The article sketches the immigration of people of Mexican heritage to Wisconsin and explores some aspects of the adaptations they have made, and some of the social, economic and cultural-ideological consequences of these adaptations.

The Mexican-American group is composed of Americans of Mexican heritage, many of whom are long-time residents of the United States, even before there was a United States of America in some cases. The group also contains more recent immigrants, legal and illegal, from Mexico. We call these two categories of people Mexicanos.

Most Mexicanos live in the Southwestern United States: in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah and California (see Table 1). United States acquisition of these territories was a process attended by disputation in the mid-nineteenth century; it changed a number of Mexicans to American citizens. Systematic land expropriation, largely by informal means, left these new citizens with little regard for the U.S.A. and its justice.

Furthermore, there is the matter of continuing immigration. Emigration from Mexico to the United States occurred at a slow rate, on the basis of demand for migrant labor mainly in the Southwest, until the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Attended by much civil disorder, the Revolution precipitated rapid migration to the United States (Gamio, 1930), again largely to the Southwestern U.S.A.

**Focusing on the Midwest**

During World II labor shortages led to the use of Mexicanos in Midwestern United States (Hill, 1948). The importation of labor from areas of labor surplus to areas of labor scarcity took two forms: either urban (and permanent) or rural (and seasonal).

Urban migration attracted Mexicano workers as cheap labor in times when labor was scarce. Since World War II the rate of in-migration to the cities has fluctuated in response to numerous factors, including job availability in the Southwest vs Midwest, the
TABLE 1. MEXICAN-AMERICANS AS A SEGMENT OF POPULATION OF THE SOUTHWESTERN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Mexican-American Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1,811,500</td>
<td>270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>20,830,000</td>
<td>1,675,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2,110,000</td>
<td>187,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>1,085,000</td>
<td>356,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>11,380,000</td>
<td>1,883,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Total</td>
<td>37,216,500</td>
<td>4,371,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Grebler et al. 1970 pp. 605-608

**It is estimated that census gathering of data on Mexican-Americans is sufficiently in error to allow an estimated additional 700,000 individuals in the total number of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest.

general economic climate and so on. In some cases the migrants returned home, when work slackened.

Social science studies of Mexicano migrants to the urban Midwest include: Humphrey (1944) for Detroit, Mich., Macklin (1963) for Toledo, Ohio, Taylor (1930) for Bethlehem, Pa., Shannon and McKim (1974) for Racine, Wis., and Samora and Lamanna (1967) for East Chicago, Ind. The following generalizations emerge from these studies:

1. Language problems are a persistent difficulty in effective communication of the Mexicano migrant with other citizens.
2. Employment is almost entirely in blue-collar jobs of low skill levels.

This latter statement is a continuing fact. For example, Samora and Lamanna (1967) found that in East Chicago, a community with a Mexicano component dating to before World War II, 90% of Mexicanos had blue-collar jobs. Shannon and McKim (1974) found some improvement in Racine in the proportion of white collar Mexicano employees between 1960 and 1971, but the percentages are still in the range found by Samora and Lamanna.
As these blue-collar Mexicano communities grow, largely by chain migration, ethnic enclaves with discrimination and lack of social, educational and skill resources develop into persistent components of the cities involved. In Wisconsin, Racine, Milwaukee and Kenosha are excellent cases in point.

According to Shannon and Morgan's study of Racine (1966) Mexicanos were significantly worse off than either Anglos or Blacks in terms of such factors as income, education, status of employment, social participation, occupational mobility, standard of living and level of aspirations. Thus urban Mexicanos not only tend to become ethnic enclaves but their future chances are poor because they are not acquiring those things which would permit them to break out of their situation.

Let us now turn to rural Wisconsin Mexicano migrants.

In the period of severe labor shortage of the 1940s, Wisconsin farmers and canners sought outside labor to supplement the local sources depleted by military service. A major available source was Mexicano migratory labor from South Texas. The workers were skilled; they worked hard; they accepted long hours and relatively low wages, and were generally available year after year. Thus the investment of time, money and effort to provide the cyclic migrants with housing, transportation and other needs was worth it to the farmers and canners. (Hill, 1948).

