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The Emergence of Mexican Immigrant Communities in the State of Georgia

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Preface

Between 1990 and the year 2000, the state of Georgia experienced a dramatic increase in its Mexican-origin immigrant community. During this period, existing population rates for this group more than doubled. However, before the latter part of the twentieth century very few Mexican nationals chose to immigrate to this area of the Southeastern United States. Only sixty thousand lived in Georgia before the 1980s; this figure increased beyond two hundred thousand by 2004. A variety of factors caused the rapid growth in the state's immigration rates. The preparations for the 1996 Summer Olympics left a lasting impact on the region. Furthermore, the growth of Atlanta and other areas encouraged new employment opportunities. Mexican nationals responded to this increased demand for labor, filling positions in construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. While the state benefited from the availability of new low-wage workers,

some public leaders sought to politicize immigration fears. With the arrival of the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act, which became law on July 1, 2007, legislators endeavored to address perceived immigration problems in the state by requiring public agencies and contractors to verify legal residency as a pre-requisite for services, benefits, and employment. Furthermore, the new law ordered local and state law enforcement to report detained illegal immigrants to the Department of Homeland Security for deportation. Their action reflected historical trends in the United States, such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which sought to regulate and limit the flow of immigrants into the nation. However, the causes of these political concerns rest within Georgia itself. The demand for labor fueled by the Olympic Games and subsequent economic growth encouraged and sustained the arrival of Mexican nationals to the state. By studying Georgia's immigration experience within a larger historical context, this paper demonstrates how political machinations can impede sound civic discourse and economic and community development.

Introduction

The current study integrates and analyzes recent scholarship on migration and immigration cycles (e.g., Delgado Wise & Favela, 2004; Herrera-Lima, 2005; Jacoby, 2006) to understand Georgia's post-1990 growth in Mexican immigration relative to future trends and regional consequences. The immigration cycle represents an attempt by specialists in this field to model the development of transnational communities within the United States. The push/pull factors of immigration and social networks are two central components in the immigration cycle model. The former describes the complex process

by which individuals make the decision to migrate to a specific region. In *La Dinámica de la Emigración Mexicana (The Dynamic of Mexican Emigration, 1999)*, Agustín Escobar-Latapí and his colleagues discuss these push/pull factors. They note the impact of labor demand as an important component. Escobar writes that “the creation of a good number of low-paying jobs in manufacturing and services were significant factors in... the insertion of Mexicans into [U.S.] urban economies since the 1970s.”¹ Since social networks may be described as entities, including ethnic associations, that offer feelings of kinship and familiarity to new immigrants that allow individuals to create new bonds within the transnational community.² I return to the analysis of social networks in the section “The Vietnam Interlude and the Role of Social Networks, 1964-1985,” which includes a study of additional components within the immigration cycle, such as commercial and political elements, as well as a brief examination of parallels between Mexican and African-American migration trends.

The analysis of existing scholarship that situates this paper, theoretically, is complemented by a narrative approach to trace the history of Mexican migration into the United States, in which immigration cycle analysis plays a central role. The analysis of migration cycles at the national level is divided into three major periods. The first begins in 1880 with the appearance of U.S. labor recruitment agents in Mexico and continues until the termination of the Emergency Farm Labor Program Act in 1964. This era covers

¹ Agustín Escobar-Latapí, Frank D. Bean and Stanley Weintraub, *La Dinámica de la Emigración Mexicana* (Mexico, D.F.: Centro de Investigaciones, 1999), 112.

² Luís Rodolfo Morán Quiroz, “Las organizaciones de migrantes, su impacto y evolución en la recepción de persona y el envío de recursos,” (pp. 37-45) in Raul Delgado-Wise and Margarita Favela, eds., *Nuevas Tendencias y Desafíos de la Migración Internacional México-Estados Unidos* (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad de la Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004), 38-9.

all major components of the immigration cycle and serves as a strong starting point. The next period begins in 1970 with the acceleration of economic growth along the border and expansion of Mexican immigration outside the American Southwest. It ends with the Immigration Reform and Control Act, an uneasy legislative compromise passed in 1986 that sought increased regulation over migration to the United States. The third and final period extends from 1990 to 2006, encompassing the economic growth of the last decade of the twentieth century that also exposed weaknesses in U.S. immigration law. The study then segues into an examination of Georgia as a regional reflection of national trends vis-à-vis the growth of its Mexican immigrant community during the nineties.

No model can expect to recreate the complexity of human decision-making in its entirety. Instead, it should be used as a guide that allows one to grasp the various components inherent to an organic process. For an immigration cycle to exist and sustain itself, two factors must remain constant: job demand and the arrival of new migrants to the receiver region (Escobar-Latapí, 1999). These constants serve as the foundation that facilitates the growth of social networks. Once pioneering immigrants arrive in a new location, their connection to family and place of origin attracts additional migrants (see, Herrera-Lima, 2005)—a process which is given greater treatment later in this paper. The development of these social networks broadens a community's ability to support and respond to new arrivals, often accelerating the immigration settlement process (Jacoby, 2006). With the appearance of a numerically prominent ethnic minority, commercial ventures eventually respond to the needs of the emergent community (Herrera-Lima, 1999). Existing businesses adapt their models, while the appearance of others, such as

ethnic grocery stores and media outlets, contribute to the formation of a transnational marketplace.³

Subsequent elements of the immigration cycle correspond to actions within the broader local U.S. community. Debates over the value of the migrant presence emerge as the general population becomes aware of this new or newly visible minority. One side supports this growth as a component of multiculturalism, while the other views it as encroachment and opposes it. These dichotomous perspectives represent the differences between cultural integration and assimilation, which will be discussed in further detail during my interview with Leonardo Jaramillo from the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta. Cultural integration, in this study, refers to the broadening of a host nation's identity with the addition of ethnic elements brought by an immigrant group. This can be seen, for example, in the form of St. Patrick's Day celebrations in major U.S. cities displaying Irish cultural identity within an American national context. On the other hand, assimilation endeavors to expunge the arriving migrant community of its original cultural identity in favor of the majority culture present in the receiver nation (see Gutierrez, 1995). With debate comes government response at the local and federal levels. Utilizing existing statutes, law enforcement agencies may take strong or soft stances depending on the political climate. The escalation of the aforementioned components: job demand, social networks, immigrant expression, and public response eventually give rise to the final phase of this cycle, which is legislative/executive action.⁴ On two occasions the federal government, first through the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration (1933-45)

³ Fernando Herrera-Lima, *Vidas Itinerantes en un Espacio Laboral Transnacional* (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, 2005), 270-5; 319.

⁴ Tamar Jacoby, "Immigration Nation," *Foreign Affairs* 11 (2006) [archive online]: <http://www.foreignaffairs.org>, 5-6.

and later under the United States Congress in the 1980s, sought to engineer compromises between the demand for cheap labor and the fear among some citizens of a rapidly growing immigrant population. These agreements tend to prove ineffectual since they fail to take into account evolving factors in the labor market. In the case of the Bracero program, for example, opponents rightly charged that it permitted employer abuses; 1986 ICRA, in turn, lacked measures that provided an adequate, or adjustable, number of worker visas.⁵ As long as labor demand remains constant, the presence of these political compromises does not cause a major disruption in the arrival of new migrants. To the contrary, as each period of the immigration cycle discussed in this paper transitions to the next phase, normal population growth and related employment opportunities can generate increased in the number of undocumented workers to that receiving region.

In many ways, Georgia is a microcosm of the larger transnational migration issue. Within a brief span of fifteen years all of the components of the immigration cycle and additional push/pull factors manifested themselves. Beginning with the demand for labor ignited by the construction boom around the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, the state quickly became one of the leading growth centers for Mexican migrant workers. To understand how this issue developed in Georgia, we now examine the historical background of United States-Mexico immigration phenomenon beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Historic Transnational Linkages along the United States-Mexico Border, 1880-1964

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) that ended the Mexican War and the Gadsden Purchase (1853) established the modern United States-Mexico border.

