# *Patterns of Household Immigration into South Texas*[1]

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Relatively little is known about household immigration to the U.S. and in particular, the cultural and work-related aspects of the transition faced by households. Results from this article suggest that immigration often leads to downward social mobility with respect to legal status of household members, type of employment, and property ownership. Of particular note is the transformation of the household from a single to a multiple worker unit, in response to agricultural labor demands and growing employment opportunities in the non-agricultural sector. These factors are influential in the modification of the traditional ideology concerning the division of labor by sex and age. This article introduces a hypothesis for explaining the increase and permanency of household immigration.

## *INDIVIDUAL AND HOUSEHOLD IMMIGRATION*

The U.S.-bound immigration ( the term immigration refers to international migration from Mexico to the U.S. although others have employed the term to signify cause of internal and international migration) patterns from Mexico appear to be undergoing a change. Throughout much of the twentieth century, immigrants were single or arrived in the U.S. without other members of their households, and these individuals represented various legal statuses: the undocumented, the permanent resident legal aliens, and the *braceros.*[3] Forty-six percent of Samora's ( 1971:90) interviewees were single. Dinerman ( 1978:497-499) indicated that households generally sent only one individual. Conditions were ideal for the immigration of one household member ( usually a male), "when there are several adult males to do agricultural work, plus a mature woman who can raise chickens, sell tortillas, or garden products or embroider, and a young daughter-in-law to tend the household..." In

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[3] "Braceros" were Mexican participants in a work contract program in the U.S. from 1942-1964 ( *See,* Galarza 1964; Craig 1971; Bustamante 1976; Hansen 1981; Acuña 1981).

Cornelius' (1979:72) study, over 70 percent were single when they immigrated for the first time. If they were married they preferred to leave their families in Mexico due to the potential risks of detection and increased costs of maintenance in the U.S.

Beginning in the mid to late 1970s, other studies reported that these individual immigrants were often accompanied or followed by members of their households. Cohen (1977:28-29) found that undocumented females would bring their children to Houston if their living situation and jobs were stable enough to permit it. Melville's (1978:231) results indicated that more than one half of her female respondents (two thirds of whom were undocumented) arrived alone but came to join their husbands. Reichert and Massey (1980:482-486) pointed to an emerging pattern of family migration in their sample. They suggested that women and children became migrants only in cases of severe economic hardship unless they travelled with a legal alien. However, when the majority of the household possessed visas, the family often migrated as a unit; others entered without visas. Tienda's (1980:393) conclusions were similar. Although 65 percent of her legal migrants emigrated alone, 35 percent did come with their spouses and/or children. Finally, Flores (1984:515) pointed out that most of his sample of immigrants were "here to stay" as suggested by their average length of time of 6.5 years in the U.S. Generally the household or family unit was composed of 5 members of whom 3 were children.

The above-mentioned studies provide documentation that the Mexican immigration pattern to the U.S. is changing. Data presented here also show that household immigration increases primarily after 1969. However, it is important to ask why the change occurred, particularly during the 1970s. It is hypothesized here that household immigration from Mexico is a response to both the new opportunity structures in South Texas' changing economy and the widening employment options in the U.S. agricultural migrant stream which began in the late 1960s. These employment opportunities are well suited to family-based labor, particularly in the agricultural sector. As such, arriving households play a significant role in the changing structure of agriculture in both South Texas and in the migrant stream.