Many workers were needed because of the labor-intensive system of picking and packing the crops involved. For the most part, this situation was due to the inherent difficulties of mechanization or to the small effort to mechanize those crops on the part of agricultural engineers. This fact is significant for the future of farm labor, since efforts to mechanize go forward only so long as price for the crops involved warrant it. As successful machines are built, they will be used, thus reducing the need for migratory labor to the vanishing point for that crop, local skilled labor being sufficient to fully mechanized agriculture.

In the 1940s the newly recruited Mexicanos worked so well that after the World War II they continued to be employed. In fact, particular growers and particular migrant families or crew leaders often established a vertical mutual dependence or patron-client relationship in which: inexpensive, skilled farm labor was provided at the right time in exchange for work and seasonal housing.

This relationship between farmer and migrant is often personalistic and affective (this is less likely in relation to universalistic, affectively neutral canneries). One can speak of the
paternalism of the farmers and the loyalty of the migrants, which is actuated by self-interest, but often the affection seems genuine enough, nevertheless. Examples of the paternalism include growers bailing migrants out of jail following arrests on drunkenness charges, giving credit references for migrants at local businesses and even lending money to migrants to buy a farm and “settle out” of the migrant stream (Provinzano 1971). The last goes rather farther than pure self-interest would dictate. Although it is unusual, it is not strikingly out of character for at least some of the growers.

Wages

Despite the above, wages of the migrants still tend to be extremely low. The following example will indicate the problem, as it pertains to cucumber workers (WSES, 1967).

Mean hours worked per day........................................5.89
Mean hourly earnings, $........................................1.51
Mean pounds harvested per hour..............................79
*Mean earnings per day $.................................8.89
Mean earnings per 6 day, $..............................53.34

*U.S. farm labor in general earned $10.05 per day (mean).

The above data cover all categories of workers—adults and children working as family unit.

Computed from the migrants’ average wage, $3541.77 would be the income of a family of four, all working full time for the maximum number of days migrants work, about 100. If one compares this income with the $3200 rural poverty level set by the President’s Council of Economic Advisors (1969) for that year, one can see that it seems hardly worthwhile to work in such circumstances. Especially is this true considering how hard migrant work is.

Working and Living Conditions

Working and living conditions of migrant farm laborers have been exposed in television specials (e.g. CBS classic Harvest of Shame), countless news and feature articles in the popular press and in many other organs of communication and otherwise. Conditions
in Wisconsin do not seem as bad as some described and pictured elsewhere.

Farm workers, whether field or cannery workers, work long hours, broken by gaps caused by rain, uneven ripening of produce and, frequently, poor grower organization and planning. All but the latter cause are endemic to agriculture and mostly unavoidable. The poor organization and planning of growers, however, occurs because many farmers themselves are not highly skilled managers. In order to make best use of farm labor, a farmer should plan so that the workers can be kept continuously busy. Examples include the planting of successional crops or planting the same crop in series to make hand harvesting more possible. He can also plant the crops, fertilize, and irrigate so that yield per plant makes the piece-working farm laborer feel that the effort expended is worthwhile.

Unfortunately, for both the farmer and the laborer, many farmers do not do these things well. This leads the migrant worker to seek work primarily with farmers whose fields are attractive. This is especially true of the family-type worker unit, which will establish a rather lasting tie with a particular farmer provided their experience is profitable. If it is, they may return year after year and maintain contact over the winter through occasional letters.

Cannery workers are also subject to violent fluctuations in amount and duration of work, since the crop will not wait and eighteen-hour days at a rush, succeeded by idle days, are part of the nature of the job. Cannery attempts to reduce this boom-and-bust cycle have been largely ineffective.

Farmers and cannery generally provide housing as part of the overall financial arrangement. Those utilities which are provided (minimally electricity and water) may or may not be charged for. Housing is generally cramped, at times scandalously so, but is generally clean. Bathing and clothes washing facilities are often provided, but are often rather primitive and inadequate. Canneries usually provide a commissary at which food, usually cooked by a Mexicana, is provided for a fee. Old barns and even old chicken coops occasionally are provided as "housing". Luckily this is becoming rare in Wisconsin. In one instance very poor housing was provided by a farmer, but it was hard to criticize him when his own house had dirt floors. The range of variation of housing quality is rather great. Canneries will generally paint up their housing to look nice at a distance and put a good sized field between it and public highways.
The application of regulations on migrant housing through enforcement procedures is very difficult. Inspectors are few, camps are many and scattered, and harvest seasons are short enough that compliance may come after the housing has been vacated.

