

Malinowski Award Lecture, 2003

***Regions of Refuge in the United States:
Issues, Problems, and Concerns for the Future of
Mexican-Origin Populations in the United States***

Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez

This address provides a conceptual heuristic of “regions of refuge” as a means of understanding the complex and dynamic processes responsible for the great growth and emergence of Mexican-origin populations in the United States. Such processes are transnational, national, and regional, but at their center are economic issues of production and labor that have their genesis in the 19th century and will be even more important in the next century. By 2100, the Mexican-origin population will make up slightly less than a third of the entire U.S. population and will face issues of increasing economic inequality, steep social stratification, and modest educational attainment. The multiple methodological approaches of applied anthropology are crucial to the solution of what I have termed the “distribution of sadness” that accompanies such growth and issues.

Key words: regions of refuge, political ecology, distribution of sadness, colonias, Mexican-origin population

Permit me first to thank the Society for Applied Anthropology for awarding me the 2003 Bronislaw Malinowski Award. This is the apogee of my career in anthropology, as well as the highlight of whatever personal accomplishments I may have earned in my chosen profession. Two things are absolutely certain: first, there are many of you sitting in this audience fully deserving of the award, and, with your permission, I would like to accept the award not just for myself but for you who have devoted yourselves for so long to bettering the human condition. Second, whatever modest accomplishments I may enjoy, these would not have been possible if not for the many colleagues, especially at Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology of the University of Arizona, with whom I have been honored to work and from whom I have learned so much. I thank you humbly. Last, I would like to dedicate this work to my wife, Maria Luz Cruz Torres, an anthropologist on her own right, who has shown me much about the intricacies of political ecology and who has affectionately supported me in my sometimes nutty ideas.

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To our Nayely Luz, and to the rest of my beautiful children, of whom I am so proud, their generations will have to help resolve many of the issues I raise here.

Exactly 30 years ago, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, one of the founding figures of Mexican anthropology, gave the first Bronislaw Malinowski Award address in my hometown of Tucson, Arizona. Without delving into any proposition of cosmic convergence, I find it remarkable that I should be honored for work closely identified with the Mexican population on the northern side of what may be termed the Greater Mexican Southwest (Bauman 1993). In that address, Beltrán laid out the various influences in the emergence of a Mexican applied anthropology and how the new Mexican state played a key role in the national integration of a people. He articulated the concept of “*regiones de refugio*” (regions of refuge) to describe isolated and frozen semicolonial ecological shelters that are regionally stratified and made up of indigenous populations in the countryside dominated by Ladinos in cities (Beltrán 1979). All are intertwined within a series of caste relations that exercise control over the land, energy, and movement of subordinated Indian populations (ibid.:31).¹ For Beltrán such stratification could be resolved in part through the critical education of all groups, but more importantly through structural national reintegration in which the social relations of production, distribution, and consumption were altered in favor of more equitable economic and social treatments. The nation-building mission depended upon such changes, since resistance to democratization and equity would be normative at the regional level.

The nation-building project was promulgated not only by Beltrán, but earlier by Manuel Gamio, who is considered the father of Mexican anthropology and especially applied anthropology. His pathbreaking research on Mexican immigration to the United States in 1926 and 1927 was the first Mexican-led research on this population in the United States. Gamio, like Beltrán, also saw the state as the focal integrating force for a newly emergent Mexican revolutionary national identity and its heterogeneous populations. For Gamio, the northern border states were crucial, and he sought to take advantage of the repatriation process of the 1930s to tap into the knowledge base returning Mexican immigrants acquired in the United States.² His research, funded by the Social Science Research Council, was designed in part to test out some of his national theories (Gamio 1930; Paredes 1931). In fact, President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), in conjunction with American agricultural combines like Anderson and Clayton, developed specific agricultural and irrigation projects to attract this population back to northern Mexico. This program was developed by Gamio to balance the extreme structural and technical inequalities between nations (Walsh 2000).

Thus, Beltrán provided an important theoretical and methodological heuristic for understanding Mexican and Latin American populations and the applied approaches to be used for Mexican nation building. Gamio provided the first indication of the importance of northern Mexican populations, specifically those influenced by and born in the United States. Now, it seems to me that we must embark on an applied anthropological mission almost as important as the ones these two giants in Mexican anthropology undertook so long ago. We will face new “regions of refuge” in the United States that require thoughtful solutions comparable to nation building because of the demographic growth of the Mexican-origin population over the next 25 years—a population that will be as large as the population of Mexico was in 1962 (over 37 million) and one that in 50 years will be as large as the population of Mexico was in 1975 (over 60 million) (Lahmeyer 2002).

In the 30 years since Beltrán’s first Malinowski Address, the Mexican-origin population in the southwestern United States emerged dramatically, and it continues to be fueled by the ever-present structural inequalities of the political economies of the United States and Mexico. These inequalities have reproduced new regions of refuge for large segments of the Mexican-origin population, not unlike those Aguirre Beltrán described for minority groups in Latin America and especially Mexico. For Beltrán (1979:18), minority groups, like colonized peoples, “experience the effects of the process of domination.” But minority groups, while entitled to the benefits of citizenship by the national society, are denied them by what we now term regional or local levels of articulation.

For Beltrán, what marked minority group status was basically cultural differences that were accentuated regionally or locally and that did not allow the minority group to participate fully in the national society. In a sense, it is the cultural characteristics of the minority group that are used

as rationales by dominant populations to justify continued supremacy at local and regional levels. Eventually minority groups come to believe they are so different culturally that their separation becomes normative.

Acute stratification, caste-like relations between populations, ecological isolation, institutional avoidance, political domination, economic subordination, unequal treatment, social distance, and lack of legal protection are consequences of real or imagined differences in culture. Citizenship, which differentiates the colonized from national minorities, allows minorities to change culturally and assimilate individually into the dominant culture. Nevertheless, depending on the severity of the cultural differences between groups, regions of refuge are created in relation to minorities regardless of the demographic differences between groups.

Several factors differentiate the regions of refuge Beltrán described for Mexico and Latin America from those in the United States. The U.S. versions have been created as: 1) an aftermath of the enormous loan repayments to the World Bank and the United States; 2) the structural relations between the U.S. and Mexico and, most recently, the North American Free Trade Agreement’s (NAFTA) penetration throughout Mexico; 3) the neoliberal policies of the Mexican regime, including the elimination of credit to rural farmers, ejidos, and cooperatives, and the privatization of ejido lands; 4) the creation of border industries; and 5) the service and agricultural labor markets in the United States. These factors have served to stimulate migration as part of the commodity-exchange relations developed over the past 150 years between the U.S. and Mexico. As a result, Mexico’s foreign debt alone:

[in 2000] stands at more than \$161 billion, 181% higher than in the early 1980s, when the country declared a moratorium on payments. The current debt is equivalent to 40.3% of the gross domestic product of 1998, according to a report released by the Finance Secretariat in 2000. In this same year, each of Mexico’s 96 million inhabitants owes \$1,608, 96.3% higher than the 1980 figure (Cevallos 2000).

These transnational capitalist extractions are creating a country almost prostrate economically, politically, socially, and ecologically. Mexico and its population are in fact a scrapped satellite periphery of the United States and international banking and monetary agencies.

The already developed structures of economic and political limitations in the United States incorporate Mexican Ladinos, as well as indigenous Zapotecs, Mixtecs, and Mixes, fleeing economic and social adversity. All become “minority groups” in the new refuge, with indigenous populations even more disadvantaged economically, linguistically, and institutionally.

In the United States, such regions include an ideology that identifies Mexicans as “cheap” commodities, incorporated into poor or near-poor economic sectors and housed in restricted and equally poor urban or rural ecologies. These are part of a complex of marginal physical localities and

regions, isolated from institutions, integrated into exploitive economies, unprotected in health, poorly represented politically, undereducated, and suffering from multiple social maladies. When coupled with cultural rationalizations of difference and a dominant ideology that values “whiteness,” they intertwine to produce new regions of refuge.

Such regions have emerged at different periods of American history: first after the Mexican War, then again following the Mexican Revolution, and for the last 35 years in different ecological niches of the southwestern United States. The development of such regions may be formed for domestic and migrating populations. In rural areas, Mexicans inhabit colonias, townships, and villages where infrastructural investment is minimal, political representation nonexistent, educational and social services poor, and basic amenities absent. Subregions also emerge in cities like Los Angeles, Dallas, and Phoenix, where neighborhoods are in decay and Mexicans are incorporated into restricted barrios. For the most part, home ownership is denied them, or it is in the midst of econiches characterized by urban infrastructures like freeways, off-ramps, industrial parks, warehouses, junkyards, and graffiti-covered public housing that sits next to macadam-covered school grounds surrounded by cyclone fences topped by barbed wire.

Beltrán would recognize the stratification, the poverty, the miseducation, and the contending ethnic and class conflicts he described for Mexico in these new regions of refuge, especially those along the U.S.-Mexican border. He would not recognize how such regions could be developed for human habitation by the sheer determination and will of a vibrant population situated at the most disadvantageous positions within such regions. These modern refuges are likely to remain for at least the next 25 to 50 years because of the continuing economic and regional asymmetry between Mexico and the United States. The U.S. relies on poorly paid persons to fill the service, agricultural, and domestic roles necessary to provide low-cost vegetables, cheap milk and chickens, affordable nannies and domestic cooks, maids, gardeners, construction workers, and hundreds of sundry occupations few desire.