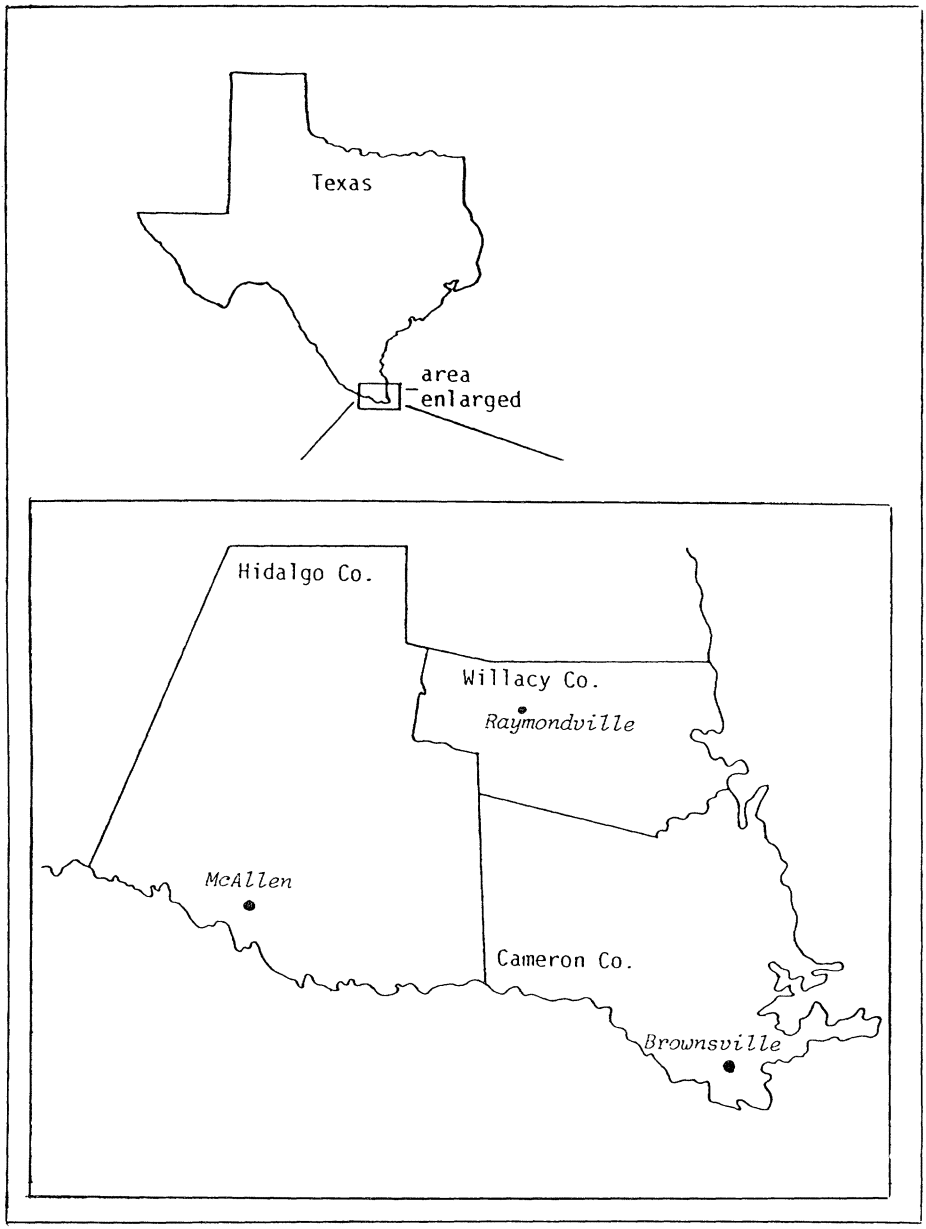
## *DATA AND METHODS*

During 1982-1983, anthropological field research was conducted in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas on the topic of household work strategies (*See,* Map 1). The research site selected for this project was a large urbanizing *colonia*[4] located about four miles north of the Rio Grande River. A purposeful

[4] A *colonia* is an unincorporated area inhabited by Mexican-American residents. Colonia households pay lower property taxes than their urban counterparts and are not subject to city building codes or zoning restrictions. The majority own their own lots and homes. Yet because of the lack of legal ties with nearby municipalities, they do not benefit from many of the usual services available in urban areas such as water, electricity, sewerage, drainage, paved roads, street signs and lights, garbage collection, and fire and police protection, among others (LBJ School of Public Affairs 1977:5-12; Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council 1981).

## MAP 1

### THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS



sample composed of 111 households was stratified by year of marriage or year of household establishment (that is, pre-1950, 1950-59, 1960-69, 1970-83). This article examines only the 56 households classified as immigrant. Their immigration to the U.S., following household establishment, was a permanent move.

An ethnographic approach based on participant observation and formal and informal interview schedules was used. Work and immigration interview schedules are a useful way of investigating process and social change both within and between households. Attention focused on how and where the various jobs were obtained and the decisions leading to job and residential changes. This information was supplemented by sociodemographic data on household residents. It was anticipated that these methods along with information gathered from published sources, would permit 1) a fairly precise specification of the variables influencing work and immigration strategies in general, and 2) the formation of the immigrants' ideology which in part, both explains and justifies certain choices over others.

Informants aided in the construction of the work and immigration interview schedule, clarifying points related to certain topics and suggesting additional kinds of information to gather. After the pretest and analysis of initial data, the interview schedule was modified in terms of focus and length. During the last several months of the fieldwork period, the final version of the interview schedule was administered. Usually the interviews were scheduled with either the mother or female household head, or with the couple as a unit. The interviews lasted between 1-10 hours, averaging 3-4 hours. All 56 interviews were conducted in Spanish.

## *THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF WORK*

### *The South Texas Economy*

Although the U.S. economy has undergone a transformation from an agrarian to a non-agrarian base, this transformation along the South Texas border has proceeded at a much slower rate. Earlier writings about South Texas made scattered references to individuals working in the non-agricultural sector (Taylor 1930:355-356; Foley 1977:4-5; Rubel 1966:41). Employed in construction, railroad track maintenance, produce packing facilities, cotton gins, and domestic service, these workers served as a small but necessary supplement to the agricultural economy. By analyzing U.S. Census data from 1940-1980, the gradual shift in the three county area towards a diversified economy can be documented. Several measures are available to demonstrate the relative importance of various types of economic activities (Briody 1987:260-271). A brief review of these findings follow.

In terms of the labor force participation, there has been a steady reduction in the proportion of workers engaged in agriculture in the Lower Rio Grande Valley ( Census of Population 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980). In 1940, for example, about 42 percent of the employed labor force worked in the agricultural sector. By 1980 agriculture employed less than 9 percent of the labor force. In absolute terms this represented a decline of workers from 27,310 in 1940 to 15,027 workers in 1980. Until 1960, the agricultural sector employed a higher proportion of workers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley than any other industrial group.

As the total size of the labor force increased over two and one half times between 1940 ( 64,441) and 1980 ( 172,846), other industries grew to complement agriculture's decline. Professional and related services experienced the greatest amount of growth both relatively ( with regard to all other industrial groups — 393%) and absolutely ( 1,217%), followed by manufacturing which experienced a relative change of 202 percent and an absolute change of 703 percent over the four decade period. The three-county-area employed only 2,866 workers in manufacturing in 1950 compared to 23,020 in 1980. By 1980, retail trade was actually the second largest South Texas employer after professional and related services. No individual group except agriculture declined absolutely over the 1940-1980 period. These data suggest that the South Texas economy was becoming increasingly diversified.