**Problems of Organization**

The migrants have little power to improve wages, working conditions or living conditions. First of all, they lack the wealth to sustain a strike. The nature of their economic resources can be surmised from the information on wages given previously. However, if this were the only obstacle to organization, they would probably have been organized effectively long ago through affiliation with larger labor unions with the resources to support a strike.

Other obstacles to organization include the following:

a. **Insecurity:** There is first of all a surplus of farm labor most of the time. Mechanization and related efficiencies, plus crop diversification has reduced job availability. Secondly, the relationship between a farm worker and employer often is not simply employee-employer, but personal and long-term as well. The worker is a “client”, the farmer is a “patron”. This makes the worker unwilling to offend this source of livelihood and perhaps this “friend”, too. The affective component should not be ignored.

b. **Labor cost:** Planting a labor-intensive crop has depended upon a substantial supply of skilled, cheap labor. If the cost of that labor were to go too high, the farmer would tend to purchase a machine to do the job, if one exists for the crop involved, or he would switch to a mechanized crop. In the case of canneries the wealth and labor surplus factors are also applicable, whereas the long-term employer-employee relationship and mechanization factors are less significant. However, canneries are usually part of a large company which has many plants and which can afford losses at any one for extended periods. In some cases, especially if the plant is not very profitable, they may even shut down a plant troubled by labor organization (this did happen at one plant during the author’s research).

The above facts lead to the disturbing conclusion that far from warmly embracing organization attempts, migrant farm workers find that such attempts threaten what they do have.
Impact of Migrant Workers on the Community

The migrant farm workers do have a substantial impact on the communities they service. First of all, although their incomes are relatively small, their aggregate buying power in this, their flush time, is considerable in the communities of relatively small population surrounding their work places. They buy food, dry goods and even durable goods. Most merchants look forward to their coming and often stock certain items especially to appeal to them (eg. pinto beans, western hats and the like).

Furthermore the migrants' presence creates jobs for people such as State Employment Service local coordinators, irrigation gangs (local people, generally), social service aides, extra retail sales employees and so on. The migrants' presence can mean community prosperity. In fact the migrants are the key to the labor-intensive agricultural system in the communities they visit and work in.

Discrimination—A Surprise?

Based upon the above description, an outside observer might expect the farm workers to be hailed as welcome, though temporary additions to the community, since after all they are indispensable to the economic life of the communities as that life is currently defined. We find, however, that this is not so. Mexicano migrants are not welcome in most local bars; they are patronized or treated rudely in retail establishments; they are treated with a wary, contemptuous suspicion by officers of the law. People say that they are drunks, that they carry knives, that they are stupid, that women are not safe around them.

One may explain these local attitudes as the normal xenophobia of an insular farming community, except for the following facts: tourists in these areas are welcome with much less hostile resentment, and the farmers tend to be less likely to share these negative attitudes (presumably personal contact reduces the tendency to stereotype). A more plausible explanation may be that of racist stereotype: Anglos discriminating against Mexicanos. There is undoubtedly more to this explanation than to the previous one, but it is incomplete as well, since Anglo farm workers tend to meet the same attitudes, if their occupation is known to the townspeople. Thus a complete explanation of the phenomenon of prejudice and discrimination should include xenophobia, racism plus a contempt for people who are poorly paid, transient, and live in
poor accommodations. The migrants do not live the good life, as it is defined in materialistic America. Therefore they are stigmatized.

As should be clear from the foregoing discussion, the stigmatizing of Mexicano farm workers in Wisconsin is a complex process with many constituent elements in it. To describe the causes of the stigmatization as being due to the rapacious cruelty of farmers and canners is as oversimplified as was the portrait of Simon Legree in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN an oversimplification of the nature of slavery. If one were seeking to put together a tract with organizational ends in mind (eg: to be used to help unionize farm workers), then such oversimplification is pragmatically justifiable (but only to “fan the flames of discontent”). However, such tracts should not then be labelled social science.

