

Summer 2008

## Across Imagined Boundaries: Understanding Mexican Migration to Georgia in a Transnational and Historical Context

Michael Kirkland Bess

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ACROSS IMAGINED BOUNDARIES: UNDERSTANDING MEXICAN MIGRATION  
TO GEORGIA IN A TRANSNATIONAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

by

MICHAEL KIRKLAND BESS

(Under the Direction of Laura Shelton)

ABSTRACT

The Mexican immigrant community in Georgia grew at a dramatic rate between 1970 and 2000 as individuals entered the area to participate in the state's burgeoning economy. Social networks played an integral role in this process, transferring information about Georgia through family and friendship bonds that stretched between sending and receiving communities across the United States and Mexico. This thesis examines the transnational characteristics of social networks as they influenced Mexican migration trends, responded to economic opportunity and crisis across North America, and challenged government attempts to restrict and regulate the movement of people across international boundaries. Conditions in Mexico greatly affected the migration flows entering the United States and Georgia; social networks developed close, transnational connections between these communities that fostered new forms of cultural expression, economic development, and political reaction during this thirty year span.

INDEX WORDS: Mexico, Georgia, Social Networks, Migration, Immigration.

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B.A., Franciscan University of Steubenville, 2005

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2008

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July 2008

## DEDICATION

For my parents, my family, and especially my tía who was a great support and source of encouragement throughout this project, but can now only see its completion with other eyes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A work of this size cannot be completed alone, a number of people played important roles in its production, including Laura Shelton, my major professor, who guided this project with an excellent critical eye, offered great encouragement, and helped me push through even the most daunting challenges along the way. Michelle Haberland and Debra Sabia worked together on my thesis committee, wonderful sources of support with fresh perspectives that advanced my work in new directions. Robert Batchelor challenged me to reach for new heights throughout this project. The professors and staff of the Department of History at Georgia Southern University, many of whom provided a warm, supportive environment that helped me to pursue my academic goals. Robert DeVillar and Ronald Bailey also contributed important editorial input in the early stages of this project. Jerry Gonzalez provided the first spark of inspiration for my work during his visit to campus in February 2007, where he gave a spirited defense of the immigrant community against racism and indifference. My parents, relatives, and friends, whom contributed important moments of solace that sustained me throughout the research, writing, and editing process. Without the individuals and organization mentioned above this thesis could not have been completed, I am grateful for their patience and generosity.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	6
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	9
Social Networks and Migration Trajectories.....	13
Economic Incentives and Migration.....	18
Social Networks and Political Devolution .....	22
A Word about the Title.....	24
2 THE CREATION AND PROCESSES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN GEORGIA .....	25
Comparative Study: From Puebla and Tlaxcala to New York City .....	29
The Emergence of Mexican Social Networks in Dalton and Gainesville ...	31
The Integration of Mexican Social Networks in Metropolitan Atlanta.....	36
Local Responses from Religious and Business Operations in Atlanta .....	40
Conclusion.....	42
3 SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES FROM MEXICO'S CORE TO GEORGIA.....	44
Comparative Study: The Great Migration.....	49
Historic Trends in Mexico-U.S. Migration Trajectories .....	53
Recent Developments in Mexico-U.S. Migration Trajectories .....	56
Mexico-Georgia Migration Trajectories .....	59
Conclusion.....	62



4	THE EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND CRISIS ON TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION .....	65
	Opportunity and Crisis in Mexico, 1961-1982.....	69
	The Era of Neoliberal Reform in Mexico, 1982-1994 .....	72
	Conditions in Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz .....	76
	Economic Influences on Immigration to Georgia after 1990.....	84
	Conclusion.....	89
5	THE ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS AND POLITICAL DEVOLUTION WITHIN U.S. IMMIGRATION LAW IN GEORGIA .....	93
	Informal Immigration and the Role of Transnational Social Networks.....	97
	Legislative Regulation and Militarization of U.S. Immigration .....	100
	Georgia and the Devolution of Political Responses on U.S. Immigration.....	105
	Conclusion.....	110
6	GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	113
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	118

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.**

Since the 1970s, the state of Georgia experienced an increasingly noticeable influx of Mexican immigrants. They first arrived to work in poultry processing plants and carpet mills around Dalton and Gainesville. Before long, however, this burgeoning community entered additional employment sectors. Social networks and migration trajectories played important, underlying roles in this process. The ways in which individuals communicated, moved, and interacted with new communities affected not only Georgia as it became a settlement area for Mexicans, but also the immigrants' places of origin, which they left behind in search of new opportunities. This thesis examines this loose system of connection within a transnational framework, giving attention to sending and receiving regions in Mexico and the United States.