⁵ Jacoby, "Immigration Nation," 7.

Subsequently, a long history of migration emerged between the two nations. While Mexican nationals maintained a presence in the borderlands for many years, including those who became U.S. citizens when the U.S. obtained the Northern Mexican territories from Mexico, their number saw a marked increase at the onset of the twentieth century. The availability of jobs in the United States proved to be a major factor for attracting labor to this area. This migration trend broadened with the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The Immigration and Naturalization Service recorded between 1899 and 1920 the legal entrance of more than half a million Mexicans to the U.S.⁶ A growing population moved into the borderlands, becoming one of the most significant new minorities in the country.

An early immigration study, the Dillingham Commission (1907), noted the unskilled quality of Mexican labor. These immigrants became stereotyped by political and social groups, which prevented some (including U.S. citizens of Mexican-origin) from obtaining higher paying jobs. Nevertheless, the large majority did come in search of work based in the agricultural sector. Many arrived on foot, coming from nearby Mexican provinces. A policy shift in the United States encouraged their arrival. Following the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement that limited Japanese labor, demand for unskilled Mexican workers increased. American labor agents traveled to Mexico, a practice dating back to the 1880s, in order to attract workers to venture to the U.S. A modest number arrived: seventy-eight thousand by 1890. In 1920, more than four hundred thousand Mexican nationals lived on the U.S. side of the

⁶ Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 7.

border. This development continued with labor imported from Mexico dominating the unskilled jobs in the vegetable, cotton, fruit, mining, and brush-clearing sectors.⁷

Two important events marked the period between 1917 and 1924. First, the U.S. Congress imposed a literacy exam on Mexican nationals, and second, the creation of the U.S. Border Patrol. While not well enforced, the former established one of the first official impediments to the arrival of Mexicans. The latter was meant to intercept smugglers moving Chinese and Europeans into the country; however, the patrol did set early ground rules for interacting with Mexican nationals. During this period, in conjunction with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the Border Patrol conducted raids of Mexican communities in the United States.⁸ Many current issues, including fear of law enforcement and social pressure for unskilled labor began in this period of the early twentieth century. Furthermore, in 1926 the U.S. Council of Social Sciences invited Manuel Gamio to study the phenomenon of Mexican immigration to the U.S. An eminent anthropologist, Gamio's research produced two works: *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (1930) and *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant* (1931). He found that Mexican immigrants resided in each of the forty-eight states, and that they sent millions of dollars home over a near decade-long span, among other findings.

Before the 1930s, the INS could file twenty-six charges, including prostitution, inability to work, and even epilepsy as grounds for deportation.⁹ The most common, however, was illegal immigration. Many Mexican nationals fell under this charge

⁷ David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 44-5.

⁸ Balderrama, *Decade of Betrayal*, 8-9.

⁹ Balderrama, 51.

because of the relative ease of entering the United States unofficially. Once apprehended, an individual could appeal for political asylum and in rare cases, oftentimes on the grounds of religious persecution, the INS upheld their cases. The *Cristero* Rebellion, an uprising against the anti-Catholic policies of the Mexican government occurred during this period. Nevertheless, the majority of individuals apprehended by immigration authorities agreed to return willingly to Mexico, because a formal hearing could lead to their permanent expulsion from the United States. By accepting deportation, the Mexican nationals in question could retain the option to return north in the future.

The Great Depression caused a major shift in the status quo along the border. On April 20, 1935 an article titled “The Immigration Crisis” appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. It argued that, beginning in 1880, if the United States had barred twenty million immigrants from entering the country, then no job crisis would exist. The article stirred considerable outrage among Americans. The U.S. Congress responded by considering at least six separate bills to reduce the presence of legal and illegal aliens in the country. One of strongest, H.R. 5921, proposed to qualify aliens for deportation if they did not declare the intent to become naturalized citizens within one year of arrival in the United States. It also proposed to allow law enforcement new powers of arrest, as well as the ability to detain suspected aliens. Furthermore, between 1930 and 1939, the Bureau of Immigration (later, Immigration and Naturalization Service, and, in 2003, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) conducted an aggressive programmatic effort, known as the Mexican repatriation, against immigrant communities (Koch, 2006).¹⁰

¹⁰ Wendy Koch, “U.S. urged to apologize for 1930s deportations,” *USA Today.com*. (2006, April 5). Retrieved October 6, 2007, at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-04-04-1930s-deportees-cover_x.htm; R. R. McKay (2001, June 6). *Handbook of Texas Online*,

Mexican nationals represented more than forty-six percent of all individuals deported from the U.S. during this period.¹¹

Political exigencies created by the onset of the Second World War influenced another change in Washington's policy toward Mexican immigrants. The Roosevelt Administration sought to cope with labor shortages caused by the war effort. In August 1942, the Roosevelt Administration reached a special agreement with the Mexican government. The Emergency Farm Labor Program (later dubbed, "The Bracero Program") imported Mexican workers ("braceros" or those with *brazos*, the Spanish word for the human body part, *arm*) to regions identified by the U.S. Labor Department as suffering from labor shortages (Marentes, 1997).¹² September saw the first five hundred braceros arrive at sugar-beet fields in Northern California. Additional contract workers entered the program in subsequent years. More than two hundred thousand Mexican nationals arrived as braceros by 1947 with fifty-seven percent working in Californian farming operations.¹³ The Bracero Program continued into the 1950s and 1960s and proved a controversial subject in the U.S. political debate.

Likewise, demographic shifts and economic trends in Mexico eventually fueled additional immigration trends northward. Cities throughout the country experienced rapid growth as increasing numbers of rural residents arrived in search of jobs. This coincided with a decrease in agricultural sector jobs in Mexico. Beginning in the 1940s, this field

s.v. Retrieved October 6, 2007 <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/pqmyk.html>.

¹¹ Balderrama, 54-6.

¹² Carlos Marentes, *Los Braceros, 1942-1964*. (1997), Retrieved October 6, 2007 at <http://www.farmworkers.org/benglish.html>.

¹³ Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 134.

lost more than thirty percent of its employment capacity.¹⁴ Workers moved to urban areas, especially Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey in search of manufacturing positions. Other individuals, accustomed to manual labor, benefited from the bracero program finding temporary employment in the United States. For a time, this situation stabilized labor trends between the two countries. The manufacturing and service industries supported Mexican workers, while agricultural needs in the U.S. siphoned off unskilled laborers. However, by the 1960s this status quo began to deteriorate.

During the Kennedy Administration (1961-1963), a coalition of Bracero program supporters saw it renewed by Congress. Corporate agricultural lobbyists, factions in the Democratic Party, and some religious organizations composed the advocacy bloc in favor of this policy. However, in an ironic twist, a large portion of the Mexican-American community opposed continuation of the Emergency Farm Labor Program. A complicated mixture of fear and sympathy permeated this group. Some leaders saw the bracero workers as a threat to the Mexican-American community's ability to assimilate within the greater U.S. culture. Others cited the program's economic abuses as grounds for termination: "[it benefits] the employer who pays the unfortunate alien as little as seventeen cents an hour."¹⁵ The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the League of United Latin Americans, though sometimes divided on how to address the issue, supported this policy's termination. In 1964, opponents succeeded in convincing Congress to refuse authorization of the Bracero Program for another cycle.

The cancellation of the Bracero system marked the end of the first major U.S.-Mexico immigration cycle. Beginning in the 1880s, this sequence began with the demand

¹⁴ Escobar-Latapí, *La Dinamica*, 15.

¹⁵ Quoted in Gutierrez, 165.

for affordable labor along the border. The subsequent restrictions against Chinese and Japanese workers increased the recruitment rates of Mexican nationals for use in agriculture and manufacturing jobs.¹⁶ This amplified the visibility of Mexican cultural communities within the U.S. southwest and would lead to the second major cycle beginning in the 1970s.

The Vietnam Interlude and the Role of Social Networks, 1964-1985

While the outbreak of the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement distracted the U.S. public at large, David E. Lorey's *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century* noted that the Bracero program's termination had a significant impact on the legal status of Mexican-origin migrants. In conjunction with changes made to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965 and 1976, the status of many of these transnational workers shifted from legal to illegal. This change, however, did not deter continued migration; by 1986 when the U.S. Congress allowed for a limited amnesty more than three million individuals applied.¹⁷ This trend in immigration occurred, in part, due to continued demand for labor along the border. The northern territories of Mexico attracted workers from that nation's central and southern states, while the proximity of well-paying jobs in the U.S. Southwest encouraged migrants to continue moving northward.

Manufacturing and the rise of agribusiness fueled growth along Mexico's side of the border. Private corporations in states such as Sonora consolidated family-owned farmlands. Furthermore, Mexico's population growth northern territories outpaced

¹⁶ Gutierrez, 44-5.

¹⁷ David Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century: A History of Economic and Social Transformation* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999), 163-4.

growth in the American Southwest.¹⁸ Internal migrations brought individuals from cities and rural regions in central Mexico to the border. While California and Texas maintained the largest border populations during the 1960s and 1970s, this growth trend saw the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Sonora, and Tamaulipas all exceed one million inhabitants. Migrants came in search of manufacturing and agricultural jobs on either side of the international boundary. The city of Los Angeles emerged as a critical urban sector with fifty-five percent of Mexican immigrants to California settling inside its limits.¹⁹ The rapid growth of immigration during the 1970s, despite the loss of the bracero program, changed the face of the American Southwest. No longer did Mexican nationals simply represent a visible minority. They left an indelible impression on the region as the modern U.S. and Mexican economies merged along the border. However, this growth did not remain isolated to the southwest. Cities throughout the United States experienced increases in their Mexican immigrant population as social networks emerged in the Midwest and Northeast as major attracting components for new migrants.

Faraway from the borderlands, New York City became another important settlement for Mexican nationals. A comprehensive investigation conducted by Fernando Herrera-Lima with the Autonomous Metropolitan University of Mexico City used this city as a case study. His work *Itinerant Lives in a Transnational Labor Space* noted the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from two Mexican states: Puebla and Tlaxcala.²⁰ Beginning in the 1980s, these groups arrived as part of a larger wave of immigration from Latin American countries. Family bonds played a fundamental role in the establishment

¹⁸ John M. Hart, ed., *Border Crossing: Mexican and Mexican-American Workers* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1998), 118.

¹⁹ Hart, *Border Crossing*, 118.

²⁰ Herrera-Lima, *Vidas Itinerantes*, 114.

of their transnational communities. Herrera-Lima studied the life of an immigrant dubbed *Doña Rosa* and her descendents to determine the influence of familial ties on migration patterns. He examined four generations of *Rosa's* family life, but protected her true identity because of issues pertaining to her legal status in the United States. Born in 1923, *Rosa* was the only transnational migrant among her brothers, parents, and five spouses from Puebla. However, once she made the decision to move, an interesting trend developed. All but one of her children immigrated to the United States as workers. The majority of her grandchildren lived north of the border and two were native-born U.S. citizens. Of this group only one of the third-generation descendents remained in Mexico and two others, after living in the United States for a number of years, later returned to their ancestral homeland.²¹

Rosa's decision to emigrate served as an attraction factor for subsequent relatives. Living in Yonkers, NY encouraged these additional family members to settle in the same area; her son Ricardo eventually opened his own restaurant business in the city. Their example, influenced by social networks, highlights the larger trend of immigration. As many tens of thousands of Mexican nationals entered the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, the power of familial bonds continued as an integral component of the immigration issue.

Other social networks, such as clubs and migrant associations also sustained these trends as new individuals entered transnational communities in the U.S. While the majority considered familial support as an important aspect of life, twenty-five percent of Mexican males preferred club-oriented social networks. These figures differed among

²¹ Herrera-Lima, *Vidas Itinerantes*, 232-7.

female migrants, however, who rated the importance of this form of support at only ten percent.²² Nevertheless, social networks, regardless of type, allowed migrants to better integrate into the local ethnic community, develop personal contacts, and find jobs.

Employment came in the form of restaurant and sweatshop labor for many New York Mexicans. The vast majority began work in small businesses with fewer than ten workers. Those migrants who later discarded the sojourner expectation of returning to Mexico represented a percentage that moved into larger businesses or started their own. Over time these bonds between New York City and Mexico saw visual representations emerge. Local graffiti in Chinantla, Puebla lauded Bronx gangs, while New York license plates on the cars of visiting transnational workers appeared around Puebla and Tlaxcala. Furthermore, products popular in these Mexican states eventually arrived in New York City.²³ Once the process of region-focused migration began, powerful forces of family and society perpetuated this trend in U.S. communities with subsequent manifestations of cultural interchange.

The attraction of new migrants to certain regions, because of familial bonds in that area is not unique to Mexican immigration history. Herrera-Lima's study draws interesting parallels with the development of African-American social networks in the northern United States. Between 1916 and 1930, more than one million African-Americans left their communities in the Southeast.²⁴ They migrated to cities including Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Detroit in search of jobs and better lives. Called the "Great Migration," it represented a mass movement that saw roughly sixteen thousand African-

²² Herrera-Lima, 193.

²³ Herrera-Lima, 318-9.

²⁴ Carole Marks, *Farewell: We're Good and Gone* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 1

Americans leaving the South each month. A series of factors ignited this process, while lawmakers later on sought to control and channel its momentum.

The Great Migration began thanks to labor shortages. Northern railroads and industrial ventures sent agents to southern states in search of large numbers of affordable workers. These representatives worked on commission, paid for every laborer they produced. Most operated within large cities and oftentimes spread news of employment opportunities by word of mouth so as to avoid attention from local authorities. Employment agents became the first line of communication between Northern demands for labor and its supply of workers in the South. The Pennsylvania Railroad imported twelve thousand black laborers in the summer of 1916 alone, while war-related industries also participated in this process. These labor agents proved so successful that one Louisiana state senator introduced legislation to prohibit African-Americans “from going north.”²⁵

Other important factors also contributed to this migration. While labor agents initiated the process, it required pioneering African-Americans to blaze the trail northward. Chicago became one of the primary destinations for immigrants. Its mills and stockyards, starved for labor during the First World War, employed many thousands of African-Americans. The rail system made Chicago one of the most accessible northern cities for black labor, especially from Mississippi. New arrivals moved into area slums including the tenements on Federal Street. The *Chicago Defender* emerged as one of the city’s most prominent ethnic presses; across the nation, many African-Americans read its

²⁵ Marks, *Farewell*, 22-3.

pages.²⁶ It became an influential media organ that attracted additional labor away from the economically backward southern states. *Defender* editors printed news of the migration under headlines titled “300 Leave for North.” Their goal was to encourage others to follow, often writing: “There are so many leaving... Waycross will be desolate soon.”²⁷ However, while newspapers played an important role, letters from migrants to relatives in the South generated crucial momentum.

Every new arrival to Chicago and other Northern cities forged an additional contact with the Southeast. No longer just promoted by company agents, soon brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters heralded the advantages of life above the Mason-Dixon line. Some observers argued that family letters convinced nine out of every ten migrants to make the journey. One woman’s letter is credited with bringing almost two hundred people northward. Correspondence included visions of social equality and upward mobility. One black worker wrote: “I was promoted on the first of the month. ...My children are going to the same school with the whites... there’s isn’t [sic] any ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir’”²⁸ Towns throughout the South saw large portions of their African-American population migrate. Many of these new arrivals chose urban centers with family members already present as their new homes.

Like Mexican nationals, African-Americans migrated northward in order to join family and improve their economic situation. The Southeast of the early twentieth century, similar to some regions of Mexico, could not absorb the large, local supply of

²⁶ Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 129-30.

²⁷ James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 87.

²⁸ Marks, 24.

labor. Instead, job demand elsewhere attracted these migrants to new cities. The growth of these transplanted communities saw the development of ethnic presses, as well as cultural and religious associations.²⁹ While differences certainly do exist between the African-American and Mexican communities, both groups of migrants in these new settings have share commonalities in their journey of moving to a new land, the adjustment to local customs, and, ultimately, the search for self-development, self-realization, community support, and community development. As can be seen from these examples, social networks in the Mexican and Africa-American migrant population provided compelling factors of attraction. Once a seed community formed it expanded with the arrival of new individuals. Growing beyond nuclear family ties, migrant associations formed and specialty businesses opened to address needs within the community. While responding to a demand, these commercial entities also perpetuated the trend as these good and services became in themselves attracting forces for additional migrants.³⁰ The 1970 and 1980s experienced both a profound increase in the national Hispanic population and additional rounds of legislation from the U.S. Congress.³¹

A New Cycle Emerges, 1970-1986

Mexican nationals represented a large percentage of the growing population of Hispanic-origin residents. During this period the overall U.S. Hispanic-origin population increased from an estimated nine million to more than fourteen million persons.³² Along the Border States, cultural convergence accelerated. Mexican nationals continued to

²⁹ Spear, 129-30.

³⁰ Herrera-Lima, 193

³¹ Hart, 118-126.

³² U.S. Census Bureau, *Georgia, Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790-1990*, 13 September 2002 [archive online]: <http://www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0056/tab25.pdf>, 1.

move into their country's northern states in search of jobs. Populations in Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon exceeded two million for the first time, while California grew above twenty-three million. Over two hundred million Mexican nationals crossed the U.S. border at San Diego during the Eighties, more than doubling 1960s figures.³³ The economic growth of northern Mexico and its proximity to the United States lowered the cost barriers for migration. Furthermore, the presence of manufacturing jobs and the growth of urbanization encouraged these immigration trends upward. Between 1980 and 1990, metropolitan areas with populations exceeding one million grew at a faster rate than any other category in the United States.³⁴ However, these expanding figures did not exist within a social vacuum. Some Americans viewed these trends with alarm. A new immigration cycle emerged as a result of Mexican population growth since the 1970s. Legislators in the U.S. Congress and state assemblies addressed this issue and the corollary of undocumented labor.

Already in California lawmakers debated the merits and impact of immigration on their communities. In 1970, Redwood City State Assemblyman Dixon Arnett proposed a bill that sought to impose criminal sanctions against employers who knowingly hired illegal aliens. Two years later in the U.S. Congress, Judiciary Chairman Peter Rodino of New Jersey held a number of hearings into the question of immigration. These activities, while they did not alter the immediate political landscape, paved the way for one of the most important immigration measures of the latter twentieth century: Senate Bill 1200. Powerful forces within the nation's capital mobilized to contend with the perceived threat

³³ Hart, 118-126.

³⁴ William H. Frey and Alden Spear, Jr., "The Revival of Metropolitan Population Growth in the United States: An Assessment of Findings from the 1990 Census," *Population and Development Review*, 18 (March 1992), 131.

of rapid growth in the Mexican demographic. The fourth phase of this second major immigration cycle emerged in the mid-1980s as the U.S. Congress proposed new legislation to resolve political and social tensions resulting from the issue of undocumented labor.³⁵

On May 23, 1985, Senator Alan K. Simpson of Wyoming introduced his motion to revise existing statutes on the control of “unauthorized immigration into the United States....”³⁶ He targeted the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) for an overhaul. Created in 1952, the INA had collected all existing measures and provisions relating to immigration into a single legal canon. Simpson hoped to reform this Act, restricting the flow of undocumented workers into the United States. His bill also sought to provide amnesty for an estimated 2.5 million illegal aliens who met specific criteria under the proposed law. During this period, President Ronald Reagan expressed support for new measures that addressed weaknesses in existing immigration law and included a provision for amnesty. He appeared receptive to Simpson’s bill throughout 1985.

Known also as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), Bill 1200 worked its way through the Senate’s legislative process over the following four months. Divided into six sections, the Senate version addressed a variety of immigration concerns. Title I revised the INA to make it unlawful for employers to knowingly hire illegal immigrants. This section also called for the establishment of an employment verification system in conjunction with the Justice Department. However, the bill’s authors made an interesting point on what would become an important topic of debate after the year 2000. Though it

³⁵ Gutierrez, 189

³⁶ Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 [archive online]: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d099:SN01200:@@L&summ2=m&|TOM:/bss/d099query.html#summary>.

called for a verification system, SB 1200 also noted, "...nothing in this act shall be construed to authorize a national identity card or system."³⁷ Furthermore, it ordered that all information rendered from the system could be used only for verification and not law enforcement functions.

The second title addressed the question of legalization. It called for the Attorney General to adjust to temporary resident status of those aliens who met specific criteria. Individuals must have entered and lived continuously within the United States in unlawful status prior to January 1, 1982; they must also apply within the eighteen month grace period allowed by the Act. Additional requirements restricted eligibility to those guilty of no felonies and fewer than three misdemeanors.³⁸ This section provided an avenue for many hundred of thousands of illegal aliens to rectify their status. On account of its short grace period and restriction to undocumented immigrants who arrived before 1982, the proposed act provided only limited solutions. The third segment of SB 1200 sought to implement long-term resolutions for aliens, residency status, and employment.

Title III reformed legal immigration to the United States. It separated temporary agricultural labor from other types of labor under H-2A visas. This class of immigrant entry applications covered unskilled workers; the Act, however, placed a variety of restrictions on visa availability. Employers needed to prove that "there are not enough local U.S. workers for the job; employed U.S. workers' wages and working conditions [must] not be adversely affected." Businesses also could not use this program to import labor if the job is "open because of a strike or lock-out." Furthermore, while the Act

³⁷ Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Title I.

³⁸ IRCA, Title II.

increased the annual quota from 600 to 5,000 visas this provision did not allow for future adjustments if demand for immigrant labor increased.³⁹

The Senate passed SB 1200 with sixty-nine legislators voting in the affirmative on September 19, 1985. It then entered the House of Representatives, sponsored by lawmakers Romano Mazzoli (D-KY) and Peter Rodino (D-NJ) on November 21, as H.R. 3810. Another eleven months lapsed as the House debated the merits of the bill. It passed by 266 to 130 votes in October 1986 and returned to the Senate for approval before heading to the White House. On November 6, 1986, President Regan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act into law.

Within days of passage, it received negative reviews from the news media. The *Wall Street Journal*'s edition for November 10 criticized IRCA as too ambiguous and confusing: "Congressional backers don't even pretend to understand [it]... Rep. Charles Schumer (D-NY) calls the bill '...a riverboat gamble.'" The article proceeded to raise further concerns about potential contradictions within the new law. It noted how "employers can be sued for hiring [illegal aliens] and not hiring [U.S. citizens who appear foreign]." Furthermore, the amnesty provision received criticism, as the *Wall Street Journal* cited "some ironies" written into IRCA: "[Illegal aliens] in the U.S. since January 1982 can apply... but this means aliens who entered legally... are not entitled to become citizens under the amnesty." The newspaper also reported that a variety of political and social groups, including the National Council of *La Raza* and the U.S. Catholic Conference were preparing to bring discriminations suits against the federal government. Elsewhere, *Wall Street Journal* sources in Florida and California had

³⁹ IRCA, Title III.

already reported that “some illegals are having to post bonds equal to the potential [IRCA] fine and others are being fired by anxious employers.”⁴⁰ Despite its attempt to rationalize the immigration process, the new era ushered in by IRCA began with the political confusion and contradictions that become a hallmark of the issue in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Political Shortcomings and the National Landscape, 1986-2000

Almost twenty years after passage, the two most important lawmakers who helped form the Act considered its legacy. Now retired, Alan Simpson (R-WY) and Romano Mazzoli wrote a joint article in the Washington Post’s September 15, 2006 online edition. They defended the legislation against more recent criticisms. When drafting the IRCA, Simpson and Mazzoli had hoped to develop a responsible, bi-partisan answer to immigration. Guided by the findings of the Congressional Commission on Immigration Reform they created what became the IRCA’s three-pronged approach to the issue. The first leg strengthened enforcement, the second developed a temporary worker system that avoided the bracero program’s exploitative legacy, and the third legalized existing undocumented aliens. They blame the failure of the Act on subsequent Republican and Democratic administrations’ inability to enforce it. To work properly, the IRCA required consistent funding, which both legislators claimed subsequent administrations did not provide; second, the tamper proof employment verification system never materialized.⁴¹ They believed their “three-legged stool approach” was still relevant and called for the House and Senate to resolve differences in their present immigration bills. While

⁴⁰ *Wall Street Journal* (New York) 10 November 1986.

⁴¹ Romano L. Mazzoli and Alan K. Simpson, “Enacting Immigration Reform, Again,” *Washington Post Online*, 15 September 2006 [archive online]: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/14/AR2006091401179.html>.

Simpson and Mazzoli defended the landmark Act near its twentieth anniversary, major weaknesses existed within the 1986 law from the beginning. Despite their claims of poor funding, the very language of IRCA contained its central problems.

Two major structural predicaments emerged within a few years of the bill's passage. First, IRCA failed to consider the influence of family connections as a major encouraging factor for waves of migration. It granted more than one million undocumented individuals permanent residence in the United States. The law did not, however, allow a path for citizenship for family members living outside the United States and thus these individuals represented a prospective new wave of illegal immigrants by overstaying their legally allotted visa-related time restriction or not by having a visa upon entering.⁴² Second, IRCA's authors failed to include a provision that could adjust the availability of temporary worker visas. While it increased the supply from six hundred to five thousand visas, this new number did not adequately address the issue of labor demand. The arrival of new immigrants quickly outpaced the visa system established by ICRA. Some analysts have called for the availability of an additional four to five hundred thousand unskilled worker visas in order to meet the current labor demands.⁴³ These structural vulnerabilities within the Act became apparent during the 1990s when dramatic increases in national and regional Hispanic population rates exposed its shortcomings.

Between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic community in the United States increased by 57.9%. This eclipsed the country's overall population growth of just thirteen percent. Individuals of Mexican origin living in the United States made up almost sixty percent of

⁴² Hans P. Johnson, *At Issue: Illegal Immigration* (Public Policy Institute of California, 2006) [archive online]: http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/atissue/AI_406HJAI.pdf, 6.

⁴³ Jacoby, 7.

the Hispanic/Latino demographic, roughly twenty million persons.⁴⁴ Though the highest concentration remained along the U.S. southern border, every state in the Union experienced growth in the Hispanic demographic. Large communities of Mexicans, however, began appearing outside of traditional population centers, entering new areas including Georgia, Arkansas, Alabama, and North Carolina. Mexicans also represented the youngest of all Hispanic demographic groups with a median age of 24 years.⁴⁵ The growth of this community and its relatively unskilled nature, reflected increases in American economic vitality and the need for affordable labor in order to fill positions in growing industries such as construction.

Demand for imported labor outpaced the U.S. Congressionally allotted limit of five thousand visas placed on it by Congress. An article appeared on this topic in the November/December 2006 issue of *Foreign Affairs* authored by Tamar Jacoby, editor of *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American*. A fellow at the Manhattan Institute, her article “Immigration Nation” noted an interesting trend in the U.S. national labor market. Since 1960 the number of American men who withdrew from high school before graduation fell from half of the population to below ten percent. Likewise, the construction industry began experiencing a shortfall in unskilled labor during the latter twentieth century as it struggled to fill an estimated 185,000 new jobs each year.⁴⁶ She argued that the limit of five thousand H-2A visas did not reflect the reality of demand. The federal government failed to address the effect of

⁴⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *Hispanic Population: Census 2000 Brief* [archive online]: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-3.pdf>, 2.

⁴⁵ Institute for Health Policy Studies, *Fact Sheet on Latino Youth* (San Francisco: University of California, 2002) [archive online]: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/Latino.pop.pdf>, 1.

⁴⁶ Tamar Jacoby, “Immigration Nation”, 2.

population and economic growth on the United States during this period. In her article, Jacoby called for an increase in the number of available unskilled worker. Twenty years after the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, the country had experienced more than a decade of rapid population growth.

In 2004, the University of Zacatecas conducted a study of 1990s migration patterns. Edited by Raul Delgado-Wise and Margarita Favela-Gavia, *New Tendencies and Challenges of the International Migration between Mexico and the United States* uncovered an array of interesting statistics. More than a third of the estimated 8.2 million Mexico-born persons living in the United States maintained undocumented status. The number of Mexicans crossing the border for temporary work fluctuated between eight hundred thousand and one million individuals annually; a rate ten times greater than the previous two decades combined. Furthermore, more than three hundred thousand Mexican nationals established permanent residences in the United States each year during this period.⁴⁷

The Zacatecas study reinforced the view of social networks as important factors in the formation of these aforementioned communities. It noted that members of informal networks share information on job availability and recognize the need to develop permanent associations. Clubs form in the community providing social outlets and the opportunity to develop bonds of mutual obligation to help fellow immigrants. As the

⁴⁷ Margarita Favela-Gavia and Raúl Delgado-Wise, "Presentación" (pp. 5-9) in Raul Delgado-Wise and Margarita Favela, eds., *Nuevas Tendencias y Desafíos de la Migración Internacional México-Estados Unidos* (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad de la Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004), 5.

population grows these associations mature to include legal and financial services.⁴⁸ By the latter twentieth century social networks had developed sophisticated mechanisms to absorb new members and disseminate information. In 1992, a major association, headquartered in Los Angeles, emerged from the consolidation of thirty separate clubs. Consisting mostly of Mexican nationals from the state of Nayarit, this immigrant association represented three decades of activity in the United States. Similar associations formed across the country.⁴⁹ The presence of social networks helped contribute to the mobility of Mexican labor within the United States.

High rates of employment and worker mobilization provided the basic elements for the dramatic growth of this demographic in the state of Georgia. Social networks received reports on the state of job markets throughout the country. If the opportunities in one area were limited, then migratory labor shifted to cities and regions where demand was higher.⁵⁰ The Zacatecas study provided interesting statistics about labor participation within this demographic. More than eighty percent of men and forty-five percent of women in the Mexican immigrant community participated in the U.S. work force in 1997. Of this group, more than ninety percent maintained some form of employment.⁵¹

Throughout the nineties, illegal immigration corresponded with U.S. unemployment rates. Between 1990 and 1992, when the American rate of unemployment

⁴⁸ Luis Rodolfo Morán-Quiroz, “Las organizaciones de migrantes, su impacto y evolución en la recepción de personas y el envío de recursos,” (pp.37-45) in Delgado-Wise, *Nuevas Tendencias*, 38-9.

⁴⁹ Cecilia Imaz, “Las Organizaciones sociales de migrantes mexicanos en Estados Unidos: el caso del Club Social de Jala, Nayarit, en California y su gestión para la coexistencia de tradiciones populares,” (pp. 47-67) in Delgado-Wise, 58-9.

⁵⁰ Jacoby, 3.

⁵¹ Paz Trigueros-Lagareta, “La migración femenina mexicana hacia Estados Unidos y su participación en el Mercado Laboral de ese país,” (pp. 97-126) in Delgado-Wise, 112.

rose above seven percent, the annual number of illegal immigrants entering the country fell below four hundred thousand. However, as the economy began to recover and U.S. employment increased, so too did the presence of undocumented aliens. By the end of the decade, with the unemployment rate at its lowest, 4.1 percent in 2000, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated the inflow of illegal immigrants at seven hundred thousand persons.⁵² Combined with Mexico's rapidly expanding working-age population since the 1970s and that country's failure to absorb these increases, the presence of jobs north of the border increased the allure of emigration for many young Mexican nationals.⁵³

Labor Demands and New Immigrants in Georgia, 1990-2006

On September 17, 1990, a major impetus for migrant labor emerged in the state of Georgia.⁵⁴ The International Olympic Committee, after much consideration, selected the city of Atlanta as the site for the Games of the Twenty-Sixth Olympiad. It arrived after three years of planning on the part of local citizen Billy Payne and his team of volunteers who raised millions of dollars in private funds and promoted the city in seventy countries. To contemporary observers, Atlanta's ascendance represented the triumph of modernity over tradition. Supported by an excellent IOC bid that blended technology with professionalism and highlighting the city's financing capabilities, it defeated sentimental favorite Athens as the site for the Games' centennial.⁵⁵

The victory, however, necessitated considerable development in order to prepare Atlanta to receive sixteen thousand athletes and officials, as well as the estimated

⁵² Johnson, *Illegal Immigration*, 7.

⁵³ Frank D. Bean, ed., *Mexican and Central American Population and U.S. Immigration Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 16.

⁵⁴ *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (Atlanta), 16 September 1990.

⁵⁵ *AJC*, 17 September, 1990.

625,000 spectators. This project required the construction of more than 350 million dollars of new facilities including an eighty-five thousand-seat stadium, hotels, and additions to existing buildings. Georgia Tech was selected as the site for a new aquatics center with the capacity to hold fifteen thousand spectators. The IOC while the committee placed the Olympic Village athletic dormitories, valued at sixty-three million dollars, near Georgia State University. Furthermore, the city implemented urban renewal programs to update its appearance in a five-kilometer area called the “Olympic Circle” where most of the events were scheduled.⁵⁶

As the Olympic preparations progressed, however, the city came under criticism for delays. Like Barcelona, site of the 1992 Games, construction fell behind schedule. In 1994, some observers announced that Atlanta would be a failure if city administrators and the Metropolitan Olympic Committee failed to make necessary changes. Labor shortages presented one of the chief problems for the entire endeavor. In order to alleviate this dilemma, government officials encouraged the importation of new workers to the area. During a recent documentary on immigration, the former head of the Mexican Consulate in Atlanta, Teodoro Maus, discussed this policy. He explained that a ranking INS official contacted him to inform the Consulate that no immigration enforcement would occur between 1994 and 1996 in order to “present a nice face... to international visitors.” Aware of the recent criticisms in the press, however, Maus identified the underlying motive of this policy shift. The government wanted to avoid failure of the Olympics in Atlanta. They hoped the Consulate could “spread the word” through the Mexican

⁵⁶ *AJC*, 19 September 1990.

community that “labor was really needed here.”⁵⁷ It became an invitation to help build Atlanta into a venue ready for international attention. While Maus’s conversation occurred off the record, contemporary census data, as well as corroborating testimony from other public individuals, provided evidence that supported this informal agreement for new labor.

Before the Olympic period, only forty thousand Mexican nationals moved to Georgia during the 1980s, bringing the statewide Hispanic population to just above one hundred thousand individuals.⁵⁸ Between 1990 and 2000, however, this demographic more than doubled. By the close of the century, 275,288 Mexicans lived in the State. While Georgia’s overall population grew by twenty-six percent, the Hispanic-origin population increased at an average 299.6% to 435,227 persons.⁵⁹

A study conducted by the University of Georgia, using criteria similar to the U.S. Census Bureau, uncovered interesting figures on the increase of this community. They rated twenty-five counties with “explosive growth,” including Forsyth and Gwinnett registering Hispanic demographic increases between 599.2 and 6500 percent. An additional thirty-six counties experienced “rapid growth” while roughly ninety percent of the remaining areas saw “moderate growth” between 57.9 and 299.6 percent⁶⁰ In a short span of time, Georgia went from being an insignificant factor in the immigration debate to a state with one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations in the Southeast. Mexican immigrants composed roughly 58% of this demographic presence.

⁵⁷ Garrett DeHart, *Fighting 529: A Documentary* (Atlanta: GALEO, 2006), DVD.
⁵⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Georgia, Race and Hispanic Origin*, 1.
⁵⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Hispanic Population*, 4.
⁶⁰ University of Georgia Business Outreach Services, *Hispanics by the Numbers in Georgia* [archive online]: <http://www.sbdc.uga.edu/pdfs/hispanicfactsheet.pdf>, 1-2.

Jerry Gonzalez, executive director of the Georgia Association of Latino-Elected Officials (GALEO), agreed to an interview for this paper on March 2, 2007. At his downtown office in Atlanta, Mr. Gonzalez spoke freely on the issue of immigration in Georgia. He confirmed Consul Maus's testimony that demands for labor prior to the 1996 Olympic Games contributed to the Mexican/Hispanic community's growth. When asked, "What exactly was the impact of the Olympics on Georgia" Mr. Gonzalez stated:

Had there not been immigrants to fill the jobs that were so sorely needed, Atlanta would have been a miserable failure for the Olympics. Leading up to the Olympics the call went out basically saying that 'we're not going to be able to get all the jobs done and all the sites and venues completed before the Olympics' schedule starts. That's when things got desperate and I think that's when people were recruiting immigrants to come here.⁶¹

He noted that the challenges for immigrants living in Atlanta are a recent phenomena related to growth in the 1990s. "The Southeastern states were not considered traditional receiving states for immigrants," he explained. However, economic development in Georgia and neighboring states saw a rapid demand for affordable labor emerge during this period. Since this happened quickly, the developing Mexican minority demographic made many local residents "nervous."⁶² He described the typical Mexican immigrant to the state as a young male who is working in order to provide for his own existence while sending

⁶¹ Jerry Gonzalez, director of Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials, interview by author, 2 March 2007, Atlanta, tape recording, author's collection, Statesboro, GA.

⁶² Gonzalez interview.

remittances back home to Mexico. Mr. Gonzalez is well positioned to understand the components of the immigration issue. He has been involved in the Latino community in Atlanta for eleven years. His position as director of GALEO places him near the center of the political and social debate, working to promote concerns of the Latino community within Georgia's legislative process.

In conjunction with local advocacy groups, the Mexican Consulate provides a variety of political and social services for the Southeastern migrant community. Located on the north side of Atlanta, the consulate lacks the typical elegance of a formal embassy. Much to the contrary, the building is an important functional node for local immigrants. With an expansive waiting room and large visa section it processes hundreds of Mexican nationals each week, registering and providing them with identity cards. The Consul General since 2001, María de los Remedios Gómez-Arnau, agreed to an interview on March 30, 2007. While she confirmed the importance of the Olympics, Consul General Gómez tempered this component noting recent changes in the Southern economy: "Georgia... and the surrounding states have been... changing from an agricultural, traditional economy to a more sophisticated service economy." As a result of local residents climbing the socio-economic ladder, new labor has been needed to fill existing low-paying jobs. Immigrants already living in the Southwestern United States and other areas began "moving out from California... coming to where they perceived economic growth." The South became a magnet for this internal migration. Furthermore, she explained that both formal and informal calls for labor encouraged the arrival of Mexican immigrants to Georgia. "There was a need for workers, clearly during [preparations] for the Olympic games... at the same time people in other states and in Mexico knew of

these new job opportunities....”⁶³ Considering the importance of transnational family bonds between cities in the United States and Mexico, it is worth examining their particular influence on Georgia.

Applications filed by Mexican nationals for identity cards provide tracking data on their places of origin. Consul General Gómez confirmed that networking among “very specific people in communities in Mexico [are] coming to specific communities in the United States...”⁶⁴ Of the more than two hundred thousand Mexican immigrants in Georgia, the state of Guerrero is heavily represented in metropolitan Atlanta. In the south, around Cairo resides a large community from Chiapas, while Gainesville, north of the capital, has a predominance of individuals from Jalisco. Mixed communities from Guanajuato, Guerrero, and Mexico City make their homes in Dalton. The largest Mexican state represented in Georgia is Guerrero with thirteen percent (13%) of the Mexican community coming from this region. Michoacán and Guanajuato follow with eleven percent (11%), while Hidalgo and the Federal District round out the top five. Of the thirty-two states in Mexico, as of 2006, twenty-one have former residents living in Georgia (for a complete map and percentages, see the bibliographic reference for the *Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior*).⁶⁵ All together, these groups provided an important economic and labor outlet throughout the state.

⁶³ Consul General María de los Remedios Gómez-Arnau of the Atlanta Mexican Consulate, interview by author, 30 March 2007, Atlanta, tape recording, author’s collection, Statesboro.

⁶⁴ Gomez-Arnau, tape recording, interview by author.

⁶⁵ Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, *Sistema de Información Origen-Destino de Comunidades Mexicanas* [archive online]: <http://www.ime.gob.mx/estados.htm>

In 2006, the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia and the Mexican Consulate in Atlanta produced an important study on immigration to the Southeastern United States: *Going North: Mexican Immigrants in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee*. The report covered the Mexican immigrant community's growth beyond the Olympics era. Using data collected by the center, research analyst Beata D. Kochut determined that immigration's upward trend did not end in 1996. That year proved to be an important turning point as Georgia's construction industry experienced a statewide "boom" period. Between 1996 and 2004, builders produced more than seven thousand homes a year. While the average annual wage was calculated at thirty-eight thousand dollars (\$38,000) for workers, eighty percent (80%) of Mexican construction employees earned between ten and thirty thousand dollars (\$10,000-\$30,000).⁶⁶ This source of cheaper labor, combined with intense demand for workers, saw Mexican nationals utilized in a variety of Georgia industries.

Manufacturing, entertainment, and agriculture became important employment sectors during the mid-1990s. Driving growth in Georgia's southern counties, including Echols, Atkinson and Ben Hill, ten percent (10%) of agricultural workers were Mexican. The entertainment industry, which included hotels and restaurants, employed nine percent (9%) of the community, while manufacturing, especially in northern counties, utilized six and a half percent (6.5%) of the labor force. In total, these sectors employed more than 130,000 individuals of Mexican-origin.

⁶⁶ Beata D. Kochut and Jeffrey M. Humphreys, eds., *Going North: Mexican Immigrants in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee* (Atlanta: Selig Center, 2006), 11-12.

In the manufacturing sector, seventy-three percent (73%) of Mexican-origin workers earned less than twenty thousand dollars a year.⁶⁷ The majority occupied positions in food-processing, textile, paper, and furniture production. The Pew Hispanic Center confirmed the findings of the Selig Center. Their study, *The New Latino South*, published in 2005, noted that as of the year 2000, Hispanics in predominately manufacturing counties earned an annual income of \$15,000, compared to African Americans' \$20,000 and Caucasians' \$26,000.⁶⁸ These employment figures matched the experience of Mexicans in the state's third largest employer entertainment sector, which includes hotels, motels, recreation sites, and food services.

Maintaining jobs as housekeepers and dishwashers, ninety percent (90%) of Mexican-origin workers earned less than twenty thousand dollars annually. Combined with the construction boom, employers came to depend on this demographic as an important source of low-paying labor. The Selig Center reported that thirty-one percent of engaged Mexican labor worked in construction, seventeen percent (17%) in manufacturing, and fourteen percent (14%) in entertainment. While often covered by the news media, agriculture employs fewer Mexican laborers than the other industries mentioned above. The U.S. Census Bureau found that only two and a half percent (2.5%) of the Mexican labor force in Georgia worked in this field.⁶⁹

Despite all of the information covered by the Selig Center, its study did not answer one major question: how many jobs does a typical Mexican laborer hold? Considering the cost of living in urban areas, it is reasonable to believe that workers

⁶⁷ Kochut, *Going North*, 11

⁶⁸ Rakesh Kochhar, et al., *The New Latino South: Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, July 26, 2005), 41.

⁶⁹ Kochut, *Going North*, 10.

maintained multiple jobs in order to pay bills. The report did demonstrate that the majority of Mexican workers filled lower paying jobs in a variety of industries. This trend continued into the new century.

The general statewide population grew by twenty-six percent (26%) during the nineties and demand for labor reflected this growth. In 1990 the labor market employed 47,000 Mexican migrant workers; this figure increased to 193,321 by 2000. Seventy-five percent (75%) of this community participated in the labor force and registered less than six percent (6%) unemployment. An average twenty thousand new migrants entered the workforce each year.⁷⁰ By 2004, Georgia ranked ninth among states with the largest Hispanic labor markets.⁷¹

Social Responses and Georgia's Immigration Debate, 2000-2006

This upward trend in population saw corresponding development of sophisticated social networks and consumer markets. Hispanics wielded \$580 billion in spending power within Georgia. Their presence saw the emergence of ethnic media, businesses, and associations to serve the community.⁷² In November 2006, Clear Channel radio made an important shift in its market strategy in Atlanta. It switched their long-standing hard rock station "The Buzz" 105.3 to a Spanish-language format. Renamed *Radio Patron*, it became the seventh radio venture serving Atlanta's Hispanic community. Furthermore, ethnic groceries, stocked with traditional Mexican and pan-American goods, opened during this period.

⁷⁰ Kochut, *Going North*, 8-11.

⁷¹ UGABOS, *Hispanics by the Numbers in Georgia*, 3.

⁷² UGABOS, 4.

The development of social associations complemented the development of the goods and services market targeted at the Hispanic community. One of the most important social associations came in the form of services provided by the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta. Leonardo Jaramillo, Regional Director of the Hispanic Youth Association, explained the role of the Archdiocese in the lives of Atlanta's Mexican residents. Having worked in Atlanta for five years, he oversees a territory that covers the northern half of the state from the border with Tennessee to Macon. Of the 103 churches in this field, sixty percent (60%) maintain active ministries for the Hispanic community. These services include full- or part-time social workers and priests that offer bilingual assistance. A central office in Atlanta coordinates the efforts of these groups; Mr. Jaramillo's division develops youth associations and activities targeted at Hispanic young adults and adolescents. In the face of this dramatic growth in the state, an important concern for the diocese is the creation of strong family units in the community. Furthermore, Mr. Jaramillo outlined the long-term goal: "The Archdiocese is concerned with developing processes for cultural integration, not assimilation."⁷³ These processes include the components listed above. His desire is to see the Hispanic community express itself, but within the context of developing bicultural harmony with the general population. The debate between cultural integration and assimilation is an important issue.

While the Archdiocese is not the only religious entity serving the community, given the predominance of Catholicism among persons of Hispanic-origin, it is one of the

⁷³ Leonardo Jaramillo, director of Archdiocese of Atlanta Hispanic Youth Ministry, interview by author, 2 March 2007, Atlanta, tape recording, author's collection, Statesboro.

largest. The existence of a sophisticated Spanish-language ministry in this diocese demonstrates an important component of the immigration cycle. As migrants arrive and social networks form, not only do new businesses form, but existing entities adapt to the presence of this new demographic. This has already been mentioned in the case of Clear Channel Radio shifting one of its stations from an English- to Spanish-language format. By encouraging cultural integration over assimilation, a point of departure occurs within the perception of the general population.

Two major trends appear to exist within the debate on immigration in Georgia. On the one hand, there are those citizens, such as Jerry Gonzalez of GALEO, who welcome the growth of immigrant communities in the state. Advocacy groups involved with immigrant concerns form within churches, universities, and other public/private entities. In the case of Georgia Southern University, the Center for Latino Outreach, founded by Dr. Debra Sabia, provides support programs for the local Hispanic community. However, other groups form which respond to the perception of “encroachment” by the presence of Mexicans and other Latinos in local society. This feeling of infringement occurs on a variety of levels, oftentimes as individuals come into personal contact with the emergent demographic. A local resident may note the growing number of Spanish-speakers while shopping. Others may recognize the presence of ethnic groceries or Spanish-language publications as a social representation. The example of *Radio Patron* highlights the dual nature of this integration/assimilation debate. Replacement of the English-language format may be seen as “lost ground” among some local residents.

To assess the climate of opinion in Georgia, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia initiated a statewide poll on this issue.

Performed over eleven days in July 2006, the *Peach State Poll* conducted 803 telephone interviews. It uncovered a number of interesting opinions among the state's residents. Forty-eight percent (48%) of Georgians polled said immigrants were "good for the country," while only fourteen percent (14%) felt that it has been historically bad. There was also a perception that most immigrants entering the state are undocumented workers. Sixty-two percent (62%) of those polled held this particular view, a twelve-point increase from 2001. Nevertheless, an interesting discovery made by the poll was that seventy-three percent (73%) of the adult generation aged eighteen to twenty-five responded that they "were not bothered by signs in Spanish." Fifty-five percent (55%) of demographic groups aged twenty-six to sixty-six, however, responded that they were bothered by these signs.⁷⁴

The results of the poll reveal a complicated picture of statewide opinion. It appears that many Georgians are willing to tolerate the presence of immigrants in their communities. However, it also notes a solid bloc of opponents who not only wish to see this group decreased, but are also bothered by public depictions of the Spanish-language. Especially revealing, fifty-four percent (54%) of white non-Hispanics responded that they would like to see current immigration levels reduced in Georgia. This figure contrasts with thirty-seven percent (37%) of non-whites respondents who would like to see a reduction. A strong, but not comparable, number of white non-Hispanic respondents—thirty percent (30%)—want to see current immigration levels maintained in Georgia, as do a comparable number (36%) of non-white respondents. A minority in both racial categories (7% and 16%, respectively) responded that they wanted an increase in current

⁷⁴ Carl Vinson Institute of Government, *Peach State Poll* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2006), 2-9.

levels. The major limitation of this poll is that it does not separate the “non-white” racial category into sub-groups.

We may, however, speculate about the sentiments held by the state’s African-American population through the study of specific polling returns for Atlanta. This component provides interesting data, and while it does not confirm specific opinions among African-Americans, it may at least offer some insight into the capital city’s opinions of Georgia’s immigrant communities. In Atlanta, where sixty-one percent (61%) of the population is counted as African-American by the U.S. Census Bureau⁷⁵, forty-eight percent (48%) of the individuals responding to the Carl Vinson Institute survey wanted a decrease in current immigration levels. Thirty-four percent (34%) preferred the level maintained, while only eight percent (8%) desired an increase.⁷⁶ Considering the long history of racial tension present within the state, these feelings toward immigrants may reflect the persistence of anti-minority sentiments, not only among non-Hispanic whites, but also within the state’s established minority groups. It could also, however, reflect frustration from the perception that most immigrants entering the state lack legal, documented status. The Carl Vinson Institute’s study represented one component of this public debate that soon captured the attention of state legislators. In 2006, lawmakers considered the merits of a new and controversial bill designed to address the presence of illegal immigrants in the general population.

⁷⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *State and Country Quick Facts: Atlanta, Georgia* [archive online]: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13/1304000.html>.

⁷⁶ Vinson, *Peach State Poll*, 11.

The Immigration Cycle and Georgia's Legislative Response after 2001

Debate over the presence of undocumented workers saw new legislation within the state. The next phase of Georgia's immigration cycle arrived in the form of the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act. Signed into law by Governor Sonny Perdue on April 17, 2006, it addressed two major concerns of Georgians questioned in the Peach State Poll. Sixty percent (60%) responded that immigrants (a) receive too much government assistance and (b) living in Georgia are mostly illegal aliens.

New employees and individuals requesting state aid must be verified as legal residents. The Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act (Senate Bill 529) orders all public employers and related contractors to participate in verification processes specified in any federal work authorization program. It also orders all Georgia law enforcement officers to coordinate with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security in order to enforce federal immigration law. This would include detention, removal, and investigation on alleged illegal aliens. The law further outlines penalties and other corresponding points relating to immigration concerns within the state. This focus on enforcement, however, lacks any corresponding section addressing the development of a temporary work program. It leaves this related issue to the responsibility of future lawmakers in the State.⁷⁷ Since its passage, the Act has ignited heated debate on both sides of the issue prior to its enforcement date in summer of 2007.

The Act demonstrate the attempt of the state government to “rationalize” immigration patterns. In the open market, supply, demand and individual agency drive the growth rates of migrant communities. As has been demonstrated, the friction between

⁷⁷ Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act of 2006, General Assembly [archive online]: http://www.legis.state.ga.us/lgis/2005_06/sum/sb529.htm

perceptions of ethnic expression and cultural encroachment is associated with the build-up of political pressure. The six phases of the immigration cycle: job demand, immigrant arrival, social networks, immigrant expression, public response, and government/legislative reaction build toward a period of critical mass. Throughout United States-Mexico immigration history, this advanced stage resulted in either temporary fixes, such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, or a return to the status quo ante, as with the termination of the Bracero Program.

What has yet to occur is reconciliation between the first and final phases of the immigration cycle. Existing laws have failed to develop a realistic solution to relieve the social pressure within local communities experiencing increased migration from Mexico. By focusing solely on law enforcement and ignoring the role of a guest worker program and path toward citizenship for existing undocumented aliens, the problems related to immigration are often compounded.

In the October 2006 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, former White House deputy chief of staff, Karl Rove, provided an interesting summary of this challenge as it has emerged since 2001: "...we are making it so difficult to get [to America]... It's too tough to get back and forth. What we ought to have is a system that allows [immigrants] to keep those personal connections [in Mexico], to travel back and forth across the border freely...."⁷⁸ Without a comprehensive reform of existing immigration law, blending enforcement with the opportunity for larger numbers of immigrants to enter the country legally, the poverty and problems of the existing system may continue.

⁷⁸ Quoted in "Excerpts from the Aspen Ideas Festival," *The Atlantic Monthly* 10 (2006), 52

Conclusion

Georgia's immigration cycle reflects many of the national trends discussed in this paper. Demand for labor, combined with the agency of private and public entities created space for migrant workers in the State. The 1996 Summer Olympics ignited this trend with the subsequent construction boom providing additional sustaining factors. Population growth within the state was driven, in part by extraordinary increases in the Hispanic community—a group that arrived to fill low-paying jobs in manufacturing, agriculture, and the service industries. As this demographic, with its majority Mexican representation, began to express itself, new political components began to emerge. Much like previous legislative endeavors at the federal level, state lawmakers sought to strengthened control over this process through the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act. Their efforts were related in many ways to the complicated political and personal issues driving the immigration cycle.

Social networks played a central role. They provided new arrivals with a cultural point of reference as well as a vehicle for cultural expression in the greater community. Georgia's experience closely followed the national trend with its demand for labor providing the initial impetus for the arrival of migrants. Once in the state, migrants tended to live among comrades from the same sending regions, as occurred with the demographic pockets of Chiapan-origin Mexicans in Cairo, Georgia and Jaliscans in Gainesville. Family bonds, ethnic associations, and religion remained important factors in this component of immigration.

In many ways, the emergence of Mexican immigrant communities in Georgia reflects the state's own economic transformation. Out of its agricultural heritage, a

modern, service-based infrastructure, with an international market, spread beyond Atlanta's city limits. As has occurred in states with longer histories of development, such as New York and California, the demand for cheaper labor and subsequent arrival of migrant workers testifies to Georgia's own economic successes. While the debate on cultural integration versus assimilation is a painful one, it reflects the modern phenomenon of globalization occurring in communities across the country. Interesting parallels exist between national and regional immigration trends, offering useful tools for studying the impact of developing minority populations in the Southeast. The emergence of a strong, statewide Mexican demographic relates to internal elements specific to Georgia, such as the 1996 Olympic Games, but also to more than a century of migrant relations between the United States and Mexico.

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