Whatever circumstances may be for migrant farm workers in other parts of the country, in Wisconsin they are caught up in a system in which their desirability as workers is their low cost, their proficiency and their availability for short term seasonal work. Anything that would tend to alter any of these three factors would tend to make them less desirable employees. Since most of their employers are small, not very efficient and under-capitalized farmers who are being squeezed by cost-price pressures themselves, organization of field workers in labor unions is a very unrewarding venture. Efforts to turn cannery workers in the direction of unionization have met with more success and organizers have, therefore, increasingly focused upon this latter group.

What the Future Holds

For migratory farm workers, especially for field workers who are the majority, increasing mechanization, rampant inflation and increasing resentment of stigmatization all have led to search for alternatives to migrant agricultural work. The obvious possibility is to leave the migrant stream, and many have done this. They “settle out”, in many cases simply by staying home and trying to make a go of it in places like Brownsville and Crystal City in Texas. These are places of labor surplus, and so this solution is not very satisfactory. Many settled-out migrants in Wisconsin described to the present author what appeared to them to be the limited choices available to them, which eventually brought them to take up permanent residence in Wisconsin.
Generally speaking, there are two modes of settling-out at some point on the migrant stream:

1. **Involuntary settling-out.** Those who settle out of the migrant stream out of desperation are included in this category. Often their decision has an unplanned quality. They do not know what to do: previously dependable sources of agricultural employment have dried up, financial resources of agricultural employment have been spent, relatives or friends offer as their only real aid the suggestion that they settle down in X community. The involuntary settled-out usually find X community to be the hispanic ghetto of a central city. In Wisconsin it is often Milwaukee.

   The author has seen people in this category on welfare or with very menial jobs. However, a few do succeed in finding positions of some substance, although always blue collar work. Whether they eventually find relative prosperity or not, individuals in this group tend to feel that they are not actively involved in charting their own destinies.

   Much attention has been paid to the involuntarily settled-out migrants by service agencies, both public (esp. United Migrant Opportunity Services) and private (eg. the Catholic Church). This is as it should be, since this category contains those who are most in need of aid. There is, however, another category of settled-out migrants to whom less attention is generally paid.

2. **Voluntary Settling-Out.** This category contains individuals or, more frequently, families who settle out of the migrant stream because they wish to improve their economic situation and choose to do so, not out of desperation, but because alternatives to migration seem attractive and they feel some confidence that they can manage the new life.

   The author’s research on this latter group has focused on a rural area and a medium-sized city, both in Central Wisconsin. Individuals in this group are more like the indigenous Anglo population than they are like the average migrant (Table 2). They have more schooling than the average migrant (3.3 years more), are bilingual, have small families (4.4 persons vs. migrants’ 7+) and, very significantly, have voluntarily settled into an Anglo community which has no coherent Mexicano community whatsoever. The author found in Fond du Lac (population approximately 40,000) that the twenty-seven
TABLE 2. SETTLED-OUT MEXICANOS COMPARED WITH NON-SETTLED-OUT MEXICANOS (SAME LOCALITY) AND WITH ANGLOS OF FOND DU LAC, 1971.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexicanos</th>
<th>Anglo families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Settled-out</td>
<td>Non-settled-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. families</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. persons (adults+children)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean family size</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% adults bilingual</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% migrated in parental generation</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean residence in city, years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean schooling adults</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% HS graduates</td>
<td>35 (10 of 114)</td>
<td>8.8 (10 of 114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% male laborers (construction, general)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean family $ income, yr</td>
<td>6,040</td>
<td>2,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income range, $</td>
<td>Unemployed to 12,500</td>
<td>Unemployed to 6,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source—Wisconsin Statistical Reporting Service and U.S. Census Bureau, Regional Census Data.

settled-out Mexicano families were not even aware of each other's existence in many cases. Specifically, no one family knew of more than six other Mexicano families and the mean was three.
The first problem was locating them. As a dispersed non-group, social agencies were of little help to us. We found that “Chicano ex-migrants” was more an analytical and less a folk category than we had believed possible. Finally we located them by chain identification. That is, each family knew about one or two others until we had located the full 27 families.

A few of the migrants who settled-out did so at great obvious advantage to themselves and with very little risk. One individual, for example, bought a good working farm on the outskirts of town with the money to pay for it lent, interest free, by a former employer, a local grower-patron. Such a situation is most unusual. Generally those who settled out did so to enter wage work with little risk-reducing aid.

In interviews and other contacts, as the researchers came to know the ex-migrants and to comprehend their adaptations, a contrast of the general parameters of those who voluntarily settle-out, as compared to those migrants who do not settle out, began to emerge. Some factors are quantifiable or are expressible in mutually exclusive categories as in Table 2.

This form of settling-out also was a long-term phenomenon (one family had settled-out in 1946). Mean income in 1971 was $6,040 per family, compared to $7,837 for the city’s Anglos. Other comparisons are equally instructive. For example: income differentials indicate clearly that self-selected or voluntarily settled-out families earn substantially more than those who continue migrating. On the other hand, the income differential between the settled-out group and the other Fond du Lac families can generally be explained on the grounds that the settled-out group tends to be involved almost exclusively in non-managerial, blue collar laboring and related fields.

Based upon the above data, we may summarize the characteristics which separate the voluntarily settled-out migrant from the continuing migrant and, from the involuntarily settled-out migrants as follows— they:

1. have a smaller number of children
2. have a greater facility in English
3. have more formal education, often including high school graduation
4. have substantially greater income without the child labor of farm work
5. have the willingness to go it alone, even to sever supporting ties
of kinship and friendship with other Mexicanos (Provinzano, 1971).

The above characteristics (especially the last) suggest that there are in the voluntarily settled-out group, some rather "Anglicized" Mexicanos. This type of voluntary settling-out, isolated as it is from the familiarity of a Mexicano community and the support of kinsmen, generally requires that the family possess a fair skill with English, confidence that the family breadwinner can get and keep a job, relative lack of dependence on traditional supportive (kinship or friendship) ties and some sophistication at self-integration into the Anglo community.

The question which occurred to our research team at this point was as follows: Was submergence of ethnicity necessary for comfortable adaptation to an Anglo sociocultural context? Subsequently, was any anti-Mexican prejudice encountered in the community? Relevant to these questions, two of the student team members did in-depth interviews with eleven adolescents from settled-out families. Most of these adolescents (8 of 11) had been born in Fond du Lac. From this investigation the following generalizations emerged:

1. The adolescents expressed little feeling of pride in, or knowledge of La Raza or of Mexicanness, although one parent or both had been born in Mexico in 80% of the cases.
2. There was little knowledge of the Brown Power Movement. Cesar Chavez was just a public figure name to most of them.
3. Five of the eleven spoke only English. Places of birth: Fond du Lac 8; Texas 2; Mexico 1.
4. They seemed to be aware of discrimination on a very low and subtle level, but tended to attribute it to idiosyncracies of the individual Anglo involved, rather than a group trait of Anglos.
5. They concurred that opportunities for them were not quite what they would be for an Anglo, but seemed to feel that by hard work they could make up the relatively small inequity.

These adolescents admittedly live in a community peripheral to main, traditional Mexican-American population centers and peripheral to Chicano activism as well. However, this does not gainsay the fact that they have carried further a process begun by their parents (who express much more awareness of discrimination in Fond du Lac). The phenomenon described above may well be called the process of Anglicization and assimilation. It suggests that successful, dispersed settling-out into Anglo communities is possible, but only at the price of submergence of ethnicity. If the
ideology of Brown Power does not penetrate Chicano consciousness in Fond du Lac soon, one can hypothesize attempts to “pass” as Anglos, name changing, and eventual efforts to achieve a dissolution of Chicano identifiability and consciousness.

This possibility may be viewed as not only inevitable, but desirable by many of those involved. If so, it will be interesting to see how far such dissolution goes, and also interesting to see how the darker-skinned individuals deal with color problems, especially as more inter-marriage with Anglos is attempted. Some future experience with Brown Power may be hypothesized, the results of which in Fond du Lac may be significant, though we tend to doubt it, unless the individual migrates to an area with a high Chicano population density in another city.

It is, perhaps, unfortunate that the cost of assimilation in this context at least, is the apparent loss of cultural distinctiveness and heritage. Alternatively, the involuntarily settled-out family may live in a situation that does permit the maintenance of Mexican tradition, although often enmeshed in a spiral that spells poverty.

NOTATIONS

1. The author has been leading a team conducting research from 1969 to the present on Mexican migrant farm workers in a rural Wisconsin county as well as on settled-out migrants in a number of areas in Central Wisconsin.

2. Chain migration is a process by which migrants aid and encourage friends and relatives from the home area to join them. Obviously there is substantial potential for geometric growth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