This thesis seeks to achieve two objectives. First, it examines modern trends of Mexican migration to Georgia within a historical paradigm. The emergence of a prominent Spanish-speaking demographic cohort did not occur in a vacuum. Studying the movement of peoples over the Mexico-U.S. border and the establishment of ties between sending and receiving regions across this line offered lessons for Georgia's experience. Second, this thesis demonstrates the central importance of social networks in the development of Mexican immigrant communities in the United States and Georgia. It studies the inter-connections that these entities maintained on a variety of levels and the creation of transnational linkages that emerged between sending and receiving regions.

Furthermore, the development of Mexican social networks, while influenced by the larger framework of Mexico-U.S. socio-cultural and economic interaction was also affected by the idiosyncratic distinctions of everyday life in Georgia. My work examines Mexican migration trends to Georgia and how these movements fit into a broader U.S.-Mexico framework. Put simply, though the individual may be an immigrant, living this identity in Los Angeles and New York City was different from living it in Atlanta or Dalton. This thesis considers why this was the case and relies on a variety of observations made by scholars in history, political science, and sociology from both English- and Spanish-speaking backgrounds. With the reader as my partner on this journey, I seek to develop an appreciation of the migration experience and what we can learn through comparative analysis of different geographic regions and epochs.

Mexican immigrants played a crucial role in Georgia's social and economic development in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Prior to the 1996 Summer Olympics, this community provided workers during a labor shortage in Atlanta that threatened the preparations for the Games. Furthermore, they filled employment space in a number of key industries driving Georgia's growth in the 1980s and 1990s. Mexican workers could be found in construction, agriculture, and service-based sectors. They built houses in metropolitan Atlanta, picked fruit throughout middle Georgia, and worked in restaurants and hotels across the state. Along the way, the

Mexican immigrant community contributed elements of its own ethnic identity to the settlement area.<sup>1</sup>

This identity manifested itself in different forms. There were market endeavors, such as ethnic groceries and restaurants that offered the tastes of Mexico. Media outlets began broadcasting Spanish-language music and talk radio; as of 2006, seven stations operated in the Atlanta area alone. Christian faith-based organizations became involved: the Catholic Church hired bilingual staffers and priests, while protestant denominations developed their own services. Catholic masses were offered in Spanish, while Baptists and others opened churches that specifically catered to this community. As the population of Mexicans living in Georgia grew, the types of services and entertainment options continued to expand.<sup>2</sup>

Georgia's Mexican immigrant community came predominately from three states in Mexico: Guerrero, Michoacán, and Guanajuato. These states represented thirty percent of Georgia's total Mexican population. An additional six states, Hidalgo, *Distrito Federal*, Oaxaca, Estado de México, San Luis Potosí, and Veracruz comprised another thirty percent. In total, twenty-one of Mexico's thirty-two states were represented in Georgia by 2006.<sup>3</sup> It was a diverse community, with many

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<sup>1</sup> Beata D. Kochut and Jeffrey M. Humphreys, eds., *Going North: Mexican Immigrants in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee* (Atlanta: Selig Center, 2006), 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion*, <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=75> (Retrieved: February 10, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior. *El Sistema de Información Origen-Destino de Comunidades Mexicanas*. <http://www.ime.gob.mx/estados.htm> (Retrieved: September 10, 2008).

individuals who maintained their regional identity and customs. The diversity manifested itself in the ways media outlets and other ethnic-oriented enterprises targeted their customers. For example, a Spanish-language format radio station may advertise a local restaurant offering the tastes of Michoacán to its listeners. There exists a tendency, however, to homogenize the Mexican community. It is important to consider regional identity distinctions that existed within the all-encompassing idea of the “Mexican community.”

Before continuing further, I must address the issue of homogenization connected to the terms “Hispanic/Latino” and “Mexican.” The former appeared frequently in U.S. Census reports and other studies conducted by organizations in the United States. Both words, “Hispanic” and “Latino,” were meant to symbolically encompass the population of individuals living in the United States with a cultural tradition rooted in Latin America or the Caribbean. Furthermore, in everyday parlance the term “Mexican” has been applied as a general identifier of the entire “Hispanic/Latino” community by many Americans. It is important not to confuse these terms; specific national identities played influential roles in Spanish-speaking immigrants’ paradigms. In Georgia’s case, many Central and South American countries were represented inside its borders. While these groups also require study, the largest cohort of individuals within the state’s Spanish-speaking population (almost sixty percent) hailed from Mexico. In order to better study how receiving regions in Georgia interacted with sending communities in Mexico, my research concentrates on this dominant sub-group within the so-called “Hispanic/Latino” community.

This thesis utilizes two conceptual terms to understand the community. It does use the regionally homogenizing word “Mexican” when considering the broader, macro-effects of transnational migration between Mexico and the United States. For instance, when describing the general contours of Mexican immigration to Georgia, I utilized homogenizing language in order to communicate the group’s growing position in the state. On the other hand, I attempted to draw-out regional distinctions in order to show the impact of social network linkages. Mexican immigration did not occur as an ad hoc “invasion” of Spanish-speaking people as some pundits liked the public to believe. Rather, family and regional social networks emerged within Georgia attