Text III

Transit to the Port

While refineries dominate the pathway to the port, it is commercial imports that play a huge role in the harbor economy. Since the 1960's, commodities are packed in huge containers hauled primarily by truck, but also placed on rail. Trucking agencies and shippers make more money when they pay truckers by the load and consider the drivers independent contractors who shoulder the burden of paying for the use of the vehicles, insurance, gas, and spend hours in line waiting to pick up a load. Labor unions and community organizations work with these drivers to expose the myth and file for wage theft, a concept that has made its way into law, but getting justice for the drivers is still an elusive effort.

The port is like a giant Lego game with giant colorful cranes, large expanses of stacked containers, and colossal forklifts to load and unload the ships. Visiting the terminals is nearly impossible for those who don't carry a TWIC card, the security ID longshore and drivers must keep on them. Aided by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, we visited two terminals, the old break bulk terminal, Pasha, and a relatively new terminal, Maersk. In Pasha, the work dockside is less automated and less modern, while in Maersk everything is massive and austere, from the endless rows of containers to the hundred foot cranes. Workers are dwarfed by machines.

Looking at the now abandoned warehouses that stored products before containerization, Warehouse #1 was a testimony to modern construction and technology. Seeing the painted letters fading on its façade, the proud lion gargoyles chipped, evokes an odd mixture of feelings. Nostalgia and kitsch make this once efficient six story warehouse into a popular site for action films. But perhaps this vacant storehouse that is on the National Register of Historic Places can forecast the future of the voracious oil industry that pushes us to the brink of destruction.

Ellie Zenhari, Photographer; Vivian Price, Writer, 2017.

These images come from a series of class field trips we organized at CSU Dominguez Hills. The series matches our journey from our campus in Carson to the Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach.