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ABSTRACT

Relative to other urbanized areas, the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas consistently ranks at the bottom in regard to almost every objective indicator of socioeconomic welfare: per capita income, educational attainment, employment, and health and housing conditions. The 1970 census discovered that approximately one-half of its population, comprised primarily of Mexican Americans, fell below government designated poverty thresholds. Based on a multidimensional approach, including assessment of the region and population in dynamic and longitudinal terms rather than as static entities, this paper provides a broad overview of the region's poverty through the synthesis of existing literature and data. The paper provides a brief sketch of the Valley; addresses the nature and extent of real poverty (the poverty status accorded on the basis of income below government established criteria) in the region by reference to data on income, education, employment, housing and health; addresses the question of regulated poverty (the differential distribution of real poverty across ethnic or racial groups) via a historical discussion of the region as an ethnically stratified social system; and, stimulated by the relative poverty concept (calls attention tc cultural definitions and individual subjective evaluations of poverty status), establishes the hypothesis that the region may be sociologically approached as a "staging area", characterized by five on-going and interrelated mobility patterns. (NQ)

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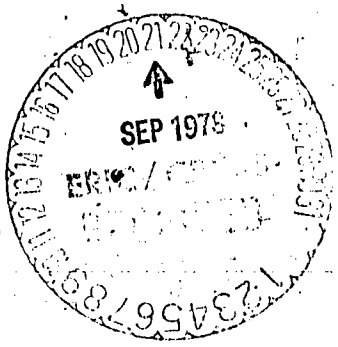


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# POVERTY IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DIMENSIONS*

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POVERTY IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DIMENSIONS

The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas has gained notoriety in recent years as one of the poorest regions, if not the poorest region in the United States. Relative to other urbanized areas, the "Valley" consistently ranks at the bottom in regard to almost every objective indicator of socioeconomic welfare: per capita income, educational attainment, employment, and health and housing conditions. Indeed, the 1970 census discovered that approximately one-half of the local population fell beneath government designated poverty thresholds.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a broad overview of poverty in this region through the synthesis of existing literature and data. In developing this synthesis we hope to illustrate that poverty in the Lower Rio Grande Valley should not be approached as a unidimensional problem -- but one which transcends evaluation on the basis of economic criteria alone. Neither should poverty be viewed in static terms, terms which neglect basic patterns of dynamism and which fail to allow for longitudinal analyses. Such a view precludes the assessment of this population as a stable entity or as merely a category into which people tend to enter, leave, remain out of over time, or possibly return to at a later date. Finally, all too often, poverty is conceptualized as a special problem -- an aberration or anomaly basically isolated from the normal functionings of an otherwise healthy social order. Consequently, it is thought to be capable of amelioration through such devices as general education, job training, and attempts to raise motivation toward achievement. We suggest, on the other hand, that pervasive regional poverty is the more or less inevitable offspring of prevailing sociopolitical structures and processes compounded by demographic and geographical considerations,

and therefore, will not likely be altered in significant magnitude through reliance on traditional individualistic approaches.

The general organizing concepts for this overview are borrowed from Stoddard's recent analysis of poverty along the U.S.-Mexico border.[1] Stoddard posits that research and policy should be sensitized to three broad dimensions: real poverty, regulated poverty, and relative poverty. Real poverty refers to poverty status accorded on the basis of income below government established criteria. Guidelines defining real poverty are variable according to such factors as family size, place of residence, etc., and are periodically revised to reflect cost of living changes. In 1960 for a normal urban family of four the designated poverty line was $3,000. Whereas the poverty threshold had only risen to $3,715 by 1970, it is now set at $6,200. Regulated poverty refers to the differential distribution of real poverty across ethnic or racial groups. A system of regulated poverty is said to exist when cross-ethnic income inequalities are related to differential institutional access, and cannot be accounted for by disparities in objective job related requirements. That is, regulated poverty is a function of ethnic discrimination. The last concept, relative poverty, is an admittedly nebulous one and, as Stoddard notes, cannot be a substitute for real poverty criteria. However, it may have utility in explaining why not all low-income people relate to their plight along similar lines. Relative poverty essentially calls attention to cultural definitions and individual subjective evaluations of poverty status.

The paper consists of three distinct parts. After providing a thumbnail sketch of the Valley, the first section addresses the nature and extent of real poverty in the region by reference to data on income, education, employment, housing, and health. The question of regulated poverty is of primary

consideration in the second section wherein we pursue a historical discussion of the region as an ethnically stratified social system. The final section, stimulated by the relative poverty concept, establishes the hypothesis that the region may be sociologically approached as a "staging area," one characterized by on-going and interrelated mobility patterns at several basic levels.

The Region

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is a relatively unambiguous area; Valley identity is based on a uniform topography coupled with population concentration and social isolation.[2] Topographically, it is not a valley (no mountains or hills enclose it), but rather a delta plain about eighty miles wide and forty miles deep. Secondly, in comparison to the rest of South Texas, the Valley is a highly urbanized area; Valley population is concentrated in a more or less contiguous string of communities ranging from Mission on the west to Brownsville at the southernmost tip. In addition, great expanses of flat, arid, and sparsely settled brushlands isolate the region from other Texas urban centers of any size; for example, the nearest large city, Corpus Christi, is over 130 miles from the closest Valley city, and San Antonio and Houston are 240 and 330 miles away.

Although the Valley remains a frontier outpost within the U.S., it shares a boundary with one of the fastest growing areas of Mexico.[3] The northern slice of the state of Tamaulipas has become in recent years a significant trade, tourist, and industrial center for the Mexican economy. Population growth within its two largest cities, Matamoros and Reynosa, has been dramatic; between 1950-1970, Matamoros grew from 45,846 to 139,318, and Reynosa from 34,087 to 137,383. Present-day estimates place the Matamoros and Reynosa populations at 265,000 and 195,000, respectively (see Table 1 for an overview of Matamoros-Reynosa and Valley population figures). Much of this

growth can be attributed to agricultural changes within the Mexican interior which have driven people off the land, the concomitant lure of job opportunities along the border, and a contemporary population explosion raging throughout Mexico.

In many respects, the future of the Valley is tied to that of northern Tamaulipas; the sociocultural and economic interdependence of the two sides is unquestionably profound. Furthermore, many of the Valley's problems are, to an extent, consequences of economic and demographic pressures within Mexico which materialize at the border. An even more analytically useful definition of regionality, therefore, would include that land area and half million people directly south of the Rio Grande. Both sides, in fact, should be considered as a single "functional unit".[3] Nevertheless, the lack of comparable data often renders such analyses difficult to effect. Little reliable demographic data on Tamaulipas is available; for example, government generated figures on unemployment are totally unbelievable, the 1970 census failed to publish data on incomes, etc.

Valley population numbers 421,633 according to the 1975 census estimate. This figure represents an overall increase of approximately 25% since 1970, despite a slight decrease between 1960-1970. Most residents live in either of two counties, Hidalgo (227,853) and Cameron (176,931), with the remainder (16,849) in Willacy County. Over 25% reside in rural areas of the region. Of the thirty-three cities and towns in the Valley, the three largest account for 37% of the total population; Brownsville (72,157), McAllen (48,563), and Harlingen (40,423). These cities have absorbed most of the post-1970 growth with the smaller towns remaining about the same.

The population of the Valley is characterized by some rather unique and extreme seasonal fluctuations. Therefore, analyses based on the above figures

should be cautiously regarded. During the months between fall and spring, the Valley is home for approximately 100,000 migrant farm workers and family members. The Valley also contains during the same months a growing population (now estimated at 35,000) of "Winter Texans," retired Anglo Americans principally from the Midwest who migrate to the area to take advantage of its mild November to April climate. Much larger numbers of short-term tourists (estimated at 310,000), stay in the Valley from several days to several weeks.[4] Additionally, an uncounted but probably sizeable "shadow population" consisting of undocumented Mexicans resides in the region.

Mexican Americans comprise numerical minorities in most places in the Southwest. Within the Valley, however, Mexican Americans are the predominate ethnic category by a four to one ratio. Indeed, in no other urbanized region of the U.S. (aside from the up-river city of Laredo, Texas) do Mexican Americans make up such an overwhelmingly large proportion of the population. The 1970 census reports that about 78% of Valley residents are Mexican American, while 22% are Anglo American (white, but not of Mexican descent). Blacks form less than 1% of the total. Evidence also suggests that the region is becoming increasingly Mexican American; between 1960-1970, the Anglo-American population declined 35%, whereas the number of Mexican Americans rose by 10%.

## Real Poverty in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

### Income

The Lower Rio Grande Valley falls at the bottom of U.S. urbanized areas as measured in terms of income. Local family incomes were about half that of the 1970 national median. Furthermore (as shown in Table 2), rather than displaying comparative improvement between 1960-1970, incomes actually declined relative to the national median. Of all SMSAs in the U.S., Cameron

and Hidalgo counties annually rank as the lowest in per capita incomes (see Table 3). In 1959 and 1969, these counties averaged roughly half of the national figure. Statistics just published for 1976 reveal that such proportional distributions have been maintained. However, perhaps more importantly, these figures also show that the income gap between the Valley and the rest of the United States has dramatically increased since 1970. Whereas the absolute per individual income difference between the Valley and the U.S. in 1969 was roughly $1,500, the gap by 1976 was approximately $3,000 in Cameron County and $3,500 in Hidalgo County. Thus it appears that despite the highly touted economic growth that has transpired in the region since 1970, the general economic condition of the overall local population actually has worsened in comparison to that of the U.S. population during this period!

Roughly half of all Valley people are poor. According to the 1970 census, 162,812 local residents, or 48.6% of the total regional population, did not have enough income to raise them above federal poverty guidelines (see Table 4). This figure is over two and one-half times the Texas rate (18.8%), and three and one-half times the incidence of poverty nation-wide (13.7%). Poverty among individuals in the region ranged from a high of 57.2% in rural Willacy County to a low of 46.0% in Cameron County.

Family incomes were abysmally low in 1970; 40.7% of all Valley families, i.e. 29,237 family units, were found to be poor (see Table 4). An additional 10% of all families had earnings of only 25% above the poverty level and thus formed the "near poor" - families which would fall beneath the poverty line when confronted with immediate extenuating financial circumstances. Furthermore, over 35% of all local households might be characterized as living in "extreme poverty" as they had incomes of only three-fourths the poverty threshold. Poverty among families, as that noted above for individuals,

ranged from an extreme of 46.1% in Willacy, 42.0% in Hidalgo, to 38.5% in Cameron. Other poverty-related demographic indicators include: a high dependency ratio (79.3), an uncommonly high birth rate (over 30 annual births per 1,000 population, roughly 175% of the 1970 national rate), and a relatively high ratio of female-headed poverty households (approximately 22%).[5] Attesting to the impact of this high birth rate is the finding that 47% of all poor families contained six or more children. Old age, on the other hand, does not appear as a strong correlate of poverty status as only 7% of the poor were 65 years or older.

Although poverty characterizes the Valley as a social region, it is not an evenly distributed phenomenon across ethnic groups. In terms of total Valley population, Mexican Americans form a numerical majority but they are, for the most part, a social minority - one grossly over-represented within the lowest socioeconomic ranks. Hypothetically, assuming an equal distribution of poverty across ethnic groups, there should be roughly 35,000 Anglo Americans and 128,000 Mexican Americans of poverty status. Despite these expected frequencies we in fact find that about 149,000 Mexican Americans are poor, while only 13,500 Anglo Americans are of equivalent status. This is to say that regional poverty is essentially a Mexican-American phenomenon. Over 90% of the poor are of Mexican ethnicity. Among the 29,000+ local families with poverty level incomes, about 26,000 or 90% of these families are of Mexican ancestry (see Table 5). Over 50% of all Mexican American families are poor; whereas among Anglo-American families only 14% are so categorized.

At the other end of the reported income spectrum, inequalities between ethnic groups diminish but nonetheless remain great. Of those families earning more than $10,000 in 1970, e.g., only 39% were Mexican American.

Higher-income Mexican-American earnings are largely concentrated at intermediate levels; of all families in the $10,000-$15,000 bracket, Mexican Americans made up 44% of the total. Conversely, Mexican-American families accounted for only 30% of all units earning more than $15,000.

If there is one bright note concerning the regional situation, it lies in statistics comparing the 1960 and 1970 poverty populations (see Table 6). These findings suggest that poverty rates declined over the decade among both ethnic groups. In 1960, approximately 70% of all Mexican-American families were defined as poor, while poverty among Anglo-American families was reported to be roughly 24%. Nevertheless, when comparing ethnic poverty ratios for 1960 and 1970, we find that local poverty has become an increasingly Mexican-American phenomenon.

Educational Attainment

Not unexpectedly, given the above poverty figures, deficits in educational attainment characterize the regional Mexican-American population (see Table 7). When compared to Anglo-American residents, these deficits are particularly evident. Median years (1970) completed for Mexican Americans (25 years and over) in Cameron County was 6.0 among males and 5.7 years among females, and in Hidalgo County 5.2 and 4.9 years. High school graduates among this population were 20.9% and 16.1% in Cameron and Hidalgo counties, respectively.

Educational attainment for regional Anglos differs dramatically. Median school years completed in Cameron and Hidalgo counties were comparatively much higher than those among Mexican Americans (+12 median years). Of all Anglos in these counties, 62% completed high school. Even these figures, however, fail to emphasize schooling differences between the two groups. If educational attainment ratios relative to general population proportions are considered, the educational differential becomes even more apparent. As noted,

Mexican Americans outnumber Anglos approximately four to one. This proportion is maintained in educational systems up to the tenth grade. However, by high school graduation, we find six Anglos to every five Mexican Americans. When those who have obtained a college degree are considered, the differences are even more pronounced: six Anglos graduate for every four Mexican Americans.

Although there is some evidence to suggest that educational attainment has improved in the last decade for the local Mexican American population, particularly in the area of higher education, a 1977 survey of defined low-income Brownsville barrios paints a dismal picture.[6] Over 40% of all barrio adults had not completed elementary school. Less than 20% had graduated from high school, and no more than 4% of all adults had attended college.

Enrollment in Valley university and junior college systems has increased considerably since 1970. Open admissions policy, the only requirement being a high school degree or G.E.D., has resulted in young Mexican Americans no longer necessarily being excluded from the opportunities afforded by a college degree. However, high school drop-out rates continue to be high, e.g., the Brownsville school system estimates that 30% of its students do not graduate. Attrition rates at the college level also appear to be extreme. Enrollment figures for the local junior college underline this trend; approximately 2,000 freshmen attended classes in the fall of 1977, while less than half that number enrolled as sophomores. Many entering freshmen, despite high motivation, are ill-prepared for rigorous study - often they are not equipped with the basic reading and study skills necessary to succeed in college. In many cases, also, economic pressures to support parents or their own families are great, and they are generally forced to sacrifice valuable study time for work at minimum wage.

Employment and the Economy

Regional unemployment and subemployment rates reflect the influence of Valley economic growth and development as well as significant shifts in population. Jobs in the agricultural sector, mainstay of the economy since the early 1900's, are actually declining. New industries have not generated enough jobs to keep pace with the growing labor force. Major population shifts to the city from rural areas and small towns, in-migration from Mexico, and a high resident population birth rate all have dramatically increased the potential labor force in the urban areas. This large surplus labor force with few effective unions has kept wages low. Even a considerable upswing in the number of jobs (such as that occurring since 1970) would probably have little effect on regional poverty.

Regional unemployment historically has been about twice that of the state in general, and data show that this gap is widening.[7] The total number of those employed in the labor force continues to grow, the Valley labor force in 1974 was 145,035 and in 1976 it was 159,993; this figure is projected for 1978 to be approximately 170,000.[8] However, unemployment figures have similarly increased. Unemployment in 1976 in Cameron and Hidalgo counties was 8.9% and 10.4%, and by 1977 had increased to rates of 11.1% and 11.3%, respectively.

The subemployment rates, which include unemployment figures, the underemployed, the working poor, discouraged persons, and the sub-employed, or those who work but are receiving food stamps, reveal the total effects of a nascent economy which has historically sought and exploited a labor surplus and in recent years has failed to keep pace with population growth. Government-generated figures, admittedly very conservative estimates, suggest that in 1974 there was a sub-employed

regional labor force in excess of 35,000. This is to say that at the minimum in the 3-county area, approximately 1 out of 4 of all adults who wanted to work either did not work or were working but earning an inadequate wage.

Agriculture historically has been the Valley's primary employer. During the 1960's, an estimated one-third of all employment was related to farming activities, services, and food processing; agriculture accounted for about one-half of all direct and indirect sales and employment.[9] Direct employment in agriculture, however, has dramatically decreased in the past decade due to decreasing amounts of cultivated land, and most importantly, increasing farm mechanization. Seasonal farm employment has dropped 63%. Farm jobs relative to the total labor force presently range from approximately 20% in April, the peak harvest period, to about 12% in August. While year around farm jobs increased by over 35% statewide, such work diminished by 3% locally.

The agricultural work force from 1974 to the present has remained more or less constant; in Cameron County, for instance, there were 8,366 agricultural workers in 1970 and 8,493 in 1977. An estimate of agricultural workers in the Valley in 1975 placed the number at 25,539, or approximately 15% of the total labor force. Further mechanization in the production of crops has drastically reduced the need for agricultural labor and a reduction in crops requiring intensive labor has strengthened this trend in the last decade. Thus, agricultural laborers are becoming increasingly superfluous to regional labor needs.

The loss of jobs in the farm sector has not been compensated by the creation of a sufficient number of non-farming jobs. From 1960 to 1970 non-agricultural employment rose 43% in Texas, but the regional

increase was less than 25%. Furthermore, during this time the Valley suffered extreme losses in manufacturing employment, declining 21% in Hidalgo County and 7% in Cameron County.[10] Manufacturing employment since 1970 has been due to indirect effects of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) to be discussed below. Nonagricultural wages and salary employment (which includes manufacturing employment) increased in Cameron and Hidalgo counties from 97,860 in 1975 to 106,970 in 1976. Projections for 1978 suggest an increase to 111,810. Subemployment rates illustrate that these recent increases fall far short of providing adequate employment.

Semi-skilled and skilled jobs recently created sometimes remain open for an extended period because the labor force is characterized, as suggested, by lack of educational attainment and few marketable skills. Population shifts from the small Valley farms to the metropolitan areas of Brownsville, McAllen-Edinburg, and Harlingen have been spurred by BIP. Migration to the Mexican border and illegal in-migration to the Valley have similarly been affected by BIP. At the same time a high birth rate and a disproportionate number of adults entering the labor force each year has intensified the problem. An incredible 53% of the low-income barrio population in Brownsville is less than 20 years of age. The median age for Cameron and Hidalgo is 21.8 and 20.7 years respectively as compared to 26.4 for the state of Texas.[11] The significance of these trends, in sum, is that more and more people are living in larger urban areas. Brownsville for instance has roughly doubled in population since 1970, and more and more of these people are unemployed or subemployed.

Illustrative of the severe shortage of job opportunities, particularly those providing stable employment, and an adequate living wage is the large

number of farm laborers who leave the Valley during the late spring to work northern crops. Conditions tend to be extremely poor for those who remain in the Valley during this period as there are few summer farm operations that are not mechanized; the younger and better educated farm workers tend to migrate. Approximately 100,000 residents are now engaged in migrant agriculture. This figure accounts for about one-tenth of the U.S. total. However, the migrant labor force will undoubtedly diminish in the future as farmers throughout the U.S. continue to mechanize and reduce crop acreage.[12] In the last five years, in fact, many migrants have found only highly sporadic employment; reports have filtered back to Texas during the wintertime of families running out of money and being stranded in rural Midwestern communities. Then, too, an undetermined amount of families, hoping to find more secure and better paying jobs, continue to settle out of the migrant stream into areas removed from the Valley.

Despite these economic patterns, the Valley recently has witnessed a rather dramatic upturn in industrial activity. In the Brownsville area alone, for example over 7,000 industrial jobs have been created since 1970. Similar development has transpired in the McAllen and Harlingen areas. While improvements in Port of Brownsville facilities since 1950 have attracted several heavy manufacturing concerns, most of the growth in Brownsville, McAllen, and Harlingen can be attributed to the relocation of light industry, mainly electronics and clothing assembly plants. Two programs, originated in the mid-1960's, have dovetailed to prompt this growth, the Mexican-sponsored Border Industrialization Program (BIP) and the federal Economic Development District. Created by the Mexican

government supposedly to relieve mass unemployment along the northern frontier following the termination of the Bracero Program, BIP provides lucrative inducements for the relocation of U.S. corporations in Mexican border cities by the combination of extremely low wage-scales and various other incentives.[13] Forty-one American firms (primarily electronics corporations), now employing approximately 15,000 people, have been drawn to Matamoros alone to take advantage of this program. A number of these companies have established "twin plant" operations, i.e., a large assembly plant on the Mexico side, and a much smaller plant on the northern side of the river to add finishing touches to products. Other firms, originally intending to set-up operations in Mexico, have relocated on the U.S. side. Altogether there are now about twenty new electronics and clothing plants (some twin, some single) in Brownsville. The EDA has played an important participating role by providing loans and grants for the development of industrial parks and building construction.

Do such measures constitute viable strategies, however, in terms of reducing poverty and meeting long-range developmental goals? The response of the Valley business community is an almost unequivocal "yes". Greater employment in Mexico, it is reasoned, not only reduces the amount of illegal immigration but also means more Mexican spending in the U.S., which in turn creates more Valley employment opportunities. Supposedly, for every three new jobs in Mexico, one is created on the U.S. side. Furthermore, the argument runs, BIP has directly stimulated local employment by "twin plant" locations, and indirectly through single plant locations on the U.S. side. Concomitantly, skill levels are presumably raised by industrial training along both sides of the border, thus providing a labor force

which in turn hopefully will serve to attract heavier manufacturing concerns in the future. To the criticism (primarily from U.S. labor unions) that BIP has helped to take jobs away from Americans, BIP supporters respond that American labor has priced itself out of the world market, and these relocations merely represent an intermediate stop in an inevitable process before more labor intensive jobs are exported overseas.

Various arguments have been posed which seriously challenge the assumed efficacy of the BIP strategy relative to facilitating local development.[14] For one, the new border industries, or maquiladoras, have come to the region for a single purpose -- the relatively unrestricted exploitation of a large and inexpensive labor force. Given unfavorable economic and political conditions, such as the rise in Mexican labor militancy along the border during the early 1970's, maquiladoras are highly susceptible to flight to places offering less hampered operations. Numerous new industries did flee in fact during this period to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Haiti, etc. Many others intending to leave decided to stay in light of the comparative advantages brought by the 1976 peso devaluations. Thus, it is argued, maquiladoras (often likened to "runaway sweatshops") offer little promise for stable and long-term development prospects on either side of the border.[15] [It shoult be pointed out though that the labor strife in Matamoros has not been problematic. Indeed, the local head of the CTM (the union controlling all Matamoros maquiladora laborers) has been highly sympathetic and cooperative with U.S. corporations. His status, as judged by recent events in that city, however, appears to have grown tenuous, and this in turn may have great influence over the future direction of local labor.] Critics charge, in addition, that scant evidence exists that maquiladoras have markedly upgraded skills; while assembly work is highly exacting, it is

extremely tedious, can be learned relatively quickly, and has little transfer value to other types of industry. Technical jobs are said to be primarily filled by recruits trained elsewhere in the U.S. or Mexico. Claims of industrial socialization to regimentation and precision probably have more validity. Observations from relocated asbestos plants in Juarez and Aqua Prieta indicate that some plants may relocate to specifically avoid federal safety and health laws.[16] Perhaps the most damning indictment of BIP in terms of its consequences for the Valley, however, lies in the argument that maquiladoras, in effect, have served as magnets in drawing a large Mexican hinterland population to the border region. Nor have they dealt with the original problem of Bracero unemployment as 80-90% of maquiladora employees are women. The population of border cities has indeed skyrocketed in recent years. Estimates suggest that only about 3% of the newcomers find jobs in the new industries.[17] It is reasoned that movements of such magnitude can only work to exacerbate the already extreme pressures on Mexican and U.S. border communities.

The Valley's primary natural resource, in addition to its fertile soil and mild winter climate, has been and continues to be its large, cheap labor supply. It was this labor force that, with northern dollars, originally provided the muscle to clear away the brush for farming. It was this same labor force that worked the crops and also built irrigation canals, railroads, and later highways. But with a few exceptions, no real industrial development has occurred which did not take exclusive advantage of an inexhaustible labor supply that would work for little. Production and manufacturing of finished goods remains slight. Although the Valley is a major producer of citrus, green vegetables, seafood, cattle, cotton, and, more

recently, sorghum and sugar; processing plants remain few. Along with its limited mineral resources, Valley agricultural goods are shipped north, processed and packaged, then redistributed back to the Valley at high prices. Public utilities, in addition to food prices, are paradoxically among the highest in the state. Furthermore, BIP factories pay unskilled workers minimum wages to produce clothing, electrical parts, and other goods which are sent north for eventual return to the Valley at correspondingly high prices. The consumer and worker benefit little from this economic merry-go-round; prices are very high and the minimum wage has become for many the maximum wage.

Other factors related to the retardation of industrial development (including distance from consumer markets, transportation costs and rate differentials, water supply problems, and the necessity of importing raw materials to the region) although important, do not serve to adequately explain the persistence of regional poverty and the historical absence of economic diversification. In conclusion, we are forced to speculate that the Valley's virtually inexhaustible and largely unskilled labor force, once its primary natural asset, is now its primary liability in terms of stable economic development as we approach the 21st century.

## Housing

Housing resources for Mexican Americans reflect poverty conditions. Approximately twenty percent of all housing units in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties are substandard. Moreover, some 20,000 families, estimated at 92,000 people, live in these substandard units throughout the Valley. The percentage of substandard housing for Valley cities ranges between 16.6% in Edinburg to 45.8% in Elsa. While substandard housing remains a crucial problem, the availability of standard housing is also critical. It is

estimated that there is a standard housing deficit of 17,859 units, or fully 18.4% of the current number of standard housing units.[18]

Generally reflecting the worst housing and other quality-of-life conditions are the sixty-plus unincorporated settlements that are locally referred to as colonias. Colonias, almost exclusively populated by Mexicans and Mexican Americans, contain over 35,000 residents and range in size from several households to several hundred families. Most were created in the 1950's during a period of expanded Mexican immigration. However, a few trace their founding back to the Spanish colonial era prior to the 19th century. While many are rurally isolated, others are located in close proximity to cities -- and in some cases are partially encapsulated by city bounds.

Despite such variations in size, age, and location, the colonias share one attribute; as the regional development council suggests, they are populated by "the poorest of the poor." A 1976 survey of colonias in Cameron and Hidalgo counties revealed the following profile: the average household contained 5.5 persons; two-thirds of all families reported 1975 incomes of less than $4,000; 44% of household heads were employed as farm laborers; of those 16 years and older, average time employed was seven months; and among those twenty-five years and older, 28% had received no formal education, school years completed averaged 4.8, and less than 7% had obtained high school degrees.[19]

Even in comparison to Valley standards, conditions within the colonias are starkly primitive. Housing tends to be makeshift, unsound during weather extremes, and usually very crowded. Colonia residents generally do without the services and amenities that city dwellers take for granted. Parks, sidewalks, and paved and lighted streets are nonexistent. Seldom do colonias have sewage systems or adequate drainage; often homes are left standing in

several feet of water after heavy rainfall. Potable water is a serious and widespread problem. A few families draw directly from the brackish and polluted waters of irrigation canals or the Rio Grande. Most others carry it in from city sources or rely on water from frequently contaminated wells. Needless to say, such conditions pose obvious threats to soundphysical and mental health.

Economic necessity is, of course, the primary reason people settle in the colonias. Given the absence of services and utilities, lots are cheap and taxes are minimal. Houses can be obtained at comparatively low cost; dwellings are available that would be condemned if located within the city. Additionally, houses need not be built to regulatory specification, and hence, are much less costly to construct. For some, colonia residence allows the time, which would not be possible in the city, to consolidate economic gains and make bit by bit housing and utility improvements. Still for others, the colonia may serve as a relatively inexpensive place to live until developing skills and opportunities provide the bases to move elsewhere. For most, however, the colonia with all of its attendant problems becomes a permanent condition of life.

Health

The health status of Mexican Americans also reflects the extreme conditions of regional poverty. In four of the five indicators of health status for which data exist; disease specific death rate, infant mortality, infectious disease rates, medical histories, and nutritional status, Valley Mexican Americans differ dramatically from state and national figures. With regard to disease-specific death rates, "...the death rates from infectious and parasitic diseases for the combined counties were nearly twice that of Texas whites, and for dysentery and amebiasis, twice that of whites and

nearly four times that of Blacks."[20] Death rates for "ill-defined causes" were three times that of Texas whites and in Cameron County nearly twice that of Texas blacks.[21]

The available infant mortality data are misleading and probably incorrect. Valley infant mortality rates, if the evidence is to be believed, are considerably lower than those for Texas whites and blacks. Undoubtedly there are a number of infant deaths which go unreported by parteras (midwives) whom in Brownsville deliver about 85% of all births.[22] Lack of prenatal care and examinations must effect the neonatal and postnatal mortality rates. Then, too, many Mexican mothers deliver their babies in the Valley only to return soon after to Mexican border-towns, thereby inflating the number of births with no possible follow-up for infant health status. Teller and Clyburn, referring to state vital statistics, speculate that, "The relatively low Spanish-surname infant mortality rates along the border seem to be related both to an artificial inflation of the denominator (live births) and an under-representation of the numerator (deaths)."[23]

Medical histories conducted in the Valley in 1973-1974 of eligible welfare clients rated the region consistently high in incidences of heart, lung, scalp and musculo-skeletal disabilities.[24] Both the Texas Nutrition Survey[25] and the 1970 Field Foundation medical survey of Hidalgo County farm workers[26] cited severe health and nutritional problems. According to one investigating physician, "High blood pressure, diabetes, urinary tract infections, anemia, tuberculosis, gall bladder and intestinal disorders, eye and skin disease were frequent findings among the adults. Almost without exception, intestinal parasites were found in the stool specimens examined. Most of the children had chronic skin infections. Chronically infected draining ears with resulting partial deafness occurred in an amazing number of the

smaller children. We saw rickets, a disorder thought to be nearly abolished in this country, and every form of vitamin deficiency known to us that could be identified by clinical examination..."[27]

Health professionals and general health services remain grossly inadequate for many in the Valley. Cameron County has approximately 80% of the patient care physicians per 1,000 as does the state of Texas, it has only 25% of the dentists, 70% of the pharmacists, and 50% of the active physical therapists. Hidalgo and Willacy counties possess even more dismal figures.[28] In addition, while McAllen and Harlingen have adequate hospital facilities, Brownsville had, as recently as 1970, only one hospital with 162 beds for a population of well over 50,000. Since 1970 it has added one small private facility. Many of the smaller Valley towns are in a similar position not to mention the significant rural population in need of health services.[29] The recent creation of an innovative federally sponsored clinic, however, in Willacy and northern Cameron counties reportedly has made important strides in filling the health care void of the poor in that area.

Mental health facilities are extremely limited. Alcohol, drug abuse, and psychiatric services are available in only Edinburg and Harlingen and on a limited scale. While a growing number of professional psychiatrists and psychologists appear to be moving to the area, Brownsville, for example, to date has only one board-certified psychiatrist.

Even these limited health services overstate the Valley health care system for differential health care is pervasive. In part, such is the case because the cost of adequate health care is prohibitive to the poor; while the poor would prefer private physicians to public health clinics, and health clinics to local folk healers (curanderos), the cost of health services limits their real choices and alternatives.[30] In addition, few health professionals

have meant little price competition, and thus even moreso, the consumer who is poor seeks professionals only in a crisis situation. Observation leads us additionally to believe that the comparatively less expensive doctors and clinics in Matamoros frequently are used as an alternative source of health care. Finally, health status of poor Mexican Americans is greatly affected by the conflicting vested interests of various groups including the medical community, local politicians, health bureaucrats, and grass roots community groups. Struggles over control of medical facilities have, in many cases, precluded providing adequate health care to the poor.

## Regulated Poverty: A Historical Overview of Regional Ethnic Stratification

Anglo Americans have constituted the elite of the Valley political econony since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848; Mexicans and Mexican Americans essentially have served as a massive and inexpensive labor supply and, even more importantly, labor reserve. Poverty, as previously noted, remains differentially distributed across ethnic groups; poverty is primarily a status befalling Mexican Americans. In this section outlining some of the historical antecedents leading to the exclusion of the majority of Mexican Americans from the American mainstream, we provide limited documentation to support the assertion that such exclusion to some extent reflects ethnically regulated poverty.

### Initial Contact: The Period of Anglo Conquest

Extreme conflict and violence characterized much of the early contact between Anglos and Mexicans. Real and perceived differences and imperial designs can be traced to the Spanish and English whose ethnocentric political systems soon conflicted in the New World.[31] The Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819 which in effect gave Florida to the United States in lieu of its giving up

any claims to Texas, provided only temporary relief to the Mexican government which in the following year ended Spanish colonial domination. Only four years later Stephen F. Austin's settlers arrived in then northeastern Mexico to assume the Spanish land grant of Austin's father. The new settlers assured the Mexican government of their economic wealth, and religious faith in the Church, two prerequisites demanded of colonizing immigrants. Notwithstanding such assurances, these settlers and others (including a substantial number of Spanish-surname families) revolted from Mexico and in 1836 established the Republic of Texas. The Valley, it should be pointed out, did not experience Anglo-American settlement either before the revolt or after it until the late 1840's primarily due to the dispute between Texas (later the U.S.) and Mexico over territorial rights. Upon the independence of Texas from Mexico, a peace treaty had not been negotiated, and thus, legal boundaries between the two countries were not affixed. Texas claimed the land down to the Rio Grande, whereas Mexico asserted its boundary extended to the Nueces River (whose mouth is at present-day Corpus Christi). Consequently, the territory between the Rio Grande and the Nueces became a sort of "no man's land" as guerilla warfare raged within its confines during the life of the Texas Republic.[32] With U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845, the stage was then set for the extension of Anglo-American control to South Texas and the Valley.

In 1846, U.S. General Zachary Taylor installed a fort on the Matamoros commons to the north of the Rio Grande, and began patrolling the area. The Mexican-American War soon followed, and Fort Brown served as the beach-head for further invasions of Mexico south of the river. Although the Lower Rio Grande Valley remained unsettled and largely uninhabitable its importance lay for some time in international strategies between emerging nations.

Zachary Taylor's Brownsville by the 1850's was already composed of a mercantile class of English, French, and American businessmen supplying the fort with goods and trade as well as a small number of Anglo ranchers who had begun absorbing the lands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans after the war and despite the 1848 treaty. The case of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and his Cortinistas is indicative of the hatred and distrust among Anglos, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans due to land ownership disputes.[33] Anglos in Brownsville divided the Mexicans into two political factions, the Reds and the Blues, selected the leadership of each political party, then held so-called elections. The well-off business elite contrasted sharply with the 2,000 destitute Mexicans. In this free-wheeling border town, however, money could prevail over ethnicity and class origins. While intermarriage between races solidified the few elite families, individual upward mobility among Mexican Americans was at least possible although highly exceptional. Sizeable fortunes were made during this time by those Anglos already possessing considerable wealth.

Mexican and American economic interdependence was founded on the benefits of international trade and the availability of a large and cheap labor force. Brownsville during the years of the Civil War was a booming city of 25,000 and for some time the only port in the Confederacy not blockaded by the Union. Matamoros similarly boomed to 40,000 as the twin river cities served as the primary port for exporting Texas cotton and other agriculture products and importing the staples of a war economy. The large cattle ranches present on both sides of the Rio Grande commonly exchanged stock with the help of bandits and rustlers. Mexicans and Mexican Americans became the prototypical cowboys; they worked hard and were paid little.

Disputes between Mexican land grantees and Anglo ranchers continued,

however, as did a poor Mexican-United States border relationship exemplified by Pershing's eventual invasion of northern Mexico in 1916 in retaliation for the raids of Pancho Villa.[34] Although the Valley, prior to 1900, was sparsely populated by either Anglos or Mexicans, these events with their depredations and atrocities were not only significant in that they established Anglo-American hegemony, but also because they created a bitter legacy of antagonism and distrust--one which in many ways remains to this day to color interethnic relations.

The famous Plan of San Diego named for one of the supposed signers who had worked and lived in San Diego, Texas, reflects the intensity of racial conflict along the border.[35] The Plan described in some detail how Mexicans and Mexican Americans would rise in unison against their common Anglo oppressors and eventually turn all of the southwestern United States to the Negroes as a buffer between the U.S. and Mexico. Hostages were to be taken, ransomed, and then shot, and Indians were to be incited to join in the revolt. Though its origins were highly suspect (there was little doubt at the time that it was produced by the German or Mexican secret police to foment discontent and confusion) the Plan, nevertheless, did not fail to further stimulate racial hostilities. Anglos used the Plan and subsequent raids as a justification for a series of further atrocities in which many Mexican and Mexican Americans were innocent victims.

Mexican bandits and soldiers crossed the river to loot, burn, and murder; the collapsing Mexican government had lost control over its northern frontier. As hostilities continued to grow, many Mexican Americans simply left the area, finding themselves too often the victims of both racial and national hatreds. Texas Rangers and others failed to distinguish between Mexican Americans, who were in fact U.S. citizens and who, in many instances,

predated the Anglo newcomers, and Mexicans, preferring to see both as a common enemy. Mexicans, on the other hand, did not necessarily view Mexican Americans as their national brothers but often as rich Americans and potential victims. Caught in between, many Mexican Americans chose to return to Mexico, while others migrated further north to escape oppression.

Thus, the Texas Rangers played a prominent role from 1916 to 1919 in what amounted to a racial war against Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Although their presence was not essential in South Texas, the army and local law enforcement were more than enough to handle any situation, the Rangers summarily executed without trial hundreds of suspected criminals. Based on findings by a full state legislative investigation initiated in 1919 by the Brownsville state representative, J. T. Canales, the Rangers were abolished as the official state police force of Texas and their numbers reduced to less than one hundred. While the Rangers clearly were among an extreme in their actions, they did embody the worst fears and hatreds of many Anglos in South Texas. Atrocities on both sides of the Rio Grande continued on into the 1920's.

Period of Expanded Anglo and Mexican Settlement: From Ranching to Farming

Large-scale Mexican immigration to the region was coterminous to the development of intensive agriculture. "The most enterprising businessmen... joined together, built a railroad into South Texas, formed real estate and irrigation companies, sliced their ranches into farm tracts, and boomed towns on their property."[36] Among towns which were developed after railroad construction in 1904, all of which began as farming centers, were Harlingen, McAllen, Edinburg, San Benito, Olmito, Mercedes, and Donna. "Home-seekers" from the north bought the land after first being enticed by attractive brochures and free visits sponsored by land developers; many of these land

developers soon became the nucleus in structuring the local banking and financial system. Mexicans served as the labor force for the agricultural infrastructure--irrigation canals, railroad lines and cleared lands which made agricultural development possible. From the beginning the availability of a cheap source of potential farm labor was advertised by land developers as a major attraction to farmers. Initial capital to develop the land could be offset by minimal investment in machinery or farm labor.[37]

Mexican immigration to the Valley was stimulated by the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1917 and the effects of the revolution on the maintenance of day-to-day life patterns in Northern Mexico were felt well into the 1920's. The northern region of Mexico figured prominently in the revolution and the regional character of self-sufficiency undoubtedly led citizens to immigrate to a land which promised great rewards for hard work.[38] The new labor contracting farmers, indeed, promulgated such myths of a promised land in their constant search for a seasonal supply of cheap labor.

Class stratification as in Brownsville, which in its two class system of rich and poor did provide for limited Mexican-American mobility, was not replicated in the countryside when the Valley's economy shifted from ranching to the production of cotton and vegetables in the early 1900's and citrus in the 1920's. This agriculture was a peculiarly Anglo enterprise. The presence of Mexicans was deemed necessary only because of growers' labor requirements. The absence of any Mexican or Mexican-American middle class to provide for an easier cultural transition as well as to possibly prevent wage exploitation made racial domination particularly blatant in these farming communities. Lacking capital, having little if any formal education, and also with a different language and cultural background, the immigrants soon formed an easily exploited rural proletariat. An Anglo laboring class never

developed, further rendering ethnic stratification as an integral feature of Valley society. As one observer in the late 1920's noted, "The hand labor... is performed by Mexicans, and among the chief reasons for the absence of white labor are the character of the work and the low remuneration. White labor was not physically displaced here, for the farm labor supply was furnished by Mexicans from the beginning. Wages have been adjusted to standards of living of Mexicans, and rates attractive to Americans have never prevailed."[39] Likewise, neither did a Mexican-American urban proletariat soon emerge; farming towns remained very small, the population rural, and few other industries were to appear for some time. The social structure of the small towns resembled, in many ways, a system of ethnic caste rather than class.

Economic powerlessness facilitated political subjugation. Differing conceptions of politics and political participation interacted in varying degrees with fears of physical coercion, economic dependence and vulnerability, and the constraints posed by various electoral mechanisms, such as the poll tax, to produce a constituency having little influence on local and regional decision-making processes.[40] Farmers attempted to maintain a more maleable supply of labor by subjugating immigrants in the 1920's and 1930's to a series of state laws designed to limit their very mobility (immigrants were discouraged from having cars) and to provide a large but temporary labor force that was encouraged to return annually to Mexico.[41] At the same time many immigrants were lured further and further north by the attraction of higher wages and a better life. At a national level, restrictive legislation against European immigration made Mexican labor increasingly attractive to northern industry.

Outright fraud coupled with the semi-feudal patron system were integral to Valley politics as small groups of political bosses dominated city and

county affairs until around World War Two much the same as in the Brownsville of the 1850's and 1860's.[42] While farm laborers were the first to realize their predicament, various attempts at unionization in the 1930's met with failure; farmers could break any strike with additional labor imported from other Texas cities.[43] No real Mexican American middle class developed in the small agricultural towns until after World War Two and even then it possessed few class interests in its struggle over few scarce resources. A Mexican-American underclass came to populate the same barrios lived in by Mexicans in Brownsville, but in the non-border farming towns no urban proletariat evolved. Brownsville served then (and now) both as a "receptacle" and a "springboard" for Mexican immigrants.[44]

Largely defined by Anglos as foreigners, racially and culturally inferior, and functionally skilled for nothing more important than farm work or other nonskilled occupations, Mexican Americans were continually forced to contend with a system in which they had few civil rights. Evidence of Anglo-American ethnocentrism, prejudice, and discrimination has been particularly acute and visible in Valley school systems. Until the past decade most schools were segregated on a de facto basis. Institutions tended to be at best paternalistic, and often oriented towards cultural genocide through attempted anglicization and the concomitant derogation of all things Mexican. School children were punished for speaking Spanish on school premises and Mexican holidays and festivals were ignored.[45] Likewise, the schools seldomly transmitted language skills effectively, and were prone to using inappropriate and often damaging tests and other techniques.[46] Teachers were paid little even by Texas standards and often lacked minimal qualifications. Anglo teachers predominated although numerically in the minority. However, Mexican Americans since World War Two have gained gradual

access to public school teaching and administrative ranks and this has contributed consequently to a nascent Mexican-American middle class.

Discrimination in other areas of employment, as well as in housing and in the courts has also denied several generations of Mexican Americans the right to equal social participation, and thus has played a significant role in structuring their presently low status. Literacy requirements by the courts meant in the Valley that Mexican Americans were often denied a trial by peers. Restricted housing has often resulted in permanent substandard structures passed on from one generation to the next with little improvement. Colonias have been one functional alternative for the poor.

While it might be postulated that the problems confronting the poor are primarily the direct consequences of racism, such a position would be unfair and distorted. Today, in most circles, ethnic discrimination has been attenuated to a large degree. While racism cannot be ignored, the poor continue to be trapped by a number of other conditions. Some, particularly the more recent immigrants, are shackled by the inability to speak English, and thus, are limited to employment in those jobs deep in the secondary labor sector. Yet, the incentive to learn English is undermined to a great extent since most of the Valley population speaks Spanish. Better paying and more secure jobs, of course, are screened by educational requirements, usually at the minimum high school graduation. It has been observed that many migrant youth, whose immediate family needs dictate that everyone must work, frequently drop out early in the education process. Of even greater import are the as yet uncounted thousands of Mexican-American youth who, although not migrants, nevertheless fall behind and eventually drop out often before reaching high school. While many more Mexican-American youth are attending local colleges and post-secondary vocational schools than ever

before, the higher education system suffers from similar problems as the public schools. This new generation of locally educated Mexican Americans will supplement the growing Mexican-American middle class who has in the past sent their offspring to colleges outside of the Valley.

Cultural traits have also been accused of limiting mobility prospects. Various writers have alleged that Mexican-American achievement primarily has been hindered by the persistence of a traditional peasant-type set of cultural values.[47] Accordingly, the Mexican-American poor are said to be fatalistic, unable to defer immediate gratification, overly personalistic and emotional, highly familistic, suspicious of everyone beyond the family, etc. To what extent these traits actually exist and furthermore, actually preclude mobility, are empirical questions -- of which neither have been intensively researched as of yet.[48] Rather than "blaming the victim," however, it would seem more accurate to view such traits (if they do markedly exist) as rational forms of adaptation to poverty conditions -- behaviors which would change under different economic circumstances.[49] Even more, it is ironic that a large proportion of such "fatalistic" and "complacent" people are annually involved in one of the most risk-filled and hazardous economic pursuits available -- migrant farm work.

Since World War Two with the lessening of restrictive institutional barriers, increased educational attainment, and the gradual diversification of the regional economy, a Mexican-American middle class albeit proportionately small has developed in the agricultural communities. It is essentially composed of small businessmen, state, federal, and city agency functionaries, school teachers and administrators, and the more highly paid skilled workers. Circumscribed on the one hand by disproportionately large Mexican-American lower and under classes and on the other by an economic

elite penetrated by few Mexican Americans, however, its political interests remain unattended. As a class it is wary of losing its hard-earned economic gains and community prestige. Relative to the poor, its stance is predominantly reflected in an orientation based on encouraging individual rather than group mobility strategies - one underlined by the assumption that if they themselves could achieve economic security through hard work and sacrifice so should many of the poor if only given sufficient motivation. In light of this perspective and also persistent status insecurities, few members of the nascent middle class have become involved in local poverty issues of a social action nature, and in general, most can be said to support the status quo.

Other Social Mobility Impediments: The Peculiar Nature of the Regional Economy

After viewing these factors, one might be prompted to say that other groups have encountered similar obstacles upon settling in the U.S. Did not the Italians and Poles, for example, begin at the bottom of the economic structure of the North? Like Mexican immigrants, they were non-English speaking and also faced exclusion and discrimination, although to a lesser extent, from the dominant society. Yet, were they not able to "make it" over the course of several decades?

The Mexican-American experience in the Lower Rio Grande Valley as in most of South Texas, however, has been qualitatively different from that of other groups in at least three crucial respects. First, the other groups entered a rapidly expanding urban-industrial economy. Although they frequently started out at the bottom, they could over time work themselves up the job hierarchy. Even at the lowest rungs of the industrial system, wages tended to be sufficient for basic subsistence. Secondly, while job

competition was keen, they could develop a semblance of security by the skilled nature of their work, and later, through unionization. The Valley, on the other hand, has been a non-industrialized region. The local labor force and particularly the working poor have been and still are strongly dependent on agriculture and farm related employment. Such work tends to be exceptionally low in remuneration and highly unstable. Job ladders, characteristic of manufacturing industries and allowing for promotion and advancement, generally are absent. Furthermore, the special skills and efforts of workers have little bearing on their value to employers as workers are commonly paid on a piece-rate basis.

These conditions, somewhat characteristic of labor-intensive agriculture throughout the U.S., are exacerbated by the fact that Valley employers always have had access to a large labor supply reserve. Up until the mid-1950's, growers minimized labor costs by exploiting a labor force jointly composed of Mexican Americans and undocumented Mexicans, "wetbacks." The border was virtually open to all who wanted to cross; and there was little or no concern as to the legal status of workers -- Mexican Americans and "wetbacks" were treated alike. Wages and conditions of work were unilaterally fixed at the beginning of the harvest season by growers' associations. Laborers enjoyed the option of accepting the wage-rate or not working. Many migrated north to become permanent residents. Needless to say, wages during this period remained relatively static and tended to be either at or below subsistence levels.

"Operation Wetback," launched by the INS in 1954 in reaction to the recession and rise in national unemployment following the Korean War, had great immediate impact on the local farm labor scene. Indeed, it is estimated that a force of approximately 70,000 undocumented workers left the

Valley during the first two weeks of local INS operations.[50] The cotton harvest then underway was not jeopardized, however, as Department of Labor machinery and pressure from the farming lobby was immediately activated to "dry out" and reconstitute "wetbacks" as braceros. Thus, the Bracero Program bolstered and administered the greater part of the Valley labor force in behalf of growers for almost a decade. While "wetbacks" were still preferred by growers over braceros as various regulations guided the use of the latter, or at least did in theory, braceros were deemed superior to sole reliance on a domestic and sharply reduced "wetback" work force. Nonetheless, by the early 1960's, braceros were largely phased out in the Valley; DOL-imposed wage-rate increases, the stricter enforcement of housing codes, and the comparative inflexibility of bracero utilization prompted farmers to turn to alternative sources.[51] Cotton growers chose mechanical harvesters. Growers of crops that remained labor intensive came to rely, and do so to the present, on a mixed labor supply consisting of Mexican Americans, "wetbacks," and in addition, Mexican commuters or "greencarders."

The effects of a large surplus labor force are evident in other local industries as well. Shrimp boat crews at Port Isabel and the Port of Brownsville struck in 1959 and again in 1975 for better wages, job security, and a few other minimal compensations. On both occasions strike-breakers put an end to labor negotiations, first in 1959 after only three weeks, and again in 1975 after some five months. Striking steel workers employed at the largest industry at the Brownsville shipyards were given a similar option in 1977: return to work or replacements would be found. Indeed, within three weeks all of the strikers' jobs had been filled by men willing to work at current wages and job conditions.

In concluding this section, we must admit that Valley history, of

course, in no way predetermines the future of the region. Yet this brief historical discussion does reveal a number of recurring themes which are of importance to any contemporary analysis. Relations between Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Anglo Americans were founded on violence and hatred, and remain divided by racism compounded by nationalism. An agriculturally based economy premised on a surplus of cheap labor traditionally has been ruled by an Anglo elite. Differential treatment in Valley social institutions has characterized interethnic relations. A Mexican-American middle class was slow to materialize in a society which provided for limited class mobility except through out-migration. In sum, we propose that many of the roots of present-day real poverty are the evolutionary consequences of a social system historically structured on the basis of ethnic domination.

## The Lower Rio Grande Valley as a "Staging Area"

This section represents an attempt to place the question of regional poverty within a more inclusive context. Compared with the rest of the United States, a number of unique conditions prevail along the border. These conditions render the analysis of poverty less amenable to purely economic definitions which would have greater descriptive relevance to poverty populations in non-border regions of the U.S. Therefore, we propose that a more complete picture of local poverty dynamics may be approached if the Lower Rio Grande Valley is conceptualized as a spatial zone of significant demographic, socioeconomic, and social psychological transition. Consideration of several major patterns of population movement bears greatest analytical value in this regard. To the extent that causal linkages between migratory flows appear to be empirically implicit and that the potential exists for successive participation in one migratory pattern to another over historical time, the region will be referred to as a "staging area."

Short of the rather unlikely event of a massive infusion of direct transfer payments to the poor, two broad and interrelated factors at this time preclude the amelioration of objective poverty within the region. The first problem relates to the particular nature of the local economy wherein unemployment and underemployment are rampant, and even full-time employment does not portend non-poverty status. As previously noted, the local economy is unique in its magnitude of providing low-wage, non-unionized, and often seasonal jobs, and in capitalizing on a minimally skilled and educated labor force. Recognition of the Valley as a staging area, on the other hand, emphasizes that the persistence of widespread poverty cannot be unequivocally viewed as a singular and locally generated phenomenon. While the regional economy does both exploit and stimulate selective migratory flows, the prevalence of low incomes also must be evaluated as a consequence of locational interface between two nations in uneven stages of economic development. The Valley, like most other regions along the U.S.-Mexico border, offers its greatest population segment a mode of material existence located somewhere toward the mid-point on a lengthy continuum. This continuum is structured at one pole by an affluent nation within which much of its labor supply is over-priced according to competitive world standards, and at the other pole by a nation in which a great share of its people endure severe destitution and are drastically in need of work.

An outline of the staging area function of the Valley should include at the minimum its proximity to a comparatively poor nation, the location of an area undergoing rapid economic development - yet even more pronounced population growth - immediately across the international boundary, and the fact that the region serves as an important gateway entry and environment for those in search of work. However, the Valley is not only a receiving

area. Out-migration also is of major significance as the region has possessed a highly limited amount of job opportunities, particularly those types providing stable employment and adequate pay by U.S. standards. An exceptionally high local birth rate eventuating by itself in a large labor surplus, coupled with on-going migration from Mexico, have necessitated large-scale migration to the north. For many, seasonal involvement in migrant agriculture has served as a functional alternative to permanent relocation.

Five predominate patterns are overviewed in this analysis. Viewing the region as functionally integrated with northern Tamaulipas[52] and given the relevance of the "springboard" function of Mexican border cities,[53] the first pattern entails population movement from the interior to the northern frontier. The second movement relates to employment on the United States side without U.S. residence; this includes several types of commuter workers. The third movement involves residential relocation from the Mexican to the U.S. side. Seasonal migration out of the Valley to the north constitutes a fourth and extremely important pattern. Finally, completing the mobility patterns to be discussed is that of out-migration from the region with the establishment of residence elsewhere in the state or nation.

## Migration and Urban Growth in the Northern Tamaulipas Region

The Mexican economy has undergone rapid industrial growth in the last two decades. Such expansion, nevertheless, has not kept pace in providing sufficient employment opportunities either for those attempting to enter the labor market (at over 3% a year, Mexico has the highest population growth rate in the Western Hemisphere) or for those being displaced from an agrarian sector in process of technical and organizational revolution. To wit, the critical factors behind widespread Mexican migration are underemployment and unemployment. Between 1950-1960, for example, the average

number of days worked per year among farm workers decreased from 194 to 100.[54] The Mexican population despite significant industrial and urban growth remains to a great extent rural. Migration within Mexico thus has been primarily to areas of real and/or perceived economic opportunity, namely Mexico City and the northern frontier cities.

Recent growth in Mexican bordertowns has been explosive; between 1950-1970, population along the frontier increased by 158%. While the Valley population underwent a slight increase (13%) during that period, northern Tamaulipas reflected expansive growth with a high rate of in-migration from the Mexican interior. The municipios of Matamoros and Reynosa grew by 95% and 117%, respectively; and by 1970, 21% of the Matamoros population and 31% of the Reynosa population had originated from a state other than Tamaulipas.[55] Growth was particularly extreme, moreover, in the cities themselves (representing intra-municipio urbanization and natural increase as well as in-migration) as Matamoros increased from approximately 46,000 to 139,000 (+200%), while Reynosa tripled, growing from 34,000 to 137,000. Such trends remain unabated up to the present as current population estimates signify that since 1970 the two cities have increased by 67% (Matamoros, 90%; Reynosa, 43%).

Several events clearly stand out in regard to stimulating these demographic changes. First, a series of infrastructural improvements (irrigation systems, highways, and other public works) undertaken in the late 1940's brought in thousands of workers - many of whom remained after completion of construction. In turn, such improvements gave rise to large-scale cotton production and the development of support and processing industries, thereby requiring larger labor inputs and transforming the regional economy from ranching and subsistence farming into a major export base for

agricultural products. Exploitation of energy resources has also been important; the discovery and tapping of natural gas reserves in the Reynosa district has by itself created over 6,000 jobs with PEMEX in that city since the 1950's. Settlement in the region was further stimulated through the Bracero Program; whereupon an undetermined but probably significant amount of braceros chose to settle along the border at the termination of the program in the mid-1960's. Indeed, justified by government and commerce as a response to high rates of unemployment (estimated at 40%) in the border cities attributed to the relocation of braceros, industrial manufacturing has evolved under the auspices of the Border Industrialization Program (see pages 12-17). Placement of the highly labor intensive operations of these U.S. multi-national corporations along the northern frontier, as already noted merely represents the latest stage of exploiting the labor of an ever growing and mobile reservoir of people desperately in search of work. Although in no way resolving the original bracero problem (80%-90% of those employed in these new industries are young females), the recent proliferation of maquiladoras has had of course great impact in creating jobs and raising wages. At present approximately one-half of manufacturing employment in northern Tamaulipas is with maquiladoras at a wage rate of about one-third the U.S. minimum.[56] More importantly, however, it appears that the expectations for employment generated by the location of these plants has provoked even higher rates of migration from the interior during the 1970's, and only a miniscule portion of these migrants are able to obtain maquiladora employment.[57]

Migration to the Mexican border does carry the potential for improved economic status. Available data (unfortunately income figures beyond 1960 are not to be found) suggest that the border region is relatively well-off

compared to the rest of Mexico. Per capita income for the nation in 1960 was $280, but for the border states well beyond twice that figure. As a rule, incomes tend to rise with movement north toward the border and are highest in those municipios directly on the border.[58] However, incomes decline along the border as one goes from west to east; average 1960 income was $958 in Tijuana compared to $612 in Reynosa and $401 in Matamoros. In addition to higher incomes at the border, the general quality of life is presumably better here than that for the nation as a whole. Studies purport that housing is less crowded and of higher quality,[59] health conditions are more salubrious,[60] a greater proportion of the public owns radios and televisions, etc. This does not imply by any means that most residents generally share in this relative affluence or that severe inequalities are not present on the frontier. By any standard of evaluation, poverty remains pervasive and extreme within these cities.

Given the general economic disparities between the border and certain areas of the Mexican interior, however, the border appears to be held in special regard among many of the interior Mexican poor. The northern frontier apparently is coming to be considered as an area possessing great opportunity wherein one can find work and receive comparatively high wages. For many migrants, though, the "promised land" does not materialize; jobs are too few in number and competition for them is vicious. Much of the migration to the frontier zone (and also illegal migration to the U.S.) is intended to be of only temporary duration; whereupon after either obtaining employment and meeting immediate economic goals or failing to find adequate work, such migrants return to their homes in the interior. On the other hand, it also appears there are many who do not share the option of return-migration. As Fernandez notes, "...an increasing number of peasants in the interior

are making the decision to sell their homes, their cattle, and whatever other belongings they may have, in order to migrate to the border area. They go there expecting to find a wonderful job awaiting them. But a very large percentage are disappointed to discover upon arrival the true state of affairs in border towns. The female is fortunate who finds a job in a factory; rarely does a male find one. Great numbers of unemployed peasants are thus stranded in the border towns. Some return to the interior. Most do not. They have nothing to return to - all of their possessions have been sold."[62] In light of such conditions, seeking employment at any wage on the northern side of the river usually constitutes the only available alternative.

Relocation on the border not only reportedly carries the highly problematical possibility for material advancement but also the prospect for important social psychological changes. As various scholars have pointed out, the U.S.-Mexico border area is neither distinctively Latin or Anglo - but rather a syncretized form of the two, a "border" culture. Yet while acculturative processes operate in both directions, it is clear that the economic force and draw of the northern colossus has greatest influence in structuring this hybrid. Monsiváis, for example, bewails the "Americanization" of the frontier: "If the influence of the United States is universal, along the border it is overwhelming. It takes the form of myth, of modern production methods, of the social invisibility of poverty, of the socialization of technology."[63] Martinez notes the strong tendencies along the northern border toward "demexicanization" and agringamiento, and indeed, the creation of "Chicanos del otro lado" (whom he argues will be adaptively superior to other newcomers should they migrate to the U.S. given this period of anticipatory socialization).[64] Another observer, Cardenas, purports that "... location close to the United States brings exposure to a higher standard of

living, gives birth to rising expectations, motivates progressive enterprises and suggests opportunities for personal improvement."[65]

Residence in Mexico - Work in the Valley

Despite the tendency toward economic leveling at the border, economic disparities obviously remain great. In 1969, per capita income in the Valley was reported to be around $1,600, whereas in the two major cities of northern Tamaulipas it was probably less than one-third that figure although much higher than for Mexico in general. The relatively high Mexican border town incomes (i.e., relative to Mexico in general) therefore may be more reflective of proximity to the U.S. with the concomitant participation of Mexican residents in the U.S. labor force rather than involvement in economic pursuits within the towns themselves.[66] Graphic economic improvement is accordingly a primary function of working on the U.S. side. Of the total Matamoros labor force, one study conducted in the mid-1960's discerned that 7.5% commuted frequently to work in the Brownsville-Cameron County area. However, this group earned four times the wages expected on the basis of its relative size; the commuters contributed 30% of Matamoros wage income. Reynosa residents working in the Valley accounted for an estimated 22% of that city's total income.[67] While the earnings of these workers would not raise many of them above the poverty index if they were to be living several miles to the north, these earnings by far surpassed prevailing economic standards for the majority of Mexican border town residents. Such incomes allowed the commuters to live a much more affluent style of life than their non-commuting Mexican nieghbors. Thus we note strong inducements to work in the U.S. yet reside in Mexico.

In discussing Mexican residents who work in the Valley, it is important to distinguish between three general categories: "green carders," U.S.

citizens, and illegal aliens. Although technically required to reside in the U.S. if employed there as they are "resident aliens," "green-carders" are allowed in practice to internationally commute to work. Within the Valley according to the INS, approximately 3,400 "green-carders" currently commute on a regular basis. As shown in Table 8, these figures have remained relatively constant (turnover is unassessed by the INS) over the past decade although there has been a marked reduction in numbers crossing at Hidalgo (Reynosa-McAllen), and the Brownsville station now accounts for over 85% of "green-card" crossings. Almost half of these workers are employed in local industry; sales and service, construction, and agriculture account in about equal proportions for the remainder. Possessing full legal status within the U.S., these workers, unlike illegal aliens, do not labor under specific wage and job condition disadvantages; i.e., disadvantages not generally shared by Valley laborers. Indeed, at least in one sector of the economy - retail trade establishments doing a high volume of business with Mexican shoppers - it appears that "green-carders" are selectively hired over Mexican-American applicants due primarily to their supposedly greater command of "trade" Spanish.

Although current data are not available, U.S. citizens who regularly commute from northern Tamaulipas to the Valley for employment probably are of significant number. INS counts conducted during the 1960's, which then enumerated those of this category found the citizen commuter force roughly equivalent in size to that of the "green-carders." If this ratio has remained constant, the legal commuting labor force ("green-carders" and U.S. citizens) in the Valley should thus approximate 7,000 workers.

No data base, of course, exists in regard to the number of Mexican residents employed in the region who either enter surreptiously or are in

violation of INS entry provisions. While the probability of avoiding Border Patrol detection and apprehension is much greater north of the Valley due to the concentration of policing efforts in border regions, observation implies, nonetheless, that illegal alien participation is common at least in jobs within the secondary labor market. Their employment appears to be pronounced in manual labor occupations and service-oriented businesses such as restaurants and motels. Also testifying to their probable ubiquity is the widespread practice among households of even modest means of employing a maid from "the other side." In light of the fact that throughout the Valley the INS enumerated a total of 54 "green-carders" engaged in domestic work, it appears likely that virtually this entire labor force commuting daily or, in the case of "live-ins," weekly from Mexico is illegally employed. The direct impact on the local labor market is negligible given the marginality and low remuneration ($20-$35 a week) of this work. However, the indirect effects may be of note as the employment of such workers enables many families, who otherwise could not afford the cost of conventional child-care and homemaking services, to augment their incomes by allowing wives to gain outside jobs - thus rendering the local job market even more competitive.

Illegal alien participation in agriculture is also of apparent significance. A 1970 study of Valley farm labor market institutions discovered that most employers preferred illegal aliens over both "green-carders" and U.S. citizens as the former accepted lower pay, harsher working conditions, and were more amenable to strict management practices and control.[68] A more recent study limited to the citrus labor market estimated that during certain periods fully one-half of that work force was composed of undocumented workers. Furthermore, packing shed personnel interviewed generally agreed that the harvest could not occur without the labor inputs of illegal aliens.[69]

Since 1974, however, with the passage of an amendment to the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act levying stiff fines against labor contractors (not growers) found to be employing illegal aliens, utilization of such workers according to local Department of Labor officials has diminished in significant degree.

What is the impact of alien labor force participation (legal and otherwise) on the regional labor market? More specifically, what impact does it have on the local Mexican-American poor? Unfortunately, little research as of yet has attempted to address either question (although studies are beginning to emerge in other communities).[70] Assessments instead generally tend both to be polemical and to stand on the vested interests of those arguing. Some, most usually members of the business community, purport that the impact is minimal and favor present or less restrictive border policies.[71] Aside from justifications based on humanitarianism, they argue that the alien labor supply is essential for regional economic viability because aliens hold jobs not desired by U.S. residents, spend most of their money in the U.S., and help to attract needed industries in the area. Likewise, they assert that extreme pressures would be placed on local housing, public services, and schools if "green-card" employment was contingent upon U.S. residency. Conversely, others, favoring more restrictive policies and stricter enforcement, argue that the widespread employment of commuters and undocumented workers causes serious problems for many residents, particularly the Mexican-American poor. Among the problems include: depressed incomes, high rates of unemployment, reduced chances for establishing labor unions, and worker displacement necessitating migrancy.[72]

The only existing quantitatively oriented study is that conducted recently by Smith and Newman which attempted to infer the impact of alien

labor participation on wages.[73] Comparing general wage data from Brownsville and Laredo with that from Corpus Christi and Houston, they found evidence of depressed labor markets in the border cities which is ascribed to the proportionately greater labor force participation of aliens. But they argue that the magnitude of the differential is much less than conventionally believed. Controlling for type of industry and occupation and other relevant job-related variables, border city workers earned approximately 20% less than their non-border counterparts. However, when differences in "cost of living" were taken into account, the former reportedly averaged only 8% less income. Alien participation though is generally confined to jobs within the secondary labor market, and thus their impact should be greater in this sector. This notion is corroborated by the finding that among those employed in typically low-wage occupations, border residents earned 13.5% less than those working in equivalent jobs to the north. The researchers conclude by proposing that these less than expected differences may be a consequence of aliens taking jobs unwanted by local residents and/or that "Anglo American and Mexican American labor are highly mobile and thus large scale migration may prevent large wage disparities."[74]

Regarding border-crossers in general, it appears that fluidity across the border is facilitated for many by family relationships spanning the boundary. For example, one study found that 64% of the "green-carders" and 56% of locally apprehended illegal aliens had relatives residing on the U.S. side.[75] In all likelihood then, temporary residence with such relatives for purposes of work or schooling as well as the obtainment of job information and understandings of local culture and society are of critical value for border-crossers. Attesting even more to the permeability of the border is the fact that most "green-carders" have at one time or another lived in the

U.S., and about one-third still retain an American mailing address.[76]

Residential Relocation on the U.S. Side

Although it is commonly believed that migration to the frontier is largely motivated by the desire to enter the U.S. for purposes of permanent work and settlement, a number of researchers have pointed out that Mexicans in the U.S. primarily represent "economic refugees," and for most, the stay is only meant to be of short duration.[77] A study of recent in-migrants within a Juarez barrio, for example, found that only a small minority (6%) chose the U.S. as the most desirable place to live. Most entered the U.S. for economic opportunities only; few people (1%) indicated coming to Juarez because of its proximity to the U.S. Thus, Ugalde concludes "...crossing the border is something sporadically done, in cases of dire necessity and with the intention of returning to Mexico as soon as possible."[78]

Nonetheless, significant movement does transpire from Mexico to the U.S. resulting in either prolonged or permanent U.S. residence. It appears that the established residence of family members already in the U.S. which in addition generally facilitates qualifying for "resident alien" status, coupled with the probability of obtaining employment are important determinants in this process. Also, contemporary research has shown that among those recently gaining resident alien status, prior U.S. residence (i.e., illegal residence) serves as a competitive advantage over attempting to enter and reside in the U.S. by first going through bureaucratic channels.[79] New resident aliens who had lived in the U.S. previously were found to be of lower educational and occupational status than others not reporting prior U.S. residence. Employer and family aid in gaining legal status are suggested as important advantages available to those in the former category.

Despite the well-known limitations of the U.S. Census in regard to the

enumeration of residents of Mexican origin (e.g., note the obvious difficulty in counting those of either illegal or questionable status), assessment of Mexican migration resulting in Valley residence perhaps is best approached through census records specifying the foreign born population (all, except a very small proportion, are from Mexico). We note (see Table 9) that relative to the total population the ratio of regional foreign born has been high although declining over time. This downward trend reflects, in great part, the mortality of the large group that migrated to the region during the second and third decades of this century, the time in which the Valley experienced dramatic economic development and population growth. In 1950 over 60,000 or approximately 20% of Cameron and Hidalgo County residents were Mexican born, whereas by 1960 roughly 15% of the population were of such origin. In 1970, the local foreign born population constituted about 12.5% of the total (compared with the state-wide figure of 2.8%). The two largest cities, Brownsville and McAllen, contained foreign born populations of 13.7% and 14.5%, respectively. Furthermore, the "foreign stock" (foreign born, and native born of foreign or mixed parentage) local population was exceptionally high; e.g., over 30% of the Valley population and 46% of the 1970 Brownsville residents fell into this category.

Recent observations made in regard to Valley school systems show that migration to the area has significantly increased in the past several years. Throughout the Valley, approximately 10% of the student population is now of resident alien status. Over the past five years, Brownsville schools have added about 1,000 new Mexican students per year whereas before that time less than one-third of such students annually entered the system. Thus we infer that the recent explosion in Valley population, to a great but undetermined extent, reflects a stepped-up rate of Mexican in-migration.

It would appear that the foreign born are generally in the worst economic position relative to other local residents. The foreign born seem to be concentrated in the lowest occupational categories; for instance, a 1970 survey of Hidalgo County farm worker households found that 43% of family heads were Mexican born.[80] Residential location also appears to reflect differences in national origin. An extensive 1977 household survey conducted in the defined low-income barrios of Brownsville discerned that of those husbands and wives reporting place of birth, 45% had been born in Mexico.[81] On the other hand, inspection of 1970 census tract data for Brownsville (with recognition of the possibility of commiting the ecological fallacy) does not clearly support the link between place of birth and economic position. The poorest census tract does have the highest ratio of foreign born, but for the other nine tracts there appears to be little correlation between poverty status and national origin. A much stronger rank-order relation is exhibited between poverty incidence and proportion of "foreign stock." State-wide data, conversely, show the foreign born Mexican-American population to be in the lowest income position, while first generation natives are of higher rank than subsequent generations.[82]

Reactions to poverty conditions may crucially differ among those recently immigrating from Mexico to the Valley as compared to those who have resided here over a longer period of time. Though the immigrant may be earning exceptionally low wages - wages far below the poverty level, this is not to say that he will in fact necessarily feel subjectively deprived. Perceptions about economic position may largely be conditioned by the socio-cultural frame of reference employed for comparison and the conditions to which one has become accustomed. In many cases, immigrants use the quality of life standards prevailing in their Mexican communities of origin rather

than those held by other Valley residents. One researcher comparing foreign born and native born Mexican Americans of low economic status found that the former were significantly more positive about current living conditions, more optimistic about the future, and less negative toward Anglos than were the latter.[83] Stoddard notes that: "...Mexican immigrants who compare their American situation with that recently left in Mexico felt a positive reaction to slum tenement life wherein running water, flush toilets, and electricity were available albeit substandard to other U.S. housing.... For the initial generation of immigrants, America might be viewed as an opportunity to pursue the "American Dream" of upward mobility and success. As compared with their immediate past, American poverty becomes relative affluence."[84] This is clearly not to say that such perceptions will be adopted by the children of immigrants, or will even be retained by such immigrants over time with greater exposure to and understanding of American society. Indeed, experience has shown that frustration and alienation constitute important collective responses to continued poverty status among subsequent generations as their evaluative frame of reference becomes adjusted to definitions of well-being prevailing in U.S. society.[85]

Valley Out-Migration: A Comment on General Causes

Out-migration from the region, whether it be seasonal as in the case of most agricultural workers or that type resulting in residential relocation in places removed from the Valley, is generally a direct consequence of employment-related factors. In saying this, we are not dismissing non-economic reasons (such as the desire for adventure or the desire to escape perceived negative social conditions) that may be of relevance in a few cases. However, our basic assumption is that characteristics of the regional economy as influenced by demographic pressures play the fundamental role in

stimulating population flows to the north.

Out-migration must be viewed as a functional response to a constellation of economic limitations that includes: (a) an insufficient number of jobs in general, (b) a restricted number of higher-status jobs that would provide for economic mobility, (c) the seasonal nature of many jobs in the agricultural sector, and (d) an employment structure which reflects comparatively depressed wage-scales. These limitations have been described in this paper, and thus will not be discussed in further detail except in terms of their relation to out-migration specifics.

In combination with various generic problems such as locational disadvantages and high transportation costs which historically have hindered Valley industrial development and diversification, the structural problems alluded to above are exacerbated by a large surplus labor supply. This abundant labor reserve emanates from two phenomena - Mexican labor force participation, as discussed, and a high local fertility rate. In lieu of firmer evidence, the assessed impact of Mexican workers in the Valley is largely conjectural at this time. "Green-card" workers occupy no more than 3,500 jobs in the region, and it is unknown to what extent these jobs would go unfilled (or be filled at what wages) in the absence of such workers. A similar case might be argued in regard to the labor force participation of the unknown numbers of illegal aliens. Legally admitted immigrants constitute a third source of pressure (again of unmeasured magnitude) on the local labor market.

Of clearer impact, however, has been the historical presence of a large youth population. This population is a primary consequence of a high local rate of natural increase (in 1970 the birth rate was over 30 per 1,000, roughly 175% of the national rate), and secondarily a consequence of Mexican family immigration. The perennial impact on the labor market by this

population constantly undergoing replenishment has been recently estimated through a demographic analysis of age cohorts.[86] Examining replacement ratios for males of working age, Bradshaw found that in 1960 there were over 250 young males potentially attempting to enter Hidalgo and Cameron County job markets for every 100 jobs that were being vacated due to either retirement or death (see Table 10). By 1970, the outlook was even more bleak; although the rate in Cameron County remained constant, over 280 potential entrants were available in Hidalgo County to fill 100 jobs. The severity of this phenomenon is further underlined when we recall that between 1960-1970 there was an actual net decrease in the number of manufacturing jobs within the two counties! Thus, replacement ratios were in reality even more extreme than those noted above. Replacement ratios strikingly differed between Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans, of course reflecting differential birth and in-migration rates. For example, in 1970 for every 100 jobs being vacated by Anglos, Anglo males entering the labor market numbered 100 and 124 in Cameron and Hidalgo counties. Conversely, about 360 young Mexican-American males potentially competed for every 100 positions previously held by older Mexican Americans! These statistics alone clearly suggest that perpetual out-migration is a widespread and important functional necessity for many Valley residents in the face of such demographic pressures.

Seasonal Migration From the Valley

The fourth major movement consists of those who seasonally migrate out of the region to work elsewhere, generally leaving the Valley during the spring to return in the fall. The migrant population constitutes approximately one-fourth of the Valley total, i.e., somewhere between 100,000 to 120,000 workers and family members (exact numbers vary according to the definition of "migrant" employed and the agency performing the enumeration).

These figures account for about one-third of all Texas migrants, and about one-tenth of the U.S. migrant farm population.

Migrants generally form a poverty class governed by a cruel dilemma. They may be viewed as a group which is attempting to reach a compromise between harsh economic realities and highly meaningful sociocultural preferences.[87] During the summer, the local job supply decreases in size; this is particularly dramatic in agriculture as few summer crops are labor intensive, nor is there much activity in local fruit and vegetable processing plants. For many residents there is simply no work available at this time. In addition, the extent and amount of available welfare benefits in Texas are very restrictive in comparison to national standards. So this source of support is not an attractive option. Subsistence thus requires northern migration. Furthermore, discussions with migrants indicate that steady work is frequently not found in the Valley during winter months - therefore further intensifying the need to migrate come spring. On the other hand, certain features of or within the Valley provide strong incentives for many militating against permanent out-migration to areas offering better employment prospects. A mild winter climate, a lower cost of living, the local predominance of the Spanish language, proximity to Mexico, and cultural and family affiliations are some of the more obvious and important impediments to relocation. Likewise, property ownership also appears to be significant as about three-fourths of all migrants own their homes.[88]

Migrancy is a status generally endemic to the occupation of farm worker in the region. Recent surveys have found that over 80% of local agricultural laborers are also involved in the migrant stream (an undetermined number of migrants in addition do not work in regional agriculture).[89] While the well-known effects of seasonal migration are often deleterious to educational

achievement, health, and family organization, migrants tend to be economically better-off than non-migrating farm workers. Also, migrant household heads generally tend to be better educated and much younger than their non-migrating counterparts.

The inducements to migrate are clear. First, migration as noted entails a longer work period per year. Farm workers in general (migrants and non-migrants) were employed a 1973 median of only 24 weeks. More than half of these weeks were worked out of the Valley.[90] Another study found that over 70% of farm workers performed most of their work away from the Valley.[91] Secondly, migration affords the availability of farm work at a higher rate of pay. Although 1973 average hourly farm wage rates were variable for states of high Mexican-American migrant participation [e.g. Michigan, $1.80-$3.06; California, +$2.00; Florida (citrus), $3.50], they were far superior to the estimated Valley rate of $1.60 per hour. Thus, mean earnings were much higher out of the region; whereas Valley farm work averaged $55 a week per household head, non-Valley farm work averaged $84.[92] Finally, as peak migrant harvest requirements occur during the summer, months when migrant students are not in school, migrancy allows families to supplement total household income through the work-force participation of their youngsters. As yearly family subsistence often demands such economic inputs (and as farm workers have not been covered by Social Security provisions), this phenomenon is in the U.S. one rather uncommon example of the economic functionality of large families.

Paradoxically, migrancy - a direct consequence of the absence of sufficient work within the region - has apparently rendered the remaining Valley agricultural work as an increasingly unattractive subsistence alternative for local farm workers. Low pay, poor job conditions, and highly-

sporadic employment, all historically persistent features of Valley agriculture, seem even more unpalatable to those who have recently returned from other states wherein farm work tends toward more enlightened management and provides better conditions and pay. As one student of the local situation has stated: "As a direct result of many of these personnel policies, farmers experience a very low rate of productivity from many of the workers in the Valley. The migrants compare how they are treated out of the Valley with Valley practices... Generally, the average worker believes he is being exploited by Valley employers due to the low pay and poor working conditions."[93] That over 40% of Hidalgo County farm-worker household heads are of Mexican birth would imply somewhat of a generational turnover with offspring moving out of farm work to other types of employment and/or moving to other regions in the U.S. In addition, we suggest that due in part to this expanded quality-of-life frame of reference afforded by migrancy (in combination with the lack of higher paying and less demeaning jobs in the region), former migrant agricultural laborers are increasingly participating in the fifth and final major staging area movement.

Out-Migration and Residential Relocation Out of The Valley

The extent of non-seasonal out-migration and its possible impact on the local poverty situation are rather difficult to infer by a simple perusal of census data alone. Between 1960-1970, there was a slight decrease (3.8%) in regional population, and in addition, an exceptionally high net migration deficit of roughly 30% the population total. While the Mexican-American population as an aggregate grew by 9.9%, the Anglo-American population declined by 35%. Such data apparently would designate the Valley as an important staging area for out-migration - but one primarily for those of non-poverty status - that is, Anglo Americans. Though showing relative

constancy for the Mexican-American population, nonetheless, such figures do not reveal compositional changes within this group reflecting in-migration (international and intranational) and out-migration dynamics.

Further referring to the work of Bradshaw, however, this problem tends toward empirical clarification.[94] Indeed, among that portion of the Mexican American population most vulnerable to labor force entry problems (young adults), actual out-migration has been extreme. Examining specified census data on all regional males who had come of labor force age (20-29) between 1960-1970, Bradshaw found that this group experienced a net out-migration rate of approximately 50% in Cameron County and 40% in Hidalgo County; i.e., of all local males who came of labor force age during this decade, about 45% were not residing in the two county area by 1970 (see Table 11). Analyzed by ethnicity, rates were high for Anglo Americans but even higher among Mexican Americans. This age cohort of Mexican-American men during the decade underwent an estimated net decline of 11,300 - approximately 52% and 45% in Cameron and Hidalgo counties, respectively. These data take on added significance relative to the scale of Mexican-American out-migration when we note that they only represent net migration. In-migration from Mexico and elsewhere among this cohort is not currently amenable to analysis, and thus, actual out-migration was undoubtedly of even greater magnitude!

Other research findings, in addition, suggest several salient trends regarding out-migration patterns. First, despite the surprisingly common myth purporting that Mexican Americans will not settle out of the region, Mexican-American youth are generally cognizant of the dismal local employment situation and view out-migration as a basic requisite for economic mobility. A regional survey, for example, found such youth not only positive toward out-migration but indeed fully one-half indicated that within five

years they would be living outside of the Valley.[95] Secondly, actual movement of long distance is pronounced. The spread of former agricultural migrants over the cities of California and the Midwest is well-known. A farm worker survey discovered that over three-fourths of the respondents had either siblings or children who had permanently migrated out of the region - with most going out of the state. Although other areas in Texas ranked second in frequency of destination at 22%, California (27%) was the most favored point of relocation - followed by Illinois (12%), Michigan (10%), and Ohio (8%).[96] Discussions with many local Mexican Americans also reveal numerous close relatives, who although not agricultural migrants, had moved to other cities in the state; Houston seems to be a particularly strong magnet for many previous Valley residents. Finally, new destinations have emerged in recent years. The industrializing cities of the Southeast appear to be attracting growing numbers of Mexican Americans. Perhaps the most noteworthy trend, however, is the movement generally concentrated toward central Florida. In 1969, Mexican Americans composed around 5% of the winter-time Florida citrus labor force. Yet by 1974, due to a more rationalized set of management procedures and to increasing citrus industry wage differentials, Texas Mexican Americans (most from the Valley) reportedly accounted for about one-half of that labor force.[97]

Implications of Staging Area Dynamics for Regional Poverty

We maintain that if the question of local poverty and its potential for amelioration is to be seriously addressed, the special conditions that prevail in this U.S.-Mexico border region, which in effect define the region as a staging area, must be recognized and further analyzed. The outline developed in this section represents an initial attempt to specify some of the parameters of locally-relevant migratory flows and the forces stimulating

such movements. If the general validity of the staging area function is accepted, we must then ask what direct ramifications this function has on the question of objective or real poverty within the region.

The first implication is self-evident in light of our synthesis: real poverty, according to U.S. standards, will remain as a significant social characteristic of the region into the forseeable future. Valley poverty is to some extent a consequence of conditions in Mexico which have stimulated migratory flows to the border region. (Despite the recent discovery of enormous oil reserves in Mexico, it is questionable that possible developmental programs which might accrue from this would have great influence in diminishing these population flows.) The permeability of the border relative to human migration defines the special character of the Valley whereby an economic system could be constructed that exploits such flows. The persistence of an economy within the Valley structured on minimum wage employment, even at full-employment, will in no way provide for aggregate mobility out of real poverty for the present-day poor. The sheer volume of demographic pressure generated through in-migration and high rates of natural increase, will continually reinforce job competition and depress wage rates. Out-migration will continue to serve as an adaptive check, keeping the extent of real poverty far lower than would otherwise be the case.

Just as real poverty is continually being generated in the region through demographic factors interacting with certain characteristics of the local economy, so too may the region be exporting real poverty to other areas of the U.S. in terms of out-migration flows. Given the currently poor state of regional school systems, job training programs, and level of educational attainment, it is likely that many out-migrants lack the necessary educational credentials and job skills essential for successful economic integration into

their new home communities. An economically marginal life-style in Houston Chicago, or Detroit produced by inadequate formal training may in fact be infinitely less tolerable than even a Valley poverty existence - one softened by close family ties and cultural roots.

On the other hand, migration theory and research relate that those moving from one region to another generally tend to occupy intermediate economic and educational status between the general population left behind and those already at the new destination. If this holds true for many of those permanently relocating out of the Valley, and we strongly suspect that it does, the implication is clear. The region may be undergoing the loss of some of its most potentially capable people. This population (better educated and skilled, and possibly more motivated than the median) would play a key role in regional development if only relevant opportunities were available. Not only potential talent is thus drained - so too are the local tax dollars invested in their education and upkeep.

The staging area concept also helps to explain why there has been relatively little political or social action mobilization among the poor. The local poor form the largest class constituency in almost every city and town in the region. At a theoretical level at least, their interests could find a degree of articulation with local political structures if coherently organized and pressed. In reality, despite numerous organizing attempts in the recent past in a variety of areas including farm labor, colonia improvements, and health-care services, organizational efforts have been minimally supported and unmeasurable in terms of impact. Having no on-going linkages with local middle and higher level interests (with the possible exception of the Catholic Diocese) poor-peoples' organizations lack meaningful coalitions necessary for issue success. Although candidates for political office at

every level of government armed with promises frequently make forays into the low-income barrios during campaigns, much of the typically low turn-out vote at election time is governed through a multi-level patron system based on personal ties, obligations, and deference rather than collective ideologies.

In reaction to the above critical passage, the staging area concept, however, suggests that the poor as a population tend to be compositionally complex. Under the generic label of "poverty population," we find a number of sub-groupings each with different and possibly opposing real and perceived categorical interests. Substantive concerns (issues related to the allocation of public goods and services) tend to be cross-cut by a range of "quality of life" perspectives as previously noted. Orientations and activities relative to political action and electoral participation tend to be conditioned by legal status, nationality affiliation, as well as "quality of life" perspectives. Intra-group prejudices, animosities, and rivalries reflect differentiated claims on allocated resources (jobs, housing, dating and marriage partners, prestige, etc.) being ordered on legal status, recency of immigration, and such other meaningful dimensions. Additionally, issues regarding ethnic distributive justice, which might serve as an organizational catalyst in unifying la raza, tend to be deflected by the lack of focused racial oppression represented in authoritative figures; i.e., Mexican American political officials, police officers, agency bureaucrats, etc., are common throughout the region. Then too, with reference to only migratory dynamics, the development of cohesive groups and serious commitments toward social change within the region is minimized by the often temporary or seasonal nature of local residence.

Finally, recent experience implies that economic development strategies

premised on the relocation of light industries may do little to alter the general contours of real poverty within the region. Although jobs are created, the minimum wage is the normal rate of return. Such wages may constitute an improved source of family income. However, if unless at least more than one family member is so employed, the minimum wage by itself will not bring the family above the poverty threshold. Newly created jobs on the American side have probably also reduced the rate of out-migration among youth and families of real poverty status. Additionally, as noted, plant relocations on the Mexican and American sides may exacerbate the magnitude of real poverty by stimulating economically excessive population flows from the Mexican interior.

## Conclusions

In summary, this analysis of poverty in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is developed on the basis of a multidimensional approach, including assessment of the region and population in dynamic and longitudinal terms rather than as static entities. Poverty in the Valley we find to be most obviously and definitely a significant real phenomenon. Poverty, in addition, is disproportionately concentrated within one of the major regional ethnic groups. Historical documentation supports the argument that the high ratio of poverty among Mexican Americans tends to be in part a consequence of Anglo American economic and political domination. Thus we purport that local poverty is to an extent a regulated phenomenon. The region is finally viewed within the context of a staging area for several major populations. In light of the varying patterns of geographical movement, occupational entry and economic attainment, and sociocultural identification, we hypothesize that local poverty should also be approached as a phenomenon amended for

some by a relative component. Such an assessment does not dismiss the extreme relevance of economic definitions of poverty, but we submit that description on the basis of economic criteria alone oversimplifies the complex forces influencing the experiences of many poor people.

Poverty measured in real terms means that the region ranks at the bottom in regard to almost every indicator of socioeconomic well-being. Family and per capita incomes are the lowest in the nation. Furthermore, such incomes signify that most residents will have access to few of the resources essential to enable either themselves or their children to be economically competitive. Labor force figures stress both the high unemployment rate as well as the substantial subemployment rate. Regional labor needs have not kept pace with population increases even though there has been significant industrial diversification and growth in recent years. Additionally, levels of educational attainment for most appear to be insufficient, particularly in our credential-conscious economy, to gain entry into jobs providing tenure and wages beyond poverty subsistence. Many of these with higher levels of education and training move from the area, leaving a sizeable minority who are often unable to find employment. Housing, particularly in colonias, constitutes a critical regional problem. Health status, which is a solid indicator of quality of life, remains very poor as seen in the data presented. Health services for the majority of poor people tend to be inadequate, and private physicians are usually only consulted during times of extreme and obvious crisis.

Historical antecedents of regional ethnic stratification demonstrate regulated poverty. An agriculturally based economy with a large source of surplus labor has meant both limited job mobility as well as low wages and poor working conditions. Poor upon migrating to the U.S. and remaining

"relatively" poor in the Valley, Mexicans and Mexican Americans have served as the labor base for developing and working the land. Historically, few mobility channels have been open to Mexican Americans in most Valley communities; outright discrimination has been common in schools, jobs, and the courts. An open-border policy and later a government administered workforce (braceros), in addition, have kept wages low and jobs tenuous. Although a small Mexican-American middle class has emerged since World War II, most Mexican Americans form a poverty-stricken underclass. Thus, a typical three-tiered class structure has failed to materialize within the local Mexican-American community.

If the region is conceptualized as a staging area, Valley society may be envisioned as generating real poverty as well as exporting poverty to other areas of the state and nation. Recent industrial development provides an expanding labor force with minimum wage employment below federal poverty guidelines, and a corresponding Mexican labor force with subsistence level incomes. Simultaneously, this development has resulted in explosive population growth. An inadequate demand for skilled and professional jobs has eventuated in a drain of local talent to northern areas offering such jobs, higher wages, and better working conditions. Compositionally complex, the poverty population has not formed organizations for the purpose of solving problems related to real poverty but continues to be manipulated through patron structures. Potential poverty leaders have yet to find a formula which might serve to coalesce the diverse interests represented among the poor.

In conclusion, the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas is distinguished from other regions by its extreme poverty. This paper represents an attempt to bridge recent conceptual development with existing literature and

data regarding local conditions. The lack of basic descriptive data on the poor as well as the questionable quality and relevance of some existing data severely circumscribe the number and nature of problem-related generalizations. Future research on the region should focus, we believe, on a continuing effort to collect empirical data within the conceptual framework suggested. A phenomenological approach to the study of differing perceptions of quality of life among low-income Mexican Americans would contribute much to an understanding of Valley poverty. The interdependence of job mobility, social mobility, and patterns of migration in a poverty economy similarly requires further research efforts. New ameliorative approaches to Valley poverty must eventually be formulated which take into account the special characteristics of the region and its people.

Table 1

## Regional and Border City Population

| | Cameron County | Brownsville | Matamoros Municipio | Matamoros City | Hidalgo County | McAllen | Reynosa Municipio | Reynosa City |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1900 | 16,095 | 6,305 | | | 6,837 | -- | | |
| 1910 | 27,158 | 10,517 | | | 13,728 | -- | | |
| 1920 | 36,662 | 11,791 | | | 38,110 | 5,331 | | |
| 1930 | 77,540 | 22,021 | 24,955 | 9,773 | 77,004 | 9,074 | 12,346 | 4,840 |
| 1940 | 83,202 | 22,083 | 54,136 | 15,699 | 106,059 | 11,877 | 23,137 | 9,412 |
| 1950 | 125,170 | 36,066 | 128,347 | 45,846 | 160,446 | 20,067 | 69,428 | 34,087 |
| 1960 | 151,098 | 48,040 | 143,043 | 92,952 | 180,904 | 32,728 | 134,869 | 74,140 |
| 1970 | 140,368 | 52,522 | 186,146 | 139,318 | 181,535 | 37,636 | 150,786 | 137,383 |
| 1975 | 176,931 | 72,157 | | | 227,853 | 48,563 | | |
| 1977(est.) | | 82,000 | 285,000 | 265,000 | | 52,000 | | 195,000 |

Source: Relevant U.S. and Mexican census volumes. Estimates for 1977, conservative selections of often quoted estimates.

Table 2

Median Family Income, 1960-1970

| | 1960 | | 1970 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Median | % of U.S. Median | Median | % of U.S. Median |
| United States | $5,660 | 100.0 | $9,590 | 100.0 |
| Texas | $4,880 | 86.2 | $8,490 | 88.5 |
| Cameron County | $3,216 | 56.8 | $5,068 | 52.8 |
| Hidalgo County | $2,780 | 49.1 | $4,776 | 49.8 |

Source: U.S. Census.

Table 3

Per Capita Incomes, 1959 - 1969 - 1976

| | 1959 | | 1969 | | 1976 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Income | % of U.S. Average | Income | % of U.S. Average | Income | % of U.S. Average |
| United States | $1,836 | 100.0 | $3,139 | 100.0 | $6,824 | 100.0 |
| Texas | 1,713 | 93.3 | 2,950 | 94.0 | | |
| Cameron County | 1,007 | 54.8 | 1,580 | 50.3 | 3,825 | 56.0 |
| Hidalgo County | 867 | 48.3 | 1,523 | 48.5 | 3,338 | 48.9 |

Source: 1959 and 1969 figures U.S. Census; 1976 figures reported by U.S. Department of Commerce, 1978.

Table 4

Selected Poverty Indicators for Persons and Families (14 years and over, 1970)

| | Lower Rio Grande Valley | Cameron County | Hidalgo County | Willacy County |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Income Less Than Poverty Level | | | | |
| Total Persons | 162,812 | 64,009 | 89,938 | 8,865 |
| Percent of all Persons | 48.6 | 46.0 | 49.8 | 57.2 |
| Families | 29,237 | 11,686 | 15,995 | 1,556 |
| Percent of all Families | 40.7 | 38.5 | 42.0 | 46.1 |
| Families With Female Head | 6,437 | 2,897 | 3,258 | 282 |
| Poverty and "Near Poverty" Level Incomes* | | | | |
| Total Persons | 195,150 | 77,703 | 107,461 | 9,986 |
| Percent of all Persons | 58.1 | 55.7 | 59.4 | 64.4 |
| Families | 36,284 | 14,515 | 19,921 | 1,848 |
| Percent of all Families | 50.5 | 47.9 | 52.3 | 54.8 |
| Families With Female Head | 7,267 | 3,225 | 3,730 | 312 |

* 32,338 or 16.6% are "near poverty" level (definition: incomes 25% above poverty level).

Source: Lower Rio Grande Valley Ancillary Manpower Planning Board: Comprehensive Manpower Plan (McAllen: Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, 1974).

Table 5

Poverty Status of Families by Racial and Ethnic Group (1970)

| | Lower Rio Grande Valley | Cameron County | Hidalgo County | Willacy County |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Families With Poverty Level Incomes | 29,237 | 11,686 | 15,995 | 1,556 |
| White | 2,807 | 1,321 | 1,423 | 63 |
| Percent of all Poor Families | 9.6 | 11.3 | 8.9 | 4.0 |
| Percent of White Families | 14.0 | 14.5 | 14.3 | 6.6 |
| Black | 73 | 41 | 32 | 0 |
| Percent of all Poor Families | 0.2 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.0 |
| Percent of Black Families | 31.5 | 31.3 | 37.7 | 0.0 |
| Mexican American | 26,357 | 10,324 | 14,540 | 1,493 |
| Percent of all Poor Families | 90.1 | 88.3 | 90.9 | 96.0 |
| Percent of Mexican-American Families | 52.1 | 49.7 | 52.8 | 64.1 |

Source: Lower Rio Grande Valley Ancillary Manpower Planning Board: Comprehensive Manpower Plan (McAllen: Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, 1974).

Table 6

Poverty Ratios of Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans by County (1960-1970)*

| County | Percent of Families With Incomes Below Poverty Level | | | | Mexican American/ Anglo American Poverty Ratio | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mexican American | | Anglo American | | | |
| | 1960 | 1970 | 1960 | 1970 | 1960 | 1970 |
| Cameron | 66.7 | 49.7 | 22.4 | 14.5 | 2.98 | 3.43 |
| Hidalgo | 72.0 | 52.8 | 24.4 | 14.3 | 2.96 | 3.69 |
| Willacy | 71.1 | 64.1 | 24.7 | 6.6 | 2.88 | 9.41 |

* 1960 figures and ethnic poverty ratio measure abstracted from W. Kennedy Upham and David E. Wright, Poverty Among Spanish Americans in Texas (College Station: Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Departmental Information Report No. 66-2, 1966).

Table 7

Educational Attainment by Ethnicity in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties, 1970 (among those 25 yrs. and older)

| | Total | % | Spanish Surname | % | Anglo (Includes Blacks) | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No School | 22,231 | 15.3 | 21,298 | 21.6 | 933 | 2.0 |
| 1-4 Years | 27,028 | 18.7 | 25,209 | 25.6 | 1,819 | 3.9 |
| 5-8 Years | 32,641 | 22.5 | 25,645 | 26.0 | 6,996 | 15.1 |
| Some High School | 16,121 | 11.1 | 8,489 | 8.6 | 7,632 | 16.5 |
| High School Graduate | 24,306 | 16.8 | 10,731 | 10.9 | 13,575 | 29.3 |
| Some College | 11,920 | 8.3 | 3,895 | 4.0 | 8,025 | 17.3 |
| College Graduation or More | 10,641 | 7.3 | 3,321 | 3.4 | 7,320 | 15.8 |
| TOTAL | 144,888 | 99.9 | 98,588 | 100.1 | 46,300 | 99.9 |

Table 8

Resident Alien Commuters ("Green-Carders") by Occupation Category (November, 1977 - April, 1978) and by Previous INS Counts

| Crossing Station | Total | Type of Work | | | | | Previous INS Counts | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Industry | Building | Agriculture | Sales & Service | Household | 1967 (Nov.-Dec.) | 1969 (August) |
| Brownsville | 2,772 | 1,429 | 542 | 260 | 493 | 48 | 1,917 | 2,306 |
| Hidalgo (McAllen) | 424 | 50 | 74 | 136 | 158 | 6 | 937 | 1,063 |
| Progresso | 155 | 16 | 26 | 107 | 6 | -- | 50 | 82 |
| Total in Valley | 3,351 | 1,495 | 642 | 503 | 657 | 54 | 2,904 | 3,451 |
| Total in U.S. | 56,973 | 15,364 | 5,626 | 20,487 | 11,346 | 1,762 | 40,176 | 47,876 |

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Table 9

## Foreign Born and Foreign Stock (foreign or mixed parentage) Population of Cameron and Hidalgo Counties - 1950, 1960, 1970

| | 1950 | | 1960 | | | 1970 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total Population | Total Foreign Born | Total Population | Total Foreign Born | Total Foreign Stock | Total Population | Total Foreign Born | Total Foreign Stock |
| Cameron County | 125,170 | 23,228 | 151,098 | 20,175 | 40,790 | 140,368 | 18,410 | 42,251 |
| Hidalgo County | 160,446 | 37,417 | 180,904 | 29,116 | 57,412 | 181,535 | 22,341 | 57,547 |
| | 285,616 | 60,645 (21.2%) | 332,002 | 49,291 (14.8%) | 98,202 | 321,903 | 40,751 (12.7%) | 99,798 |

Source: U.S. Census

Table 10

Replacement Ratios for Males of Working Age (20-64) for Relevant Mexican Municipios and Lower Rio Grande Valley Counties - 1970 and 1960*

| Place | Total | | Spanish Language or Surname | | Other White | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1970 | 1960 | 1970 | 1960 | 1970 | 1960 |
| Matamoros, municipio | 337 | 301 | | | | |
| Reynosa, municipio | 327 | 289 | | | | |
| Cameron County | 250 | 251 | 360 | 375 | 100 | 129 |
| Hidalgo County | 281 | 259 | 362 | 365 | 124 | 124 |

* "The replacement ratio is the expected number of entrants into the age group 20-64 years per 100 expected departures resulting from death or from reaching retirement age, on the assumption of no migration during the decade." Source: Benjamin S. Bradshaw, "Potential Labor Force Supply, Replacement, and Migration of Mexican-American and Other Males in the Texas-Mexico Border Region," International Migration Review (Spring, 1976), p. 35.

Table 11

Estimated Net Migration of Spanish Surname and Other White Males Becoming of Labor Force Age (20-29 in 1970) for Cameron and Hidalgo Counties - 1960 to 1970*

| | Net Migration | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Spanish Surname[a] | | Other White | |
| County | Number | Rate[b] | Number | Rate[b] |
| Cameron | -5,300 | -52.2 | -1,800 | -48.1 |
| Hidalgo | -6,000 | -44.9 | -1,400 | -37.3 |

[a] Estimated using 1960 to 1970 U.S. national forward census survival rates for native males of Mexican parentage.

[b] Per 100 expected males aged 20 to 29.

* Data abstracted from Benjamin S. Bradshaw, "Potential Labor Force Supply, Replacement, and Migration of Mexican-American and Other Males in the Texas-Mexico Border Region," International Migration Review (Spring, 1976), p. 39.

Notes

1. Ellwyn R. Stoddard, "Patterns of Poverty Along the U.S.-Mexico Border," (unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, The University of Texas at El Paso, 1978).

2. Starr County, basically due to its isolation from other definable regions, is sometimes included with the counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy in definitions of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Aside from being a rather unique sociocultural enclave, Starr County does not possess a similar topography or agricultural infrastructure to that of the Valley proper, nor are its two small towns (Rio Grande City and Roma) physically proximate to other Valley cities.

3. Ellwyn R. Stoddard and Jonathon P. West, The Impact of Mexico's Peso Devaluation on Selected Border Cities (Tucson, Arizona: SW Borderlands Consultants, 1977), p. 120.

4. William Rush, "A Study of Winter Tourists," (unpublished manuscript, Business Research Institute, Pan American University at Edinburg, 1977).

5. See Poverty in Texas, 1973 (Austin: Office of Economic Opportunity, Texas Department of Community Affairs, 1974).

6. Anthony N. Zavaleta and Robert Lee Maril, Demographic Characteristics of Poverty Barrios in Brownsville, Texas (Brownsville: South Texas Institute of Latin and Mexican American Research Monograph Series, forthcoming).

7. See various issues of the Labor Market Review (McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr and Brownsville-San Benito-Harlingen) published by the Texas Employment Commission.

8. These and other figures, unless specified, are found in the Overall Economic Development Plan, 1977 (McAllen: Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, 1977).

9. Robert B. Williamson, "The Lower Rio Grande Valley: An Economic Profile," Texas Business Review (March, 1966), p. 74.

10. Basic Data of 47 South Texas Counties (Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University at Edinburg, 1973).

11. Zavaleta and Maril, forthcoming.

12. For example, over the past decade in the northwestern section of the lower peninsula of Michigan cherry harvesting has undergone extensive mechanization. As a result, seasonal jobs in this local industry have been reduced from approximately 30,000 to 3,000.

13. The pre-devaluation 1976 hourly minimum wage for industrial employment in both Matamoros and Reynosa was 80 cents. Under BIP in 1967, the Mexican government created a twelve and one-half mile zone stretching the length of the border in which foreign corporations may build or rent plants

and import necessary machinery and raw materials without paying duty under the stipulation that all finished goods are then exported. In the early 1970's, the 12 1/2 mile zone restriction was removed, opening up the entire nation to foreign corporate access. Current U.S. tariff regulations allow the exportation of machinery, parts, and assembly, and as well, impose duty on only the value added by such assembly.

14. For critical analyses, see Hit and Run: U.S. Runaway Shops on the Mexican Border (NACLA's Latin American and Empire Report, July-August, 1975); Jorge A. Bustamante, "Maquiladoras: A New Face of International Capitalism on Mexico's Northern Frontier," (presented at the Latin American Studies Association, Atlanta, March, 1976); and Cameron Duncan, "The Runaway Shop and the Mexican Border Industrialization Program" Southwest Economy and Society (November, 1976).

15. According to one Brownsville industrial development expert, 1982-1983 were earmarked as the years when location on the northern Mexican border would no longer be of competitive advantage to business due to escalating minimum wage levels. Maquiladoras would then move out of the region. Given the 1976 peso devaluations, however, this projected "cross-over point" now has been postponed for some time beyond 1983.

16. Paul Sweeney, "AMATEX in Juarez: A Squalid Business," The Texas Observer (June 9, 1978), p. 8.

17. Oscar J. Martinez, "Chicanos and the Border Cities: An Interpretive Essay," Pacific Historical Review (February, 1977).

18. Housing Data for the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1970 (McAllen: Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, 1973).

19. Colonias in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas: A Summary Report (Austin: Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, Policy Research Project Report no. 18, 1977).

20. Charles H. Teller, "Physical Health Status and Health Care Utilization in the Texas Borderlands," in Stanley R. Ross, ed. Views Across the Border: The United States and Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), p. 262.

21. Ibid.

22. M. Richard Leopold, "Report on the Public Health Significance of the Midwife Training Program in Brownsville, Texas," South Texas Journal of Research and the Humanities (Spring, 1977).

23. Teller, 1978, p. 264.

24. Ibid.

25. Ten State Nutrition Survey, 1968-1970 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Health Services and Mental Health Administration).

26. Health Services for Domestic Agricultural Workers (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972).

27. Testimony of Dr. Raymond Wheeler before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, July 20, 1970, cited in Poverty in Texas, 1973, p. 161.

28. Resources Handbook of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1977 (McAllen: Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, 1977), pp. 50-60.

29. Ibid.

30. Observations of Anthony N. Zavaleta, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Texas Southmost College, Brownsville, Texas.

31. S. Dale McLemore, "The Origins of Mexican American Subordination in Texas," Social Science Quarterly (March, 1973).

32. Carey McWilliams, North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 101.

33. T. R. Fehrenbach, Fire and Blood (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 509-534. For descriptive accounts of local banditry and guerilla warfare, see also Frank C. Pierce, A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Co., 1917); J. Lee Stambaugh and Lillian J. Stambaugh, The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas (San Antonio: Naylor, 1954); and John R. Peavy, Echoes From the Rio Grande (Brownsville: Springman-King, 1963).

34. Anthony K. Knopp, "The Problems and Opinions of Foreigners in Mexico During the American Intervention of 1914," South Texas Journal of Research and the Humanities (Fall 1977).

35. See Fehrenbach, 1973, and Juan Gomez-Quiñones, "Plan de San Diego Reviewed," Aztlan (Spring, 1970).

36. David Montejano, "Race, Labor Repression, and Capitalistic Agriculture: Notes From South Texas, 1920-1930," (working paper series, Institute for the Study of Social Change, University of California, Berkeley, 1977).

37. Ibid.

38. Miguel León-Portilla, "The Norteño Variety of Mexican Culture: An Ethnohistorical Approach," in Edward H. Spicer and Raymond H. Thompson, eds., Plural Society in the Southwest (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975).

39. Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the U.S.: Dimmitt County, Winter Garden District, South Texas (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1930), p. 340.

40. See among many others Rudolph F. Acuña, Occupied America: The

Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972).

41. Montejano, 1977, p. 16.

42. For a concise summary of patron politics in the Valley before 1930, see O.D. Weeks, "The Texas-Mexican and the Politics of South Texas," American Political Science Review (August, 1930), pp. 606-627. For a sample of pre-World War Two voting patterns, see Edgar G. Shelton, "Political Conditions Among Texas Mexicans Along the Rio Grande," (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1946). For ethnographic studies of Anglo-Mexican American relations (including political relations) in the Valley agricultural towns of McAllen and Weslaco, see Ozzie G. Simmons, "Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans in South Texas: A Study of Dominant-Subordinate Group Relations," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), and Arthur J. Rubel, Across the Tracks: Mexican Americans in a Texas City (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), respectively. For a generalized discussion on South Texas politics which differentiates the Valley from other areas of South Texas, see Michael V. Miller, "Chicano Community Control in South Texas: Problems and Prospects," The Journal of Ethnic Studies (Fall, 1975).

43. For a description of 1937 farm labor organizing attempts in the Valley, see the classic monograph by Stuart Jamieson, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin No. 836, 1945).

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49. William Ryan, Blaming the Victim (New York: Random House, 1971).

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51. See McBride, 1963, for a narrative from the agribusiness perspective on the Bracero Program and its gradual demise in the Valley. Also, see David E. Vassberg, "The Use of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as an Agricultural Work Force in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas," (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1966).

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53. Martinez, 1977.

54. Jorge A. Bustamante, "Commodity Migrants: Structural Analysis of Mexican Immigration to the United States," in Stanley R. Ross, ed., Views Across the Border: The United States and Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978).

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61. Antonio Ugalde, "Regional Political Processes and Mexican Politics on the Border," in Stanley R. Ross, ed., Views Across the Border (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978).

62. Raul A. Fernandez, The United States-Mexico Border: A Politico-Economic Profile (Notre Dame, Ind.: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 129.

63. Carlos Monsivais, "The Culture of the Mexican Frontier: The Mexican Side," in Stanley R. Ross, ed., Views Across the Border (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), p. 65.

64. Martinez, 1977.

65. Leonard Cardenas, Jr., "Contemporary Problems of Local Government in Mexico," Western Political Quarterly (18, 1965), p. 861.

66. C. Daniel Dillman, "Urban Growth Along Mexico's Northern Border and the Mexican National Border Program," The Journal of Developing Areas (Vol. 4, July, 1970). Also see David S. North, The Border Crossers: People Who Live in Mexico and Work in the United States (Washington, D.C.: TransCentury Corp., 1970).

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