Other measures of the relative importance of these industrial groups to the economy include the percent change in the annual sales or receipts, and the percent change in the number of manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and service establishment from 1948-1977. In general, the period between 1958-1967 was a period of slow growth relative to the other periods ( 1948-1958 and 1967-1977) ( *County and City Data Book 1949, 1962, 1972, 1983*). However, during the 1967-1977 period, all of the percent values changed greatly. Retail trade, which employed over 31,174 workers in 1980, experienced a growth rate in annual sales from 1967-1977 of 70 percent, and of 20 percent in the number of its industrial establishments. Over this same period, annual sales in manufacturing increased 109 percent while the number of manufacturing establishments increased 30 percent. These data suggest that the non-agricultural sector showed moderate to high growth beginning particularly during the 1967-1977 period.

## *The U.S. Agricultural Migrant Stream*

Other employment possibilities have been available to border residents since the early part of the twentieth century. Fruits, vegetables, and other crops grown outside the Lower Rio Grande Valley require a large migrant force primarily during the cultivation and harvest stages. Seasonal employment in the U.S. agricultural migrant stream has typically provided

income often exceeding wages that were offered locally. Similarly, the availability of work in the migrant stream has complemented the seasonal nature of agricultural employment in South Texas. As such, South Texas residents may work at their home base during the winter months and part of the spring and fall, and seek work in the migrant stream during the remainder of the year. The principal receiving states for South Texas migrants are clustered in the central portion of the U.S. — West Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Idaho and Indiana, for example — although some migrate as far as California and Florida ( Briody 1987:224-227).

Beginning in the World War I era, the migratory pattern which developed in South and Central Texas was first a result of increased cotton acreage in production. However, as land values grew and as landlords demanded a greater percentage of their tenants' crops, migratory labor became a response to the displacement of tenants from their land (McWilliams 1942:208-218), and a means of guaranteeing a constantly available supply of workers to certain agricultural regions in the U.S. Work was performed by the household or extended family unit. According to McWilliams (1942:232), the Mexican migrant units were so large in number and so well organized in comparison with Anglos and Blacks, that they often were able to supply cotton farmers with an entire harvest crew. In the late 1930s the average Mexican sugar beet family unit in Michigan had 4.4 adult workers (that is, 14 years of age or older) and 34.7 percent of those workers were women (McWilliams 1942:276).

As mechanization in agriculture increased, both the absolute number of migrant laborers and the length of stay away from the home base declined. Haney ( 1979:146) reported a decrease in seasonal labor use in mid-Michigan agriculture beginning in 1968. Briody ( 1987:218-223) showed that from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, migrant farm work had become an important work option for over 40 percent of the families in her sample; the proportion of migrants tapered off by the 1980s. Similarly Briody reported that the number of months spent away from the home base peaked in 1965 at 6.6 months and declined thereafter.

## *DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE*

Immigrant households crossed the Rio Grande seeking a "better life" for themselves and their children as early as 1940 and as recently as 1982. The majority of these households (73%) immigrated in 1969 or later. Earlier studies of short-term Mexican migrants to the U.S. reported that the principal sending areas were located in the interior from states such as Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Jalisco (Gamio 1971:13; Samora 1971:92-94). By contrast, 89 percent of the 56 households in this sample were living in the border state of Tamaulipas before immigrating. And, although some studies have demonstrated that rural areas were the principal places of origin of migrants (Samora 1971:92-94; Cornelius 1979:71-72), 54 percent of the households

residing in Tamaulipas originated in the city of Reynosa,[5] while 38 percent of the households lived in other Tamaulipas border cities such as Río Bravo, Valle Hermoso, Matamoros, and Nuevo Laredo (*See,* Map 2).

Of equal interest is the fact that the 56 immigrant households are composed, in part, of "stage migrants" — migrating from one or more areas of Mexico to Tamaulipas and finally to the U.S. Stage migration generally carries an important implication of the "probable personal adjustment of migrants" since they "are not required to change their community environment radically" (Browning and Feindt 1971:320-321). Instead these individuals migrate to particular areas in stages or steps over a given period of time. Of the 89 percent of households that originated in Tamaulipas prior to immigrating to the U.S., approximately 63 percent of the household heads were born outside that state.[6] This trend in stage or step migration is evident for both the state of Tamaulipas and the country as a whole. In 1980, 26 percent of those residing in Tamaulipas originated in some other Mexican state or in a foreign country while over one-half of the national population was not native to its current state of residence (*Resumen General Abreviado* 1980).[7]

Much of this internal movement in Mexico can be attributed to the rise in the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy and to the decline in agricultural employment. In Tamaulipas, the proportion of the economically active labor force (12 years of age and over) engaged in agriculture had declined from 53 percent (1950), to 50 percent (1960), 33 percent (1970), and finally 18 percent (1980) (*Resumen General* 1950, 1960, 1970; *Resumen General Abreviado* 1980). The 1980 proportion contrasts sharply with the country's average of 26 percent. Development of the non-agricultural sector in Tamaulipas can be attributed, in part, to the Border Industrialization Program[8] because a number of U.S. firms are located there. However, this program has not acted to hold migrants in this border state. Unemployment, particularly among males, has increased despite the creation of these new jobs since the vast majority of these jobs are held by females (Baird and

[5] The *municipio* (territorial division for political and administrative organization) of Reynosa has a population of 211,412 (*Resumen General Abreviado* 1980). Reynosa is located in the north central section of the state and borders the city of Hidalgo, Texas which is adjacent to McAllen.

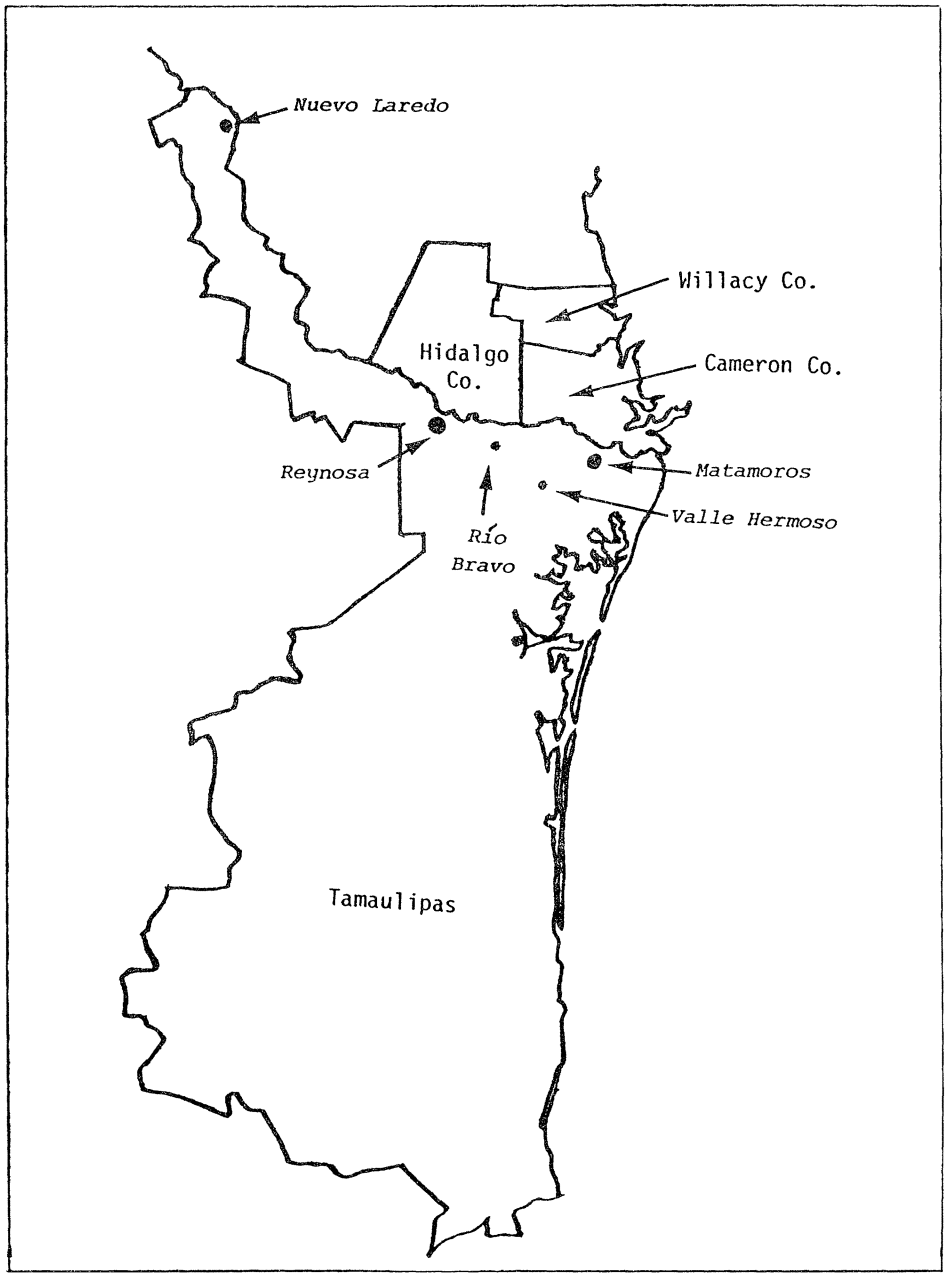
[6] In this case the sample is composed of individuals rather than households. Place of birth data were collected from a total of 50 households or 97 individuals.

[7] These state and national patterns are reversed when examined over time. In 1950, for example, about one-third of the inhabitants of Tamaulipas were not native to that state in comparison with approximately 13 percent of the national population residing outside its state of birth (*Resumen General* 1950). The changes from 1950-1980 suggest that while internal migration is increasing in Mexico generally, the pattern of movement is not as directed towards the state of Tamaulipas as it has been in past decades.

[8] The Border Industrialization Program allows non-Mexican owned companies to set up labor-intensive shops and factories in Mexico which assemble American products, process them, and re-export the nearly finished items back to the U.S. (*See,* Bustamante 1976; Baird and McCaughan 1979; Peña 1980; Hansen 1981).

MAP 2

THE BORDERLANDS AREA OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY



McCaughan 1979:139; Peña 1980:209; Hansen 1981:97). Indeed, Ugalde (1978:109,112) argues that the program was not intended to solve any local employment problems but rather to stimulate migration from less developed areas of Mexico to reduce the economic difficulties there.

Concerning immigrants' occupations and job security prior to immigration (N=38)[9], 58 percent were engaged in non-agricultural pursuits and the remainder were involved in agriculture. Fifty-three percent of the primary income earners were employed in jobs which were secure, permanent, and year-round. Examples included clerks in stores, drivers or delivery personnel, factory workers, and permanent employees on large *ranchos* (ranches/farms). The remainder were divided equally in jobs which were classified as semi-secure (such as part-time domestic work or the cultivation of a small plot of land) and not secure (such as seasonal carpentry work and employment as a *jornalero* or day laborer). The educational level of the principal income earners (N=54) was low; 65 percent had completed three years or less of schooling and 89 percent had attended only elementary school (that is, grades 1-6).

Immigrant households already were engaged in the process of raising a family at the time the entire household immigrated to the U.S. The households in the sample had been established for an average of 12.5 years with a range from less than one year to 40 years. Sixty-one percent of these households immigrated within 11 years of household establishment. These data seemed to correspond with the age date of the sample. The mean age of the principal income earner (of which 84% were males) upon immigration was 36 years (N=54), while that of the spouse averaged 31 years (N=49). The range of ages for the principal income earner was 18-63 years, while that of the spouse was 17-58 years. The standard deviations were 11.5 years and 10 years respectively. The households had an average of 3.7 children at the time of immigration.

Two examples are provided to illustrate the kinds of families likely to immigrate. María's family lived in Reynosa. Her husband had been a bracero in Texas during the first years of their marriage, from 1955-1959. At the age of 35 and with only two years of schooling and no renewal of his work contract, job options were not plentiful. However, a friend taught him how to bake bread so that he could go into business for himself as a *comerciante ambulante* (street vendor). He spent five hours each day baking and the remainder of the workday selling. In the late 1950s, his net income was approximately $10-15 pesos/day. Twenty years later his net income had increased to only $40 pesos/day. At this time, with 7 children to support, María herself began working — as a maid in South Texas. She lived with her

[9] There are fewer cases in this analysis, in part, because of the lack of information concerning the principal income earner. However, the main reason relates to the fact that many of these individuals never worked in Mexico despite their residence there. Instead, they worked in the U.S.

sister during the week and returned to Reynosa on weekends. The oldest children were responsible for the care of the younger ones. By 1980, the family decided to immigrate to the U.S. despite the fact that they had been unable to obtain visas.

Unlike María's family, Ana's family of 4 relied on their two hectare *ejido*[10], (equivalent to 4.94 acres) for their livelihood. Her husband raised sorghum, maize, pinto beans, and a little cotton near the city of Matamoros. Some irrigation was possible because of the drainage canals which crossed portions of the land. The work was primarily considered men's work, although during the harvest season, Ana's husband would hire a few women to pick the beans and corn. Generally, the family sold a large amount of the crops. In 1963, the couple was divorced, and Ana and her children moved to her mother's house in Reynosa. Each day Ana would go to the international bridge and wait to be hired by a crew leader for work in the vegetable fields of South Texas. No social security numbers (and thus, no legal documents) were required in those days since the workers were paid in cash. Ten years later Ana established her own household again and settled in South Texas.

## *PARTIAL HOUSEHOLD IMMIGRATION*

As indicated in the two examples above, the immigration process often includes a transitional phase whereby one household member comes to work in the U.S. while the other household members retain their residence in Mexico. This phase varies in length of time from a few months to several years and was experienced by 24 of the 56 households.

Why would so many families follow this strategy involving a transitional phase? Browning and Rodriguez (1982:39) argue that individual migrants are quite different from a migrant household because the former both have a goal of earning as much money as possible in a relatively short period of time, and have few obligations in the U.S. This assertion corroborates the findings from the sample. Although families believe that life will be better for them in the U.S. because of greater work opportunities, higher wages, the extension of some family and friendship networks there, and better and cheaper school systems, some are unwilling to move the entire family at once.

First, the cost of living is lower in Mexico. One informant states, "We never tried to get *arreglado* (documented) since it was cheaper for us to live in Mexico." Second, the family would have difficulty immigrating if they had not obtained visas. Third, it would not be possible to locate housing and provide for the day-to-day needs of the entire family right away. While the

[10] As part of the land reform program in Mexico, plots of land are assigned to individuals according to specific rules for eligibility established by the National Ejido Program. The title of the land rests with the nation and is under the control of locally elected ejido officials. It cannot be purchased or sold.

settlement process undertaken by family migrants generally has the advantage of increasing household income since several members may work, it has the disadvantage of increasing the family's vulnerability. The latter is apparent with regard to both undocumented households and households at the early stages of the life cycle where child care costs, particulary those related to health, are high (Browning and Rodriguez 1982:40).

In the cases of those households engaging in the transitional phase, 58 percent of the principal income earners who sought work in the U.S. prior to the immigration of their households were documented at the time of entry. If their household members had immigrated with them, only 8 percent of the households would have been documented; the remainder had not yet applied for or received documentation to reside in the U.S.

Seventy-five percent of the principal income earners worked as agricultural wage laborers, primarily for South Texas crew leaders (as Ana did in the example cited above). Others were able to find jobs in the non-agricultural sector in either carpentry or construction, or in domestic employment. The majority of these workers arrived in the U.S. with no definite job possibilities. It was no more likely for an individual seeking work in agriculture to have a job contact in advance than for an individual looking for employment in the non-agricultural sector in South Texas.[11] Indeed, three-quarters of the jobs taken by these arriving immigrants were neither permanent nor full-time. Most wage laborers seeking work for the first time in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, simply appeared at the international bridge each morning and were hired by crew leaders.

Wages were either sent home to Mexico or brought home depending on the distance between the home and work locales. Although wages, and thus the potential for saving, always have been greater north of the Rio Grande, these U.S. earnings were used principally for two purposes — household maintenance for family members still residing in Mexico and, in some cases, fees involved in obtaining legal documentation. While it is possible that household members in Mexico experienced somewhat greater buying power, U.S. earnings do not appear to have been saved towards the households' eventual living expenses once they had moved to the U.S.

## *CHANGES IN SOCIAL MOBILITY OF THE HOUSEHOLD UNIT*

Immigrant households show evidence of downward social mobility in terms of status upon arrival in the U.S. In seeking a better life and educational system for their children, these households must undergo a temporary status

[11] In examining the categories within the agricultural sector, however, first time seasonal migrants in the U.S. agricultural migrant stream were more likely to rely on job contacts than those seeking work as hired hands or wage laborers in South Texas.

loss upon leaving Mexico if they are ever to achieve a status gain once in the U.S. First, undocumented status is an important consideration because it is acquired at the moment of entry to the U.S. for those household members without documentation. Although both the number and proportion of households whose members were documented are greater than among those engaging in the transitional phase, 71 percent of the households had at least one member who was not documented (N=55). This proportion contrasts with a smaller percentage (39%) of the households' primary income earners who were not documented at entry.[12]

Because of the possibility of deportation, undocumented households or household members find that they are often in a vulnerable position with regard to locating work, and in terms of exploitation at the work site (via lower wages). Some are not as well incorporated into social networks as are documented immigrants and may not benefit from certain jobs or social services because of their lack of awareness about them. In other matters such as shopping, registering the children for school, taking a bus to a nearby town, and finding suitable health care, their fear of detection generally limits their daily activities. As one informant states, "If you are not arreglado, people find out about it. You are always scared and often you can't get hired."

Second, it is appropriate to comment on some of the major changes with regard to the working lives of immigrants when changing their residence to the U.S. Although wages are relatively higher in the U.S., the majority of immigrant households work in jobs which are mainly intermittent, seasonal or part-time. In terms of job security, 63 percent of the primary earners held jobs classified as not secure when they first began working in the U.S. — representing an increase of 10 percent from the jobs held prior to immigration (N=38)[13] Indeed, the majority of these jobs classified as not secure were located in the agricultural wage labor sector. These findings corroborate other research (Cancian 1967, 1972; Roumasset 1971; Scott 1976; Dinerman 1982) that only those households with enough socioeconomic resources (including kin contacts, saleable work skills, and some available cash), will accept the higher risks associated with a particular decision — such as that to immigrate.

A third indication of downward social mobility in terms of status is an overall decrease in property ownership once the household takes up residence in the U.S. Many were no longer financially able to operate their farms or

[12] These data suggest the relative importance of documentation for the primary income earner, usually the most visible of the household members to the Border Patrol.

[13] In order to make the primary income earners' employment data in Mexico and the U.S. comparable, only 38 cases were used in the analysis (*See,* footnote 10 for an explanation for the small sample size). However, if 38 cases of the primary income earners' employment in the U.S. are compared with the entire sample of 56 cases, the results are very similar.

ejidos in Mexico. In a similar manner, most new immigrant households could not afford to purchase even a plot of land on which to build a home once they moved to the U.S. Instead, the majority either rented homes or stayed with kin, while some households, if employed year-round by a *patrón* (grower), were able to live on the patrón's land without having to pay rent or utilities.

Three examples provide a more precise specification of this trend. Dominga's husband worked full-time in an automobile manufacturing plant in Río Bravo, Tamaulipas. He had a steady income but desired to move his wife and child to the U.S. even though he had neither comparable job prospects there, nor legal documentation for himself or his family. Since their immigration in 1980, he has been involved primarily in agricultural labor, earning scarcely $2,200 in 1983. This household has chosen to remain in the U.S. since Dominga's mother's household and her brother's household now reside in the U.S. They are a close knit family and often pool their earnings in times of hardship.

Benita's husband had been trained as a printer in a business in Monterrey, Nuevo León since the age of 13. He believed he could find a similar type of work in the U.S. at a higher wage. Upon immigrating he found that his lack of knowledge of English was a hindrance in becoming hired. Consequently, he was forced to take seasonal construction jobs which provided little job security.

Gregoria and her husband received a 20 hectare plot of land (equivalent to 49.4 acres) as a wedding gift in 1954. It had produced enough to live on but when his Texas-based cousin encouraged him to accept employment with a patrón in South Texas, Gregoria's husband sold the land and came to work in the U.S. Although he said that he made approximately the same amount of money as he did in Mexico, for 8 years he worked under conditions knowing that if he were caught, he would be deported. His family joined him during this period despite the fact that they also had no legal documentation.

Immigrant households tend to experience this downward social mobility initially. However, having resided in the U.S. for a few years, households are able to save enough money for an *enganche* (downpayment) on a house lot and purchase a house shell or the materials to construct their own homes.[14] Similarly over time, they are able to expand their own social networks which

[14] Data are available for the purchase of a house lot in the colonia for 40 of the 56 immigrant households. These households have spent an average of 10.8 years in the U.S. and have owned their house lots for about 5.6 years. Nine households did not own their own land in 1983; 6 rented and 3 lived on land belonging to other households at no charge. The purchase of a house or the materials to build it either occur simultaneously with the purchase of the lot, or follow within a few years. These data suggest that the majority of these households are able to save enough money over a relatively short period of time in order to establish a more permanent residence in the U.S.

may be influential not only in coping with day-to-day problems, but also in opening up new job opportunities.