Not since the Mexican Revolution, which pushed almost a million Mexicans into the United States, and whose children became the “Mexican American Generation,” has such a shift occurred in North America (Hall and Coerver 1988: 126). The size and scope of this Mexican movement rivals westward migration in the United States during the 19th century (Gonzalez 2000).

Part I: The Future in the Present: The Demography of Mexican-Origin Peoples

Education, income, labor, politics, health, social and community development, and culture are deeply interrelated. In conjunction with their physical environments, these issues emerge to form regions of refuge that present serious challenges at local, regional, national, and transnational

levels. They must be examined and extrapolations to the future suggested if applied social sciences are to play strong programmatic and policy roles now or in the future.

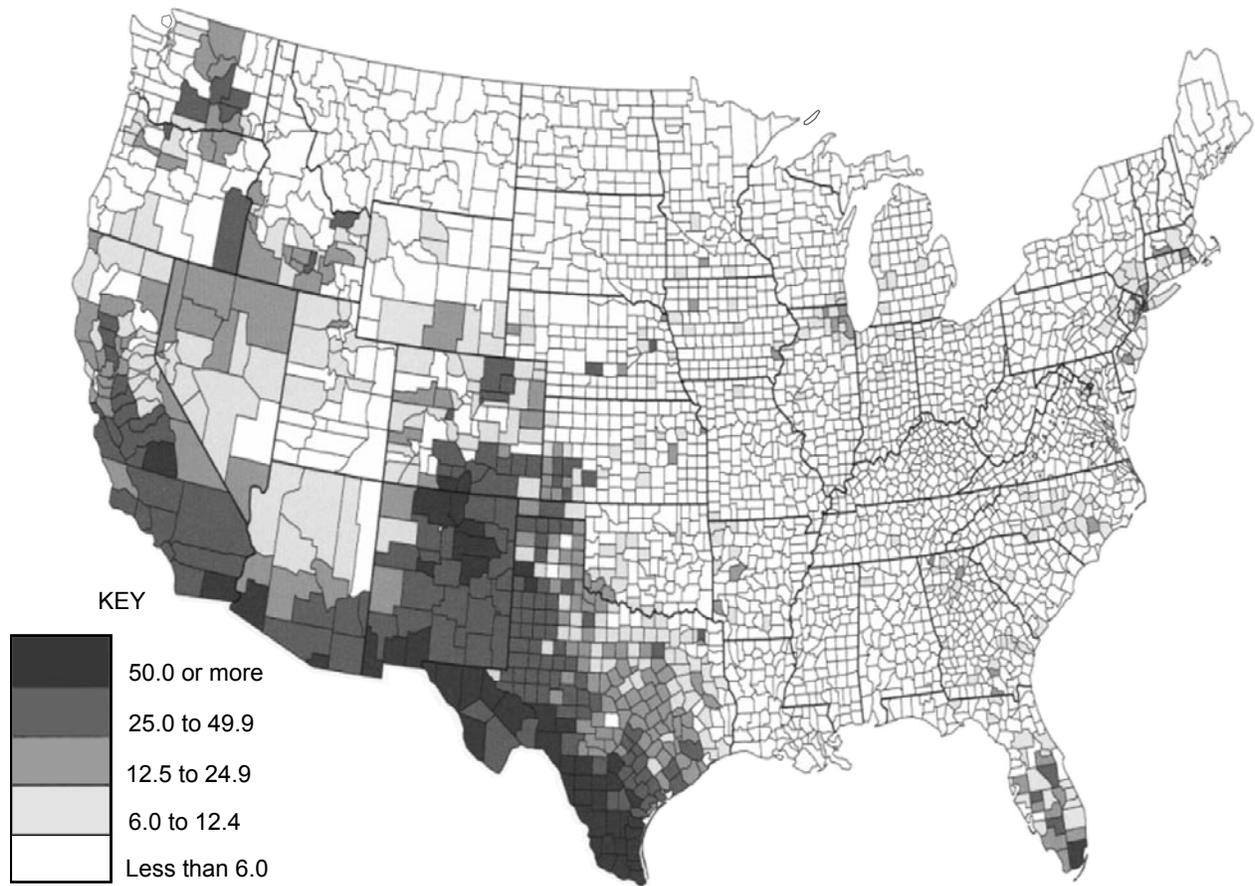
Even a modest demographic expansion of the Mexican-origin population over the next 25 to 50 years has enormous consequences for what I have termed “the distribution of sadness” (Vélez-Ibáñez 1996). By this I mean the overrepresentation of Mexican-origin populations in the bilges of poverty, and among the undereducated, underemployed, and underrepresented who suffer from poor mental and physical health and lack in protection. They are also overrepresented in penal institutions and as war casualties. These most recent versions of regions of refuge have been forming for 25 years or more as the great restructuring of world economies emerged. Applied anthropology on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border has enormous responsibilities in research and application, responsibilities comparable to those faced by Aguirre Beltrán’s nation-creating period. We will have to deal with the many aspects of these new regions of refuge for many years to come.

On the other hand, for the Mexican-origin population there are also indicators of strong educational advancement between generations, a decline in poverty among the U.S. born, an increased percentage of upper-income households, and the creation of many small- and medium-sized businesses and enterprises. There has been a creative explosion in the performance arts and literature, as well as solid academic advancement in the social sciences, the biological and material sciences, and in medicine and engineering. These academic achievements could not have been possible without affirmative action and programs developed to increase the educational pipelines for the disadvantaged. But we have barely put a dent in the structure of these new regions of refuge.

The 2000 Census identified 35.2 million Latinos in the United States, of which almost 20.6 million were of Mexican origin (60%). Remarkable growth characterized this population during the 20th century: 1.3 million Mexicans were reported in the 1930 census; 2.3 million persons of Spanish surname were reported in 1950; and 9.1 million persons of Spanish origin were reported in 1970.³

Mexican-origin populations continue to concentrate in the states bordering Mexico, but they are rapidly expanding to the Midwest and South (see Figure 1). Recent Mexican immigrants have joined populations established since the 18th century to increasingly occupy urban landscapes in cities like Los Angeles, Santa Fe, San Antonio, San Diego, Tucson, San Francisco, and Albuquerque.⁴ Cities like Phoenix, Dallas, Houston, and Long Beach have also witnessed dramatic population growth, especially between 1970 and 1980 when the total Latino population virtually doubled. In urban border areas like Brownsville-Harlingen, El Paso, and Laredo, Texas, Mexicans comprise over 60 percent of the population. The Los Angeles-Long Beach, California, area has the highest number of Latino households, of which the great majority is of Mexican origin (U.S. Census Bureau 1995). Over

Figure 1. Hispanic Population as a Percent of the Total Population, by County, 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting.

70 percent of the Mexican-origin population in the United States lives in California and Texas and another 15 percent in Arizona, Illinois, Colorado, and New Mexico (Groggier and Trejo 2002:10). In each, regions of refuge constitute political ecologies of stratification and inequality, marked by cultural diversity and ethnic boundaries that are the analogs of economic constrictions and limitations of social structure.

Of the 10 places of 100,000 or more with the highest percentage of Hispanics, except for Miami, all are in largely Mexican-dominant cities of the Southwest (see Tables 1 and 2). With the exception of New York and Miami, cities in which Mexicans are dominant also constitute the largest Hispanic markets. The Strategy Research Corporation estimated the buying power of all Hispanics in the United States for 2002 at almost \$430 billion—greater than the buying power of either Mexico (\$404 billion) or Brazil (\$398 billion). In fact, there are more Hispanics in the United States than in Peru and Venezuela (Whitefield 2001). There is also an increasingly visible presence not only in the rural Southwest, but also in the Great Plains, Midwest, and Southwest.

There are over 2,000 impoverished, rural colonias totaling approximately 1 million persons, in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. Colonias vary between “settlements” and communities.⁵ Made up largely of clandestine makeshift housing, they are characterized by inadequate or nonexistent water supplies, sewage, or electrification, and surface drainage systems. The populations themselves are largely poor, with sizeable families, and sustained by a combination of local and migrant agricultural work. Figure 2 shows their distribution.

Colonias are part of the continuing “Mexicanization” of rural areas throughout the southwestern United States. After much of the non-Mexican population migrated out, Mexicans revitalized dormant or dying townships and villages (Allen and Rochin 1996:1, 3, 8, 18). Population projections for the foreseeable future provide a highly charged series of projections of increased Mexican-origin growth, both by birth and migration, and the continued development of highly complex regions of refuge.

Figure 3 provides the latest projections for the racial and ethnic composition in the 21st century.⁶ This remarkable

Table 1. Ten Places of 100,000 or More Population With the Highest Percent Hispanic, 2000

Place	Total Population	Hispanic Population	Hispanic Percent of Total Population
East Los Angeles, Calif.*	124,283	120,307	96.8
Laredo, Tex.	176,576	166,216	94.1
Brownsville, Tex.	139,722	127,535	91.3
Hialeah, Fla.	226,419	204,543	90.3
McAllen, Tex.	106,414	85,427	80.3
El Paso, Tex.	563,662	431,875	76.6
Santa Ana, Calif.	337,977	257,097	76.1
El Monte, Calif.	115,965	83,945	72.4
Oxnard, Calif.	170,358	112,807	66.2
Miami, Fla.	362,470	238,351	65.8

* East Los Angeles, California, is a census-designated place and is not legally incorporated.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

growth does not comprehensively tell the tale. For that we must look at the projected percent of native and foreign-born population in 2100. We do not have a disaggregated projection yet, but based on the 2000 census figures we can assume the same 60 percent will be persons of Mexican origin.

By using this approximate percentage we can surmise that by 2025, the Mexican-origin population will comprise

approximately 37 million and by 2050 slightly less than 60 million. Mexico's total population will number over 160 million in 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000a). With a growth rate of less than 0.5 percent by 2050, the Mexican population will grow at approximately 1 million persons per year. By 2100 it will total almost 214 million (World Bank 2002). By 2100, almost 115 million persons of Mexican origin will live in the United States. The Mexican-origin population in the United States is very young—it averages 24.5 years in comparison to 38 for the rest of the U.S. population—and age is an important consideration in all projections.

What then are the portents of this impressive growth for education, income, labor, politics, health, social and community organization, and culture? And what are the most salient issues that will emerge for the United States and Mexico?

Educational Attainment

Table 3 illustrates educational attainment of Mexican-origin men and women by generation and in comparison to other groups. Educational attainment for the immigrant generation is extremely low—almost half have less than 8 years of schooling. Only about 20 percent have completed secondary school, and less than 5 percent have completed high school. In the second generation, however, there is a dramatic increase for both men and women, but educational attainment slows down between the second and third generation (Groggier and Trejo 2002:11-13).

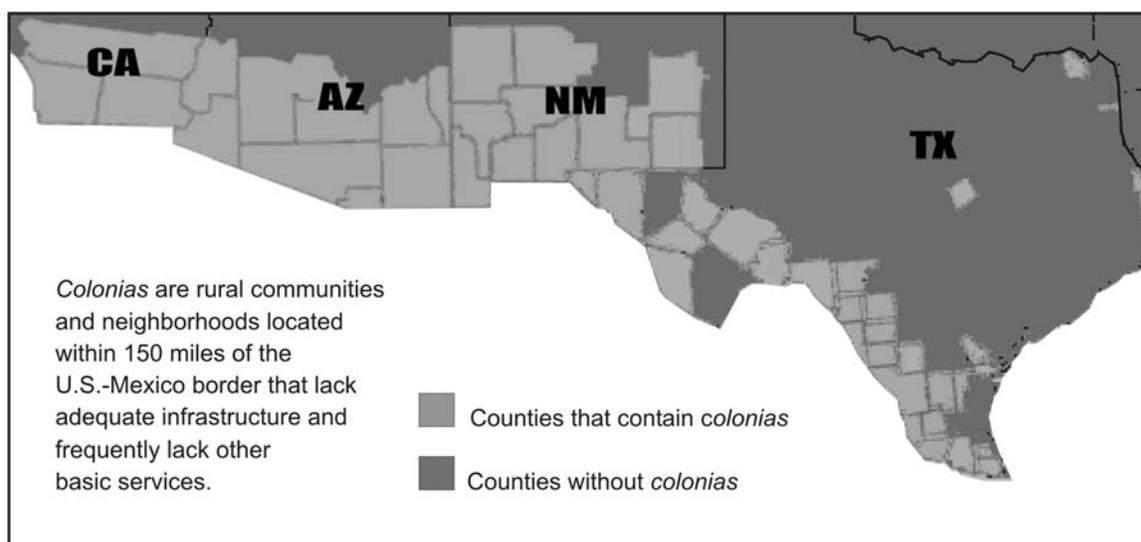
Educational attainment for this generation should be much greater than the preceding one, but Anglos are still three times more likely to graduate from college (Groggier and Trejo 2002:13). The third generation is almost four times less likely than Anglos to earn a postgraduate degree and half as likely as African Americans (ibid.). It should be remembered,

Table 2. Ten Largest Places in Total Population and in Hispanic Population, 2000

	Total Population		Hispanic Population		Hispanic Percent of Total Population
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	
New York	8,008,278	1	2,160,554	1	27.0
Los Angeles	3,694,820	2	1,719,073	2	46.5
Chicago	2,896,016	3	753,644	3	26.0
Houston	1,953,631	4	730,865	4	37.4
Philadelphia	1,517,550	5	128,928	24	8.5
Phoenix	1,321,045	6	449,972	6	34.1
San Diego	1,223,400	7	310,752	9	25.4
Dallas	1,188,580	8	422,587	8	35.6
San Antonio	1,144,646	9	671,394	5	58.7
Detroit	951,270	10	47,167	72	5.0
El Paso	563,662	23	431,875	7	76.6
San Jose	894,943	11	269,989	10	30.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

Figure 2. Location of Colonias Along the U.S.-Mexico Border



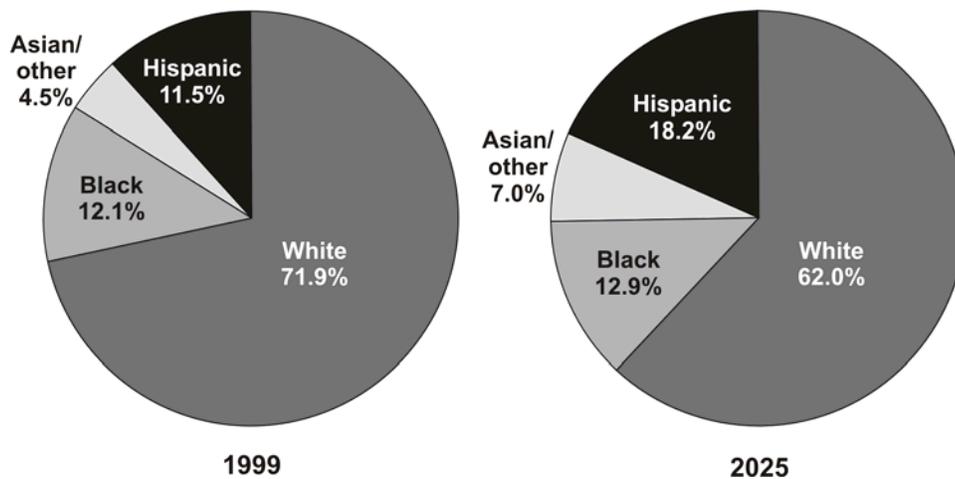
Source: Galán 2000.

Table 3. Educational Attainment in the United States (Excluding California and Texas), by Race/Ethnicity and Generation, Ages 25-59

Education Level	Recent Immigrant	Mexican Americans			3rd+ Generation Whites	3rd+ Generation Blacks
		Earlier Immigrant	2nd Generation	3rd+ Generation		
Men						
Avg. years of education	8.8	8.4	12.1	12.4	13.5	12.5
Percentage with 8 years or less	44.9	48.7	10.9	6.0	2.1	3.4
Some high school	20.2	18.6	14.3	16.1	7.0	14.3
High school graduate	21.5	20.2	36.5	35.6	34.6	41.7
Some college	7.7	8.4	24.4	27.2	26.2	26.7
Bachelor's degree	3.9	3.4	8.6	11.1	20.0	10.2
Postgraduate degree	1.9	0.8	5.4	4.0	10.1	3.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Women						
Avg. years of education	8.5	9.0	12.1	12.2	13.5	12.8
Percentage with 8 years or less	48.3	43.6	9.8	7.5	1.5	2.6
Some high school	18.7	18.7	14.7	14.0	6.1	13.9
High school graduate	19.5	20.6	33.7	37.6	35.8	37.5
Some college	8.0	12.8	29.2	29.7	28.7	29.9
Bachelor's degree	4.5	3.1	8.9	8.3	19.5	11.6
Postgraduate degree	1.1	1.2	3.7	2.9	8.5	4.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Recent immigrants are defined as those who arrived in the United States within approximately 10 years of the survey date.
Source: 1996-1999 CPS ORG data.

Figure 3. Racial and Ethnic Composition of the United States, 1999 and 2025



Note: White, Black, and Asian/other categories exclude Hispanics, who may be of any race. The Asian/other category includes American Indians, Eskimos, Aleuts, and Pacific Islanders. Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Population Reference Bureau 2002.

however, that the great majority of Mexican-origin persons come from families that have been in this country less than two generations; at least half were born in Mexico and another fifth have at least one immigrant parent (ibid.:10).

Immigrant status does influence the undereducation of Mexican-origin persons in the United States, but the weak second to third generation educational influence is very worrisome. Gender is also an important factor, since Mexican women between the second and third generations have a lower completion rate at the bachelor's and postgraduate levels than men.

The intellectual loss for those who do not complete college cannot be overemphasized, especially for women who bear children and who are the primary socializing agents for subsequent generations. Such loss is felt in fragile communities where education is sorely needed. The lack of income for most Mexican communities is directly tied to the lack of education—both in the presence of those with less than an eighth-grade education and in an educational and opportunity system that does not seem to provide the intellectual or social scaffolding necessary for the third generation of Mexican-origin men and women.

And there is a fly in the ointment. Mean earnings of Anglos with a bachelor's degree are over \$55,000, while Hispanics (read Mexican) average a little over \$42,000; at the master's level, Anglos earn over \$65,000 compared to \$57,662 for Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b). The difference between Anglo and Hispanic mean earnings for the same educational attainment must be related to noneconomic causes and factors. Such disparity could be part of the remaining structural

bias within a political economy that reflects broader structural inequalities of an American region of refuge.

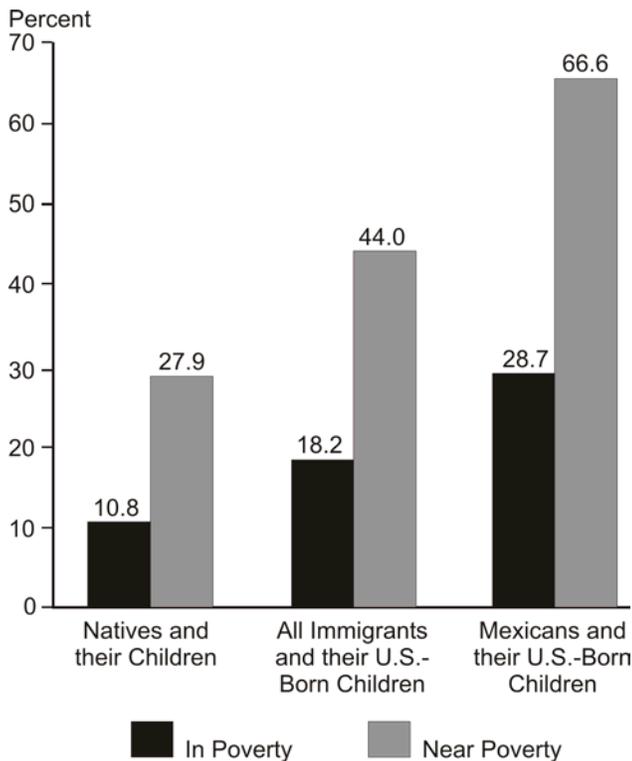
Income, Poverty, and Labor

In 2000, 24 percent of the Mexican population lived in poverty, compared to 9 percent of Anglos and 22 percent of blacks (Population Resource Center 2001). In fact, most Mexican households are below the median income of \$38,000 and 71 percent of the population earns less than \$30,000 a year. Figure 4 illustrates the unequal distribution of resources between foreign born and native born: 65.6 percent of Mexican immigrants and their U.S.-born children live in or near poverty while only 27.9 percent of their native counterparts and their children live in or near poverty. Mexican immigrants and their U.S.-born children are 20 percent poorer than their counterparts from other cultural systems (Camarota 2001).

Figure 5 shows the stark income differences between natives and legal and illegal Mexican immigrants. The annual income of undocumented workers is less than half that of natives and three-quarters that of documented workers.

Between 1975 and 1990 the number of Latinos earning over \$75,000 a year tripled, and the number of persons earning \$50,000-\$75,000 rose to 20 percent of the entire Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau 1997). Yet in comparison to other populations, Latinos did not fare well. For example, in California, where more than 40 percent of the Mexican-origin population lives, the median income for Anglos was \$27,000 a year in 1999. Asians were close behind at \$24,000 and African Americans were at \$23,000. But Latinos, the largest

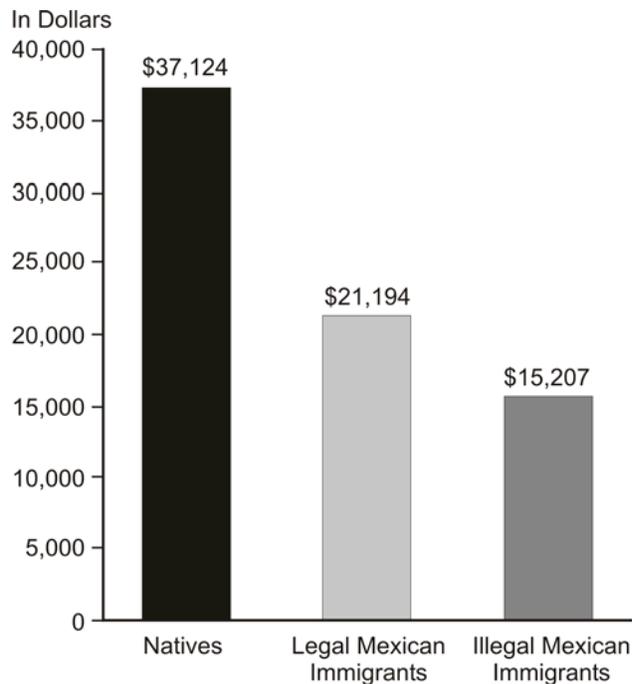
Figure 4. Poverty and Near Poverty in the U.S.



Note: U.S.-born children (under age 18) of immigrant mothers are included in the figures for all immigrants and Mexican immigrants are excluded from the figures for natives. Near poverty is defined as less than 200% of the poverty threshold.

Source: Camarota 2001.

Figure 5. Estimated Average Annual Income by Legal Status for Mexican Immigrants, 1999



Note: Figures for income from all sources for persons 21 and over who worked at least part time in 1999.

Source: Camarota 2001.

minority group in California, had a median income of only \$14,500 (Lopez, Ramirez, and Rochin 1999:9).

In 2001, only about 20 percent of Mexican-origin workers were employed in managerial or professional capacities. For the most part, the structure of the labor force reflects income distribution and educational levels (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). Table 4 presents the occupational structure for U.S. workers of Hispanic and Mexican origin.

Yet, labor, income, and educational statistics say little of the massive contributions the Mexican labor force makes to the American economy. Documented or undocumented, first generation to third, Mexican-origin populations support many parts of the economy and participate in myriad labor activities that few others dare to approach. More importantly, they are creating regions of refuge from little or nothing, revitalizing many urban and rural communities, and inventing ways to survive in very difficult circumstances. This population is creating and developing the foundations of and structure for civil society under debilitating circumstances. This has profound implications for what constitutes citizenship.

Part II. A Miniethnography of a Region of Refuge⁷

Creative, stubbornly persistent, and many times suffering from overwork and underpayment, Mexican-origin populations create social platforms from whence future generations will emerge. In the megacities of Los Angeles and Chicago, and in the growing urban hubs of Dallas, Phoenix, and Albuquerque, large networks of communities emerge amidst weak urban infrastructures, poor educational systems, oppressive physical ecologies, and, in some cases, the presence of dangerous gangs and urban violence. In rural areas, Mexican-origin populations, at great sacrifice and human cost, give life to barren landscapes or revive dead towns and villages. I am amazed at the many ways these people continue to thrive and suffer simultaneously. I would like to provide a simple example from my current work in New Mexico.

El Recuerdo: A Colonia of New Mexico

New Mexican colonias are largely situated along the serpentine Rio Grande, which begins in the Rocky Mountains of

Table 4. Employed Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-Origin Workers by Sex, Occupation, Class of Worker, and Full- or Part-Time Status (in thousands)

Category	Total Hispanic Origin		Mexican Origin	
	2000	2001	2000	2001
Sex				
Total (all civilian workers)	14,492	14,714	9,364	9,577
Men	8,478	8,556	5,718	5,805
Women	6,014	6,159	3,646	3,771
Occupation				
Managerial and professional speciality	2,036	2,150	1,107	1,190
Executive, administrative, and managerial	1,072	1,148	602	667
Professional speciality	964	1,002	504	523
Technical, sales, and administrative support	3,504	3,556	2,060	2,143
Technicians and related support	303	338	171	198
Sales occupations	1,385	1,402	816	843
Administrative support, including clerical	1,816	1,816	1,073	1,102
Service occupations	2,867	3,000	1,818	1,884
Private household	251	234	133	124
Protective service	208	244	112	144
Service, except private household and protective	2,408	2,521	1,573	1,616
Precision production, craft, and repair	2,075	2,176	1,456	1,527
Mechanics and repairers	522	547	323	354
Construction trades	1,004	1,088	739	801
Other precision production, craft, and repair	550	541	394	373
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	3,202	3,134	2,202	2,225
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	1,416	1,320	976	941
Transportation and material moving occupations	662	697	423	473
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	1,125	1,118	804	811
Construction laborers	281	300	220	230
Other handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	844	818	583	582
Farming, forestry, and fishing	807	698	721	607

Source: 2001 Household Data Annual Averages: Table 13, Employed Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-Origin by Sex, Occupation, Class of Worker, and Full or Part-Time Status, U.S. Census Bureau, 2001.

Colorado and flows 3,200 kilometers to the Gulf of Mexico. The 37 odd colonias in Doña Ana County, where the majority of the colonias have developed, all straddle either the Rio Grande or Interstate 25 and State Highway 32. The rest of the 148 colonias in New Mexico either border the Rio Grande or the international border.

Most colonias border agricultural fields and adjoining roads and are largely situated to provide labor to the surrounding farms. Four main venues offer colonia residents employment in the formal and informal economies: more than 70 percent of men and women work in agriculture; another 10 percent are labor contractors, foremen, and truck haulers; and a small percentage own very small businesses, such as informal garages, junkyards, hidden grocery stores, and home

child care. A small but significant percentage (20%) engage in the underground economy, transporting undocumented relatives from Mexico to the United States and other less benign activities. This creates the basis for class mobility as well as transregional mobility and the establishment of colonia-like settlements in Alabama, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and other agricultural states thousands of miles away.

“El Recuerdo” is a perfect model for those colonias. It encompasses 80 acres and was first inhabited in 1987 after the original owner—a local rancher—sold four 10-acre parcels of undeveloped land to different families for \$1,000 per acre. These families subdivided their parcels into ¾- to 1-acre plots and sold them for \$3,000 each. By 1994, approximately 10 families had moved to Recuerdo, and by 2001, 31 households

Plate 1. Southern Portion of the Colonia of El Recuerdo



Photograph by author.

had been established in a combination of trailers, mobile homes, and finished concrete block homes. Most residents borrowed money from relatives, banks, moneylenders, or the landowner, who charged 10 percent interest per month. The owner could—and did—easily foreclose on the land and acquire any structures built on the property for failure to make a monthly payment. This credit relationship hung like Damocles’s sword over the colonos and forced many to seek out moneylenders or become involved in underground activities to ensure they could make their land payment.

Lots generally are no less than three-fourths of an acre, and construction usually follows a sequence of settlement: a trailer first, then hybrids with permanent structures attached, then houses built entirely of block or adobe construction. Of the 40 dwellings in El Recuerdo, 30 are connected trailers, some of which have been ensconced within family-built brick homes. Many have no access to sewage or gas lines, and all, at one time or another, suffered from the lack of electricity and running water. (See Plates 1, 2, and 3.)

Eventually residents create “miracle” communities out of nothing. *Colonos* (colonists) literally fight for basic water services and electricity. For the most part, colonos rely on septic tanks that often overflow or incomplete sewage lines that allow overflow in pools of partially filtered but untreated sewage. Needless to say, children suffer from high rates of gastric and pulmonary diseases, while over 80 percent of persons 25 and over suffer from traces of hepatitis A.

Of the 27 households sampled (3 were elsewhere during the research), 11 live in trigerational arrangements, 6 in clusters of two or more households on the same lot, and 5 share a single hearth. Sixteen nuclear families occupy the rest of the colonia. Total population is 177 persons, with a mean of 6.7 persons per household. Annual income is less

Plate 2. Camper and Animal Pen with Building Material being Stored



Photograph by author.

than \$25,000. Table 5 illustrates the range of income sources and labor activities in the community.

Every three to four months, *brigadas de limpia* (clean-up brigades) scour the colonia for broken bottles, plastic bags, assorted paper, discarded wrappers, and other trash strewn about by the strong winds that come from out of the hot desert in the summer. In the winter—the rainy season—these same brigades try to cover the perennial potholes created by trucks and cars that run over roadways weakened from the heavy rains which pour through the colonia. Located in a

Plate 3. Mobile Home with Attached Room with Exposed Sewage in the Foreground



Photograph by author.

Table 5. Income and Labor Activities in El Recuerdo

Formal Economy		Informal Economy		Underground Economy	
Activity	Frequency	Activity	Frequency	Activity	Frequency
Agricultural contractor	2	In-house store	2	Confidential	10
Agricultural wage laborer	16	Babysitting	2		
Agricultural skilled laborer	3	Animal husbandry	2		
Agricultural packing warehouses	2	Cockfighting	1		
Dairy	2	Junkyard	1		
Bus driver	1	Tandas	6		
Trucker/Entrepreneur	1				
Mechanic	2				
Disabled	2				
Retired	3				

Source: Vélez-Ibáñez n.d.

flood plane, Recuerdo is often threatened by rain from the surrounding low hills, and flooding is common. Before its present development, part of El Recuerdo was used as a dump and another part was a pasture for cattle belonging to a noncolonia owner. People from Hatch and other colonias continue to dump unwanted materials there. Ten or so cattle continue to use the pasture; in the evening they graze through the community, plowing up flowerbeds and urinating and defecating on the colonia itself. Children often run about barefoot with the obvious consequences.

Most residents work on nearby dairy farms for minimum wages; a lucky few have service or construction jobs in a nearby city. About a third travel the migrant stream for three or four months when the crop cycle of the area's chili and onions slows to a trickle of production. Pecans and cotton are largely machine-picked, and labor is limited to gathering what the machines cannot collect.

During January and February, and again in May, colonos migrate to Alabama, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Mississippi. Almost every household owns two trucks and automobiles that are called *muebles* (furniture). The term is symbolic of the nomadic nature of migratory existence in which their households are carried literally with them to points far from the colonias themselves. The term also attempts to soften the utilitarian function of vehicles with a more familial sense because the travel is strenuous, tiring, and saps family resources.

Such travel is part of an elaborate and complex mechanism developed to fill agricultural labor needs in the southeastern United States. The process often is initiated by telephone from labor contractors who communicate with *cuadrilla* (labor group) leaders, who then recruit kin and friends. This aspect of the migrant process also provides an avenue

for class formation. Some individuals begin the process by purchasing a second-hand truck and driving to the onion, pecan, and chili fields, where they bag, box, or shovel product onto the pick-up truck's bed for transfer to a warehouse or processing plant. In time they invest in a larger truck and eventually haul products to markets. Simultaneously, the same individuals become involved in labor contracting and lead the *cuadrillas* to Alabama, Mississippi, or another state needing labor. Once established, however, the same individual purchases a garage, grocery store, and restaurant/bar in the new town, since the *cuadrillas* sometimes establish "colonias" in these distant locales. The individual will then recruit relatives to work in these establishments. They, in turn, serve as the basis for community life and function as central nodes for further recruitment for a trustworthy mechanic, familiar food and articles, and a meeting place for isolated Mexican families in an alien Anglo world.

Formative class aspects emerge. Those who work in these new businesses avoid the fields and the migrant stream and establish a lower-middle-class existence without having to rely on the vagaries of agricultural labor. Thus, some relatives jump from manual labor in Mexico to petty businesses in the United States. It is in this process that an emergent middle class forms "off the backs of others."

When insufficient kin are available, telephone calls are made to Mexico (usually Guanajuato, Chihuahua, and Zacatecas), and a relative who is a smuggler will charge \$700 per person to arrange for transportation from the point of origin to a safe house or hotel. In some cases, relatives will be transferred to a ranch in Mexico close to the border and then moved into New Mexico through well-elaborated routes and communication links, the latter usually involving cell phones that are difficult to tap and to trace. Once safely

housed in the region, immigrants then may be moved to other regions and states. But such safety is often illusory since border check points are well manned, surveillance apparatuses technologically sophisticated, and roaming Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents very familiar with the routes traveled by the smuggler and his kin.

Danger, anxiety, and indeterminacy often fill colonia residents with dread. Too often relatives are arrested and vehicles impounded, the latter representing very hard-earned capital. It must also be said, however, that those engaged in this underground economy represent only a small percentage of all residents of this and other colonias.

The Means of Credit, Debit, and Class Formation

Money is always scarce and seldom sufficient to accomplish many of the basic life-cycle functions. The question then arises, if income is mostly negative, how are lots and homes purchased, improvements made, gardens grown, children clothed, food purchased, automobiles and trucks afforded, and the basic costs of daily living met? How are emergencies like illness, immigration raids and deportation of household members to Mexico, visits to relatives, travel to Alabama, and the other sundry costs dealt with?

The simple answer is a constant balancing of debt, credit, income, and expenditure. Such balancing involves: 1) shuttling between informal and underground economies; 2) pooling available resources and participating in rotating credit associations; 3) borrowing from local banks and loan sharks or using credit cards; 4) creating margins of favorable return on goods purchased in pesos and sold in dollars; and, finally, 5) renegeing on loans from formal or informal credit sources. I discuss each in turn.

These approaches are not exclusive one to the other. Households are large, and extended households serve as a kind of "corporate" group in sharing of resources. Different individuals within households and within the larger network may engage in one or more of these activities at the same time. Which of the activities is most important depends on the life cycle of the household(s) and the number of household members present.

But there is a constant struggle to keep the negative income ratio to less than 20 percent. Transportation, gasoline, and food take up 55 percent of expenditures. Of this 55 percent, 70 percent is paid in auto or truck payments to banks, finance companies, or individuals, with interest in the 13 to 16 percent range per month. Vehicle insurance adds another 15 percent to the monthly cost. Gasoline costs an average of \$200 a month, which adds another 10-15 percent of gross costs. Thus, fluctuations in gasoline prices, costs of periodic mechanical dysfunctions, tire replacements, and upkeep adds another 10-15 percent to the 55 percent already spent on transportation and food. Any fluctuation will automatically move households toward a greater negative income percentage, making informal and underground activities mandatory. At times, this will mean total reliance on underground activities.

Such activities yield very large returns, but they also accrue very large risks.

Pooling resources and participating in rotating credit associations is a second important balancing strategy. The former usually involves pooling income, wages, and future earnings to make an initial down payment on land, trailers, or automobiles. Land in the colonias costs between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per acre, and three-quarters of an acre is needed to build or place a trailer. Based on payments of \$150 per month on a 10-year mortgage, the actual price may double by the end of the payment cycle. A second-hand trailer costs between \$3,000 and \$10,000. A down payment of 20 percent is usually followed with installments between \$100 and \$300 per month, with interest around 15 percent. Therefore, the level of credit indebtedness for lots, housing, and necessary infrastructure, when added to the 55 percent, rises to about 75 percent.

Once married, individuals call upon their parents and siblings for assistance. Where two or more generations share the same land, a cycle of debt continues as new housing creates new debts. Meanwhile, the original generation assumes the costs of the land.

Rotating credit associations (RCAs) have two major functions: debt reduction and purchase of gifts for rituals or to defray the costs of everyday needs. For the most part, the amount is no more than \$200 a month, with a rotation of five to six months. At one time an individual may receive between \$1,000 to \$1,200 and considerable relief is noted, especially during slack periods of employment. Many seek to have their fund collection fall in May or June and for the most part RCAs do not operate during these periods. RCAs are mostly in the hands of women and play a less important role than familial pooling.

Borrowing from banks is the prerogative of households that have been in the colonia area for one year or more and have established credit with stores or have a record of steady employment. Banks use a combination of safeguards with less regard for collateral and with a greater dependence on the local networks of farmers who vouch for the reputation of their employees and provide income information to banks when loans are solicited. But banks never provide more than 75 percent of the estimated maximum of any given loan. According to them, no household should exhaust its credit because it will return for more during the Christmas holidays, when most households visit Mexico and in some cases collect rent from lands left in the hands of relatives. At least one bank officer is sincerely concerned that colonia residents are often on the brink of insolvency, and borrowing more will put them at risk for foreclosure. In addition, one bank officer wanted the colonia borrower to have a cushion in case of emergencies for relatives in Mexico, not an infrequent occurrence. In some cases bank officers will not approve credit cards, not because colonia residents are poor risks, but because they think colonia residents are simply unacquainted with the mail as the means of repayment.

At times, colonia residents take advantage of the Mexican border 75 miles to the south to purchase Mexican foodstuffs

and religious items for resale in the colonias. Carbonated drinks, candies, bakery goods, flour, sugar, beans, and spices are sold in tiny home-stores or simply stored and advertised through the dense information networks of the colonias. The return on investment is limited, given transportation costs, the limited quantities allowed by U.S. Customs, and the increasing costs of items. About 20 percent of households may be involved in these activities.

Reneging on debts is the last of the possible balancing measures, and the least desirable. Reneging on bank loans places the household in even greater risk, since banks may be the only source of cash for emergencies. If lots or homes are used as collateral, the household's most valuable asset may be eliminated. Farmer-bank relations are often close and personal relations between bank officers and farmers are also dense. As a result, employers may garnish wages.

Borrowing and reneging on informal borrowing may have both social and physical consequences, depending on the relationship with the creditor. Reneging on a relative, colonia resident, or friend has far-reaching consequences—failure to pay a debt breaks *confianza* (mutual trust), the central value in the many reciprocal and obligatory relations between colonia residents. Since reciprocal relations based on exchange endure even though the commodities they entail may not, reneging on debts places relations based on other obligations in danger. The rupture of relations is simply too dangerous socially for colonia residents, given their negative income, marginal economic stability, immigration status, and sundry other uncertainties and indeterminacies.

“Loan sharking” may also be present, especially among men. For the most part, women do not participate in this underground credit economy. Men usually contact other men, who then contract someone engaged in other underground activities and who may lend money at weekly interest rates. Reneging on such debts may result in physical violence. In one case, the borrower dared the lender to collect his debt and the lender together with his father, brothers, and cousins ambushed the borrower and broke his kneecaps.

The political ecology of the colonias reflects the asymmetry of the interaction between the labor needs of industrial agriculture and the labor regulatory role of the nation-state. It also reflects the meager provisioning of Mexican households, coupled with the lack of available housing stock. While these are in fact poor households, their inhabitants are also innovative and develop inventive practices using all available materials, wages, relationships, and opportunities to establish their homes in the midst of often unsettling physical conditions.

Colonias are the manifestation of one type of human subsidy that meets the needs of industrial agriculture. The colonias serve as available sources of labor, thereby freeing the state and industry from providing the basic provisioning necessary to develop healthy communities. It is only with great political struggle and local organizing that services are introduced, community formation made possible, relatively stable households formed, and some of the basic infrastructure for community living provided.

In fact, industrial agriculture demands an initially underpaid, underprovisioned, and largely uninsured and unprotected labor force. Colonias function as important platforms from which to gain profits in a risky and uncertain enterprise, one beset not only with declining local, regional, national, and international market prices but also with all the usual cost demands in farming, such as transportation, processing, marketing, chemicals, and equipment.

At one level, the entire edifice is dependent on the subsidies provided by the colonias, since their formation is a cost borne by the inhabitants themselves and only later by institutions. The reciprocal relationships of extended households used in the colonias, such as the exchange of money, information, and favors, provide a modicum of security and the basis of community life. This social capital makes up for the lack of monetary capital unavailable to colonos and serves as a subsidy to the local and regional economy. The structure of credit and debts is associated with this subsidy function as well and undergrids the entire process. The underground economy provides an added invisible subsidy—the recruitment of relatives to fill the work needs of agricultural interests. Costs associated with such recruitment are entirely in the hands of those being recruited, and the risks to smuggler-relatives are also entirely debited to them. In no case is agriculture bearing any risk or cost associated with this process.

On the other hand, class mobility for some individuals is guaranteed by the same subsidy system, just as it guarantees social and economic inequality that is the central principle of social development in all capitalist systems. These subsidies of sacrifice, invention, reciprocity, indebtedness, and community formation are crucial links in the chains of debt and credit accrued by colonos. Yet this colonia and the 2,000 others in rural areas, as well as the urban networks created in the largest of our cities, form the basis of civil discourse, community relations, and political empowerment through self-development. The basis of participatory citizenship in all polities consists of exactly these webs of relationships, and, whether documented or not, migrant, immigrant, or native born are due political recognition as such.

There are many social and physical costs for those engaged in this chain of labor, debt, and community formation. In literally millions of instances, these chains tie households and individuals to a broader system of national and transnational production and economic ecology. These create the underlying structural conditions that guarantee statistical and actual overrepresentations in what I have termed “the distribution of sadness.” Their implications for the future are profound and their solution mandatory, given the sheer weight of projected demographic growth.

The solutions lay in recognizing these colonias as regions of refuge and in extending and recognizing them as civil entities with all rights and duties of recognition by supraregional states. Equally imperative is forming an articulated transnational plan, rather than piecemeal approaches presently applied by state and national authorities. At the present rate of colonia increase—7 percent per year—by 2050 very large

portions of unsuitable locations for human habitation will be occupied by desperate populations integrated within exploitive, largely debilitating, and oppressive political ecologies.

Part III. The Distribution of Sadnesses: The Prices of Subsidizing Regions of Refuge

There are special costs to be paid by significant parts of the Mexican-origin population for their roles in subsidizing the American economy and in the development of these regions. These roles are situated in their poor educational achievement, integration at the lowest rungs of the occupational ladder, low income, and in the struggle to develop stable communities in the midst of nothing in rural areas or networks of relations in dangerous urban areas. I refer to the actual costs paid as the “distribution of sadness,” in that these appear as bulges in the statistical distribution of mental and physical health problems, of premature deaths for young people, in the early and too frequent incarceration of young men, and in the political disempowerment of sizeable parts of the population. Among the most terrifying sadnesses are those of an overrepresentation in war. Once more, young Mexican-origin servicemen and women will be overrepresented in another U.S. international adventure; one in which they will again become physical and mental casualties of the dogs of war, led by failing old men who themselves largely escaped the call of their own generation.

Physical and Mental Sadnesses

To be in or near poverty almost guarantees associations with certain types of illnesses. These are in part the consequences of low-wage employment, but equally important is having little or no health access or insurance. More than 40 percent of working Latino adults have no insurance and only 20 percent of all poor Latinos have medical coverage. In compassionate Texas, 39 percent of Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 64 have no medical coverage (Sumaya 2002). While listed as “Hispanic,” more than 90 percent of the Texas Spanish-speaking population is of Mexican origin, and 30 percent of all Mexicans in the U.S. reside in Texas. Even more remarkable is that in this most compassionate state, formerly led by a most compassionate governor, and now led by a most compassionate president, 80 percent of employed Mexicans are not covered by health insurance.

In general, there is little wonder the death rates among Mexican-origin populations are considerably higher than those of other populations. Taking Arizona as a case in point (Table 6), the average age at death from all causes in 1990 was 54.6 years for Mexican males and 65.4 for Anglo males. Ten years later, in 2000, the average age of death by all causes for Mexican males was 55.9 and 70.9 for Anglo males (ADHS 2001). This gain for Anglos and stasis for Mexican-origin males is an artifact of health practices, labor, and homicide. As Table 6 shows, similar dismal average ages for African Americans and American Indians remained relatively

unchanged except for a four-year increase in longevity for American Indians. Women in all cases fared better than men, but Anglo women had an average age at death in 1990 of 73.9, while Mexican women lived an average of 9 years less. This advantage grew for Anglo women to almost 14 years by 2000. In 1990, Mexican women lived an average of 10 years more than men, but 10 years later it had decreased to 8 years. The reason for the decrease is unknown.

What then accounts for such disparities between groups? For Mexican-origin populations in general, chronic illnesses remain untreated because of lack of insurance. Mexican-origin women suffer twice the rates of cervical cancer of Anglo women and have the highest mortality rates due to breast cancer (Intercultural Cancer Council 2001). The latter condition is primarily because only 38 percent of Mexican-origin women age 40 and older have regular screenings, and high cervical cancer rates are also due to the lack of screening procedures (ibid.). Mexican-origin men get hurt and are killed more often on the job than women, and they are more often victims of homicide than are either women or Anglos.

Accidents, most work-related, are the third highest cause of death among Latinos in general and apply to Mexican-origin populations even more so than other populations given the structure of occupational participation (Table 7). Malignant neoplasms are strongly associated with exposure to chemical agents, and especially vulnerable are men who work in agriculture, construction, and mining. Noticeably, deaths by homicide are the seventh most common cause of death for Latinos (CDC 2001).

In California, which has 8 million Mexican-origin persons (or 40% of all Mexicans), homicide is the leading cause of death among males aged 15-24 and the second leading cause of death for males aged 25-34. Homicide is also the second leading cause of death among Latina females aged 15-24 in California. Many such deaths are alcohol related: 10 per 100,000 Latinos died in alcohol-related homicides compared with less than 3 per 100,000 Anglos (CDC 1998). In 1995, Latinos comprised almost 46 percent of all homicide victims, compared to 26.2 percent for African Americans and 20.6 percent for Anglos (CDJ 1995).

Such violence is also turned inward. Thirty-four percent of all Latinas surveyed had experienced domestic violence. In California, 40.6 percent of all Latino arrests were for domestic violence in 1998. The percentage for domestic violence arrests increased by 8 percent between 1988 and 1998 (California Department of Corrections 1999).

Such levels of violence cannot but develop a sizeable distribution of post-traumatic stress on entire families and singularly on women, who are the major targets for abuse. Mexican-origin populations have similar rates of psychiatric disorder to Anglos, but those born in the U.S. had higher rates of depression and phobias than those born in Mexico. In fact, the Mexican born had lower prevalence rates of all lifetime disorders than Mexicans born in the U.S. All studies point to the fact that Mexican-born immigrants have better mental health than U.S.-born Mexicans (DHHS 2001). It would seem

Table 6. Average Age at Death from all Causes by Gender and Ethnicity in Arizona, 1990-2000

Year/ Gender	All Ethnic Groups ¹	White Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Black	American Indian	Asian
1990						
Total	68.4	70.6	58.5	58.1	51.4	NA
Male	65.4	67.9	54.6	55.5	48.7	NA
Female	72.2	73.9	64.1	61.6	56.1	NA
1991						
Total	68.5	70.8	57.6	58.8	52.3	NA
Male	65.6	68.1	54.7	54.4	50.4	NA
Female	71.9	73.7	61.5	64.4	54.8	NA
1992						
Total	68.7	71.1	58.3	57.8	52.8	NA
Male	65.8	68.5	54.8	54.7	49.0	NA
Female	72.4	74.2	63.7	62.3	58.7	NA
1993						
Total	68.6	71.1	57.9	56.2	51.9	NA
Male	65.6	68.3	54.7	54.1	49.3	NA
Female	72.2	74.3	62.7	59.2	55.8	NA
1994						
Total	68.4	71.0	56.6	56.8	52.0	NA
Male	65.2	68.2	52.5	54.5	48.7	NA
Female	72.2	74.2	62.3	60.6	57.2	NA
1995						
Total	68.5	71.0	57.4	57.4	52.2	NA
Male	65.2	68.2	53.1	53.7	48.2	NA
Female	72.4	74.2	63.6	62.9	57.8	NA
1996						
Total	69.6	72.4	56.5	57.8	52.9	62.1
Male	66.1	69.2	52.6	54.9	49.9	60.6
Female	73.6	75.9	62.4	61.3	57.2	63.9
1997						
Total	71.0	73.1	61.3	61.9	55.4	64.2
Male	67.5	70.1	57.2	57.6	51.2	61.4
Female	74.9	76.3	67.4	67.7	61.4	68.0
1998						
Total	71.2	73.4	61.8	62.5	56.5	62.7
Male	67.9	70.5	57.4	59.4	53.2	60.8
Female	74.9	76.5	68.0	66.3	61.2	62.7
1999						
Total	71.7	74.1	59.2	60.5	55.7	63.9
Male	68.8	71.5	56.2	57.8	51.8	62.3
Female	74.9	77.0	63.3	63.9	60.6	65.5
2000						
Total	71.6	73.9	59.2	60.8	55.4	62.3
Male	68.7	70.9	55.8	56.8	51.6	61.6
Female	74.9	77.0	63.7	65.8	60.4	63.0

¹May include records with other/unknown ethnic groups.

Source: ADHS 2001: Table 2D-1.

that while parents leave debilitating regions of refuge, U.S.-born Mexicans emerge in new ones.

Rates of substance abuse and dependence among U.S.-born Mexican males exceed those of Mexican-born males by a ratio of 2 to 1. U.S.-born males have higher rates of substance

abuse than Mexican-born youth as well (DHHS 2001). When coupled with the fact that “Latinos (most of whom are of Mexican origin) are nearly four times as likely as Anglos to be in prison at some point during their lifetimes,” then rates of mental disorders are likely to be higher among them because

Table 7. Ten Leading Causes of Death among Hispanics in the U.S., 1999**Rank Hispanics in the United States**

1	Diseases of heart
2	Malignant neoplasms, including neoplasms of lymphatic and hematopoietic tissues
3	Accidents (unintentional injuries)
4	Cerebrovascular diseases
5	Diabetes mellitus
6	Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis
7	Assault (homicide)
8	Chronic lower respiratory diseases
9	Influenza and pneumonia
10	Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period

Note: Rates per 100,000 population in specified group. Race and Hispanic origin are reported separately on the death certificate. Cause of death (Based on the 10th Revision, International Classification of Diseases, 1992)
Source: Public Health Service Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 2001 Report.

greater rates of mental disorders are found among incarcerated persons than the general population (*ibid.*).

For many Mexicans, U.S. born or not, escape from such regions and from incarceration also meant joining the military service. The history of Mexican participation in the military is long and distinguished, but an inordinate number became casualties in almost every conflict since World War I. At present, 14 percent of Marines are Latinos, most of Mexican origin. The Army, Navy, and Air Force have focused their recruitment efforts on high schools with large concentrations of Mexican-origin youth, and services have established Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) chapters in the same schools. The first U.S. casualties in the war in Iraq were a Guatemalan Marine shortly followed by a Mexican Marine—neither were citizens. Whether to be used as commodities, for war, or as candidates for prison, we simply must not allow this to occur.

Conclusions

If the future seems less than promising for so many Americans of Mexican origin, it behooves us to treat the symptoms and causes of the creation of the many versions of regions of refuge.

A partial solution lies in the recognition of colonias and urban networks as civil societies. These must be treated politically on a national and transnational level on their civil status, as reflected by their self-development and community formation, rather than on the basis of individual birth or legal status. Or to say it a bit differently, if communities are formed, then these should be the units of citizenship, and *civitas* becomes the glue for national and transnational protection, not individual birthright or passing an immigration test. Given their rate of growth, no draconian measures can stop their development.

However, the educational attainment of persons in Mexico has to be addressed if those communities are to become even stronger. Whether documented or undocumented, a Mexican labor force with an educational attainment similar to that of Asians in the United States—13 years or so—would be an intellectual and social force to be reckoned with. The information technology field holds great promise for Mexicans in Mexico, since it is a relatively low capital-intensive market that needs a well-educated labor force. Educational quality will determine the efficacy of such a sector. An educated Mexican labor force would help shorten the gap between first and second generations and reduce the need for special education programs. The first generation would receive all of the advantages of parents who can influence strongly the education of their children, defend themselves in the job market, and contribute even more to what could become a more vibrant economy.

On the other hand, the second- to third-generation gap needs to be addressed immediately. If the demographic expansion previously described is certain, then each gap between the second and third generation can only mean this gap will be maintained and many more generations will suffer. Therefore, programs designed to accentuate intellectual abilities and skills, as well as opportunities, need to be developed for exactly these generations. The emphasis would be on developing the social scaffolding that may have been weakened by class movement from one generation to another, with specific attention to the highest intellectual preparation for this generation through special preparatory programs. These would accentuate cognitive, compositional, computational, and scientific skills and could be developed as bridge programs between junior colleges and universities, since a very large percentage of Mexican-origin students attend junior colleges as part-time students. This combination of junior

college attendance with part-time jobs weakens the preparatory base for advanced university-level instruction. As well, special attention to enrollments in Research I universities may also result in added generational benefits. The cost of such suggestions would be roughly two B-2 bombers over a ten-year period to fill the gap between generations and assist in the revamping of the educational opportunity structure of the Mexican system as well.

But whatever solutions emerge, we must deal with the overarching inability of poor and near-poor Mexican-origin populations to provision their households. Simply said, this is an issue of human rights too often dismissed by reference to a declared “cheap labor” rationalization that accompanies the word “Mexican.” This treatment of the Mexican population as an often-devalued commodity, or at best a commodity to be bought and sold like any other feature of value, must be removed from the clutches of economic definitions in which the humanity of a population is reduced to a market rationalization.

I argue that we are looking at a potentially new area for examining and reporting human rights violations. No existing instrument of the United Nations or other intergovernmental agency considers the inhumane conditions faced by people when they cross borders voluntarily for economic reasons to be human rights issues, nor do these address the impacts of local, regional, and national dislocations on human beings because of economic changes (see Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney 1992). International instruments, most notably the UN’s International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (UN 1976) do, of course, call for basic economic, social, and cultural rights, including “the right of everyone to just and favourable conditions of work” (ibid.:Article 7); an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing, and housing (ibid.:Article 11). While Article 2 states that rights specified in the ICESCR pertain to all, it also says that “Developing countries . . . may determine to what extent they would guarantee the economic rights recognized in the present Covenant to non-nationals” (UN 1976:Article 2(3); Vélez-Ibáñez 2004).

Yet there is no attention to a broader strategic mission that includes an operationalized method of integrating within the strategic decision-making process of corporate investments and outlays concomitant guarantees to the stable and predictive provisioning of households. I take the view that economic institutions—local, national, and transnational—must have integrated within their strategic “thought-range” the appropriate provisioning for human households and the deconstitution of regions of refuge. Economic processes initiated by capital institutions seldom recognize either political or economic borders of any sort, nor does this approach suggest any. Therefore, I do not distinguish the necessity of differentiating the provisioning households and the development of reconstituted regions of refuge between those created by migration, by natural birth rates, or by a combination of both. I argue that one of the most pressing human rights issues for the new century is the continued devalorized commodification of Mexican-origin populations.

It is only by enormous struggles and extraordinary human effort that many parts of the Mexican-origin population manage to emerge relatively whole within different versions of these regions of refuge. But they do so with real and tangible costs—cultural, social, and physical. Without decent wages, too often our populations have to dip into the grey interstitial corners of making a living to survive and to deal with bare versions of what allows human beings to emerge without immense psychic and physical damage.

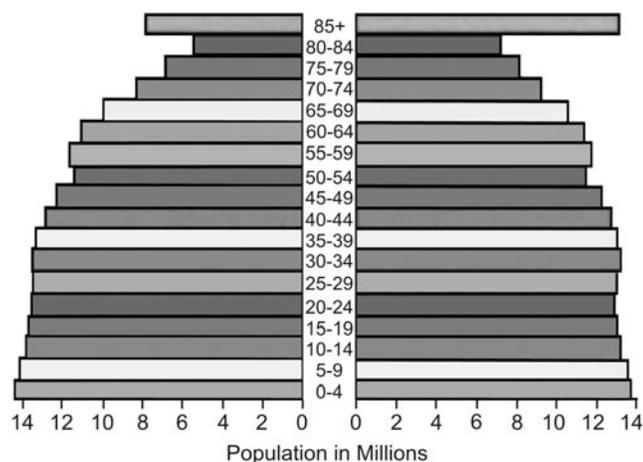
The hard work to be done analytically includes how best to capture the most important variables linking the structures of each region of refuge to the broader political ecology and economy and to other regions. In rural areas, each will be marked by distinctive and similar physical ecologies like agricultural valleys, intensive and extensive organizations of production, available land for purchase or sale, and the invaluable relation to water. At the social and cultural level, how political influence is exercised and who has access to it would be crucial elements to research and to understand. In urban areas, different elements would have to be considered, like home ownership, control of local schools, funding patterns, stratification of legal and judicial access, and the economic investment and consistency of local businesses as they relate to the communities upon which they depend. Certainly religious and juridical authorities play crucial roles in how drugs, gangs, and violence are treated. In concert with the analysis of household dynamics and generational opportunities and change, as well as their limitations, urban subregions could be characterized and relations of obstruction, ideologies of subordination, practices of exclusion, and economic exploitation and misrepresentation could be addressed within an action-oriented application of the subregion.

Each region of refuge will have specific characteristics—some unique, some the same—but in their entirety they will constitute an integrated anthropological vision from which to gauge as well to apply our knowledge for the benefit of the populations that are in need now and that in the future may be even more in need.

I have provided you with a glimpse of the present for many Mexican-origin populations and argued that we face many challenges to the thorny issues of immigration, health, education, community formation, social relations, and labor. These are all interrelated, and each may have applied to it specific approaches for possible alleviation, but without a broader synthetic framework, we are sure to fail. That framework must incorporate an anthropological vision akin in scope and application to Aguirre Beltrán’s, for to borrow from him more specifically, much of the Mexican-origin population of the United States ends up in regions of refuge in which it is difficult to establish stable social platforms from whence future generations could arise as whole human beings.

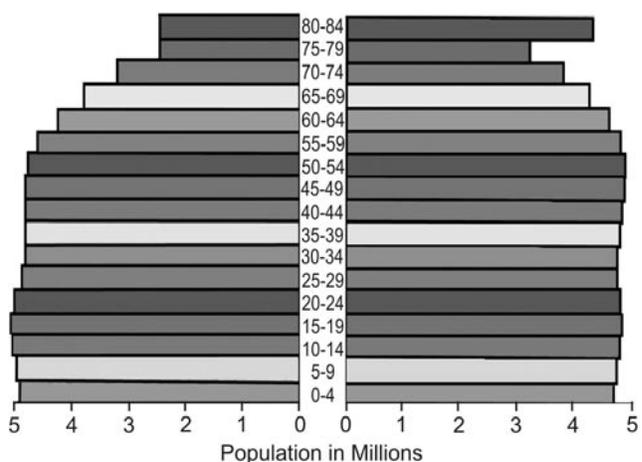
I would like to leave you with a final thought by showing you the Mexican and the U.S. population pyramids for the year 2050 (see Figures 6 and 7). For all the reasons I have discussed, in the next 25 years, especially, applied

Figure 6. Estimated Population of the United States by Age Group, 2050



Source: Population Pyramid Summary for United States, Population Division, International Programs Center, U.S. Census Bureau. URL: <http://www.census/ipc/www/idbpyr.html> (November 21, 2003)

Figure 7. Estimated Population of Mexico by Age Group, 2050



Source: Population Pyramid Summary for United States, Population Division, International Programs Center, U.S. Census Bureau. URL: <http://www.census/ipc/www/idbpyr.html> (November 21, 2003)

anthropology will be very important in formulating projects, programs, initiatives, solutions, and interventions. By 2050, our respective pyramids will look more like each other than different, and those 25 years old today will face an uncertainty much greater than the present because of the sheer presence of the aged on both sides of the border. One doubts that migration will subside, unless real transnational measures become successful or an entirely new polity emerges. In either case, Mexicans will continue to cross the border as long as it offers escape from regions of refuge, but they will do so as much older populations that will join older populations with renewed issues of health, economy, polity, social relations, community formation, and education. Applied anthropology may be at the cusp of accelerated growth, since it is one of the few disciplines that can not only think about the long-term theoretical possibilities described here, but, as importantly, it can use its already established skills, learning, and practice to shift policy, programs, and institutions and thereby reduce the probable outcomes of inattention to these matters.

Notes

¹Beltrán also suggests that it is technological backwardness and cultural disadvantage that propagates and permits such dominance, which is not a position assumed by my use of the phrase for the United States.

²Between 1929 and 1935, almost a half million Mexican-origin persons were “voluntarily” deported or forced to go to Mexico. One-third were American citizens (Vélez-Ibáñez 1996:288).

³Unless otherwise stated, “of Mexican origin” refers to persons born in both Mexico and the United States. The most current population report, by Roberto R. Ramirez and Patricia de la Cruz (2002), indicates that

the Mexican-origin population now numbers over 25 million, or almost 67 percent of all Hispanics. Most continue to live in the Southwest.

⁴Many of these cities were founded as the Spanish colonies expanded from Mexico beginning in the 16th century. Santa Fe, for example, was founded in 1610, three years after Jamestown, and Albuquerque 100 years later, San Antonio in 1731, San Diego in 1769, Tucson and San Francisco in 1776, and Los Angeles in 1781 (Vélez-Ibáñez 1996:37-62).

⁵The former are characterized by isolated, nucleated households with little horizontal or vertical relations and the latter (fewer in number) are largely associated with the landlords who sold them the property in the first place.

⁶In fact, even the middle-range series projections for 1990 have already proven to be too low by over 5 million Latinos, of which at least 60 percent are of Mexican origin (Population Reference Bureau 2002).

⁷This mini-ethnography is being published as “The Political Ecology of Debt Among Mexican Colonias in the Southwestern United States” in the *Journal of Development Studies* (Vélez-Ibáñez n.d.).

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