Third, there are a number of non-profit charitable organizations operating in South Texas which provide social services and forms of assistance to low income households ( Briody 1987:229-359). In cases where members of the household have legal documentation or are U.S. citizens, they are usually eligible for government assistance, particularly food stamps.[15] Such aid may be one factor in lowering return migration rates to Mexico. ( During the research period the researcher was aware of only one household that opted to return to Mexico). One informant referring to the differences over the last 30 years emphasizes, "There was more poverty then than now since there was no government aid".

One facet of the transition from life and work in an urbanizing section of Mexico to the U.S. concerns the transformation of the household from a single worker unit to a multiple worker unit. A difference-of-means test (t-test) was conducted on the number of economically active household members (that is, employed outside the home) in the year before immigration and the year of immigration. Because of greater work opportunities in the U.S., it was expected that there would be significantly more wage earners in the 56 immigrant households upon arrival in the U.S. than among those same households in Mexico. In the year prior to immigration, immigrant households had an average of 1.2 economically active members in comparison to 1.4 economically active members in the following year when they immigrated. This result is statistically significant at the .05 level of significance using a one-tailed test.

Who are these new household wage earners? Because the difference between the time before and after immigration is at most one year, the aging of offspring (and consequently their immediate entrance into the labor force) cannot completely account for the difference in the two means. Most of the difference is attributable to the wife's (or mother's) addition to the household work force, and in some cases, older children who have completed or terminated their schooling. Prior to their departure from Mexico, the wives

[15] In 1983, 52 of the 56 immigrant households had at least 1 documented household member — making them legally eligible for the receipt of government assistance. Seventy-seven percent of these legally eligible households received food stamps. Twenty-five percent of these households received some other form of government assistance: 10 households were eligible for Social Security and Supplementary Security Income benefits due to permanent disability or old age, 2 households received Aid to Families with Dependent Children monies (1 of whom for a temporarily disabling condition of the household head), and 1 household collected unemployment insurance. It has been argued that undocumented individuals are a drain on the state and federal government's public assistance programs. While undocumented children participate in the public educational system in the U.S., none of the 4 households in this sample (with only undocumented members) was eligible for any of the above-mentioned state and federal assistance programs. Other researchers have found that undocumented individuals typically receive little in the way of social services, and yet overpay in terms of taxes, Social Security and other withholding monies (Villalpando 1977; North and Houstoun 1976).

constituted about 19 percent of the total number of household wage earners (N=67), while the children constituted only 1.5 percent of the employed household members. Once in the U.S. these proportions changed to approximately 28 percent and 10 percent respectively (N=78). If the household engages in agricultural wage labor in the U.S. agricultural migrant stream, the labor of all able-bodied household members is utilized.

Two examples are pertinent here. Rosa's husband worked in a junk yard in Reynosa and crossed the border to follow the U.S. crop cycle on at least two occasions. Through a friend he was hired as a permanent employee of a South Texas patrón in 1978, despite the fact that he had no documentation. This household lived on the patrón's land rent-free. Within three years they had saved enough money to purchase a house lot. To date they have constructed a one room house on the lot and hope to move the household of 4 in shortly. Rosa's husband has kept his job with the patrón although during the slack summer season, the family usually migrates to Indiana.

Esperanza's household did not move to the U.S. until they had obtained visas in 1974. Her husband has found work over the years by going to new construction sites directly, or by keeping in touch with his friends as well as the Texas Employment Commission for any upcoming employment. His most recent job lasted 30 months before he was laid off. Currently he is receiving unemployment insurance totalling $142/month, food stamps totalling $409/month, and his youngest child is eligible for the WIC program[16]. There are now 13 members in the household. However, at this point, the household is very much dependent on the earnings of the only other working household member — the oldest child who still resides at home. Susana is a teacher's aide in an elementary school classroom and she receives a check for $365/month. Esperanza adds simply, "This is how we are surviving".

## *IDEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES SURROUNDING WORK*

Ideological statements made by informants provide justifications for behavior. According to one individual, "Mexican women don't usually work outside the home since, *los patrones no tienen confianza en la mujer*" (employers do not have faith in female workers). Work is the realm of the Mexican male[17], while women have household and child care responsibilities. "Men have other opinions over there in Mexico on women working. Husbands don't

[16] The Women, Infants and Children Program is a governmental nutritional supplement program for pregnant women, newborns, and young children who are found to be underweight or who show vitamin deficiencies. If they qualify for the program, they are provided with coupons for foods such as eggs, milk, cereal and juice, among others, which can be purchased at different times throughout the month.

[17] It is not possible to confirm this claim with the data at hand. However, it seems likely that there are fewer employment opportunities in Mexico (other than among the self-employed) than in the U.S.

like women to work; *son costumbres de los mexicanos*" (these are Mexican customs), as one housewife aptly states. Once in the U.S., the ideology surrounding work changes. "They don't look down on women working here", states one individual. In comparing work in Mexico with that in South Texas, another notes, "Here the *chamacos* (kids) work and I can work too".

The relaxation in the ideology concerning multiple household workers occurs as new employment opportunities become available. While there is still a sense that it is preferable if women and children[18] do not work, many women, adolescents, and teenagers are engaged in agricultural labor (Some also are employed in domestic service). The agricultural harvest in particular demands a large force at certain times of the year. Such work usually can be performed as readily by women as by men. While young children tend to be employed primarily *en la pisca* (in picking the crops), children of both sexes, 12 years of age and older, are usually considered capable of completing the agricultural tasks of adults. Nevertheless, when work opportunities in South Texas agriculture, for example, are limited, men tend to be hired over women.

Women's and children's labor force participation in agriculture is a response to labor demands requiring a larger number of workers than can be fulfilled by adult male wage laborers. It has been in the interest of U.S. agribusiness to employ such workers at those stages of the production cycle requiring large amounts of manual labor. However, it generally becomes acceptable for women and children to work if the household is able to justify it on the basis of economic necessity (*por necesidad* — an emic category). Interestingly, nearly all households in the immigrant sample could substantiate their reasons for working on the basis of some officially recognized indicator of need, their annual income for example.

Immigrating to South Texas seems to be an option followed by several divorced women. When their husbands no longer provide for them or their children, these women are quickly thrust into a situation where they are the sole breadwinners — and most of these women never were employed outside the home. Delia's family maintained its livelihood from a two hectare ejido until the couple was divorced in 1962. Since she lived close to the international bridge she was able to find work with some South Texas crew leaders. Her children stayed with her mother in Mexico until she could afford to establish a home in the U.S. Ninfa had never thought of coming to the U.S. before her divorce in 1978. However, she and her children immigrated in 1979 and they found work in agriculture. Finally, Lupe followed a strategy similar to these other two women. However, after her divorce she first moved to the Reynosa

[18] Children's labor is sanctioned primarily when it does not conflict with the school calendar, or when the household faces such severe financial constraints that it cannot do without the children's income.

area from Mexico City and worked for 9 years in the Zenith plant (one of the labor-intensive factories that participates in the Border Industrialization Program).

## *THE IMMIGRANTS' ROLE IN A CHANGING ECONOMY*

For immigrant households, the industrial changes in the U.S. and South Texas economies have had two notable effects. First, the more recently arrived the households, the more likely they are to engage in agricultural-related tasks and the less likely they are to work in the non-agricultural sector. Of the households immigrating between 1969-1974 (N=15), 67 percent of their primary income earners were actively employed in non-agricultural jobs, 27 percent in agricultural jobs, and 6 percent were temporarily unemployed in 1983. By contrast, of the households immigrating between 1975-1983 (N=26), 58 percent of the principal income earners worked in agriculture (most in wage labor) and 35 percent in non-agricultural jobs; in the remaining households the usual primary income earners were not active in the labor force.[19] Of the 56 immigrant households in the sample, 43 percent were active in the U.S. migrant stream in either 1982 or 1983. These data suggest the relative importance of recent immigrant households to the agricultural labor supply.

Second, job security of immigrant households in 1983 varies with date of arrival. Of the households immigrating in or following 1969, 63 percent of the principal income earners (N=41) held jobs classified as seasonal, intermittent, or part-time; an additional 7 percent were unemployed. The more recently arrived households (those coming to the U.S. in or after 1975, N=26) fared even worse. Eighty-one percent of these principal income earners were engaged in jobs which were neither year-round nor permanent, and an additional 8 percent were unemployed. The non-wage earning households relied either on the receipt of government assistance (Social Security or Supplementary Security Income) or upon the earnings of non-resident family members. This pattern holds for both labor force participants in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors of the economy, suggesting that while newer immigrants are generally more vulnerable, they fulfill specific niches in the changing South Texas economy.

## *SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS*

The data from this analysis suggest that household immigration to the U.S. is an emerging pattern existing concurrently with the longer established pattern of individual immigration. It could be argued that the identification

[19] The years 1969 and 1975 were selected for analysis based on the clustering of household arrivals in or following those years. From 1969-1983, 73 percent of the sample immigrated while from 1975-1983, 46 percent of the sample immigrated.

of household immigration is a function of this researcher's methodology, that is, that households rather than individuals are the unit of analysis. Similarly, in the past there may have been an over-reliance on Immigration and Naturalization Service figures with regard to individual arrests and an underreporting of family immigrants. However, at least as early as the late 1960s, family-based immigration has been an increasingly prevalent phenomenon.

Because household immigration tends to be permanent, it requires adaptation to new cultural rules and practices both at home and at the workplace. These immigrants come to the U.S. primarily seeking better work opportunities for themselves. In addition, they hope that their children will benefit from the U.S. educational system. Often it is possible to accomplish both aims in conjunction with the chance to reside closer to U.S.-based kin. Household members experience a period of separation during the stage of partial immigration. During the reunification period, they undergo a temporary status loss as they establish their homes and social and job networks which improve their social mobility. Households face ideological changes concerning women's and children's work. Not only do seasonal labor demands of the economy generate more work than can be carried out by adult males, but the cost of living is typically higher north of the Rio Grande River. Consequently, it has become acceptable for women (both married and divorced) and children to generate income if the household is "in need".

The type of immigration and settlement patterns from Mexico into South Texas are responses to specific demands of the economy beginning primarily in the 1970s. First, the availability of wage labor employment in South Texas agriculture and in the U.S. migrant stream is designed to utilize the labor of all able-bodied household members. Second, despite the shifts in the U.S. and South Texas economies towards non-agricultural employment, workers from recent immigrant households have not benefitted as much from opportunities in the manufacturing and service sectors as they have from the few remaining agricultural jobs which are not mechanized. Members of immigrating households are one of the primary mechanisms supplying labor to growers during periods of peak labor needs, replacing some of the second generation wage laborers and their children who have become socially mobile. This pattern of household immigration should continue as long as household labor can be readily utilized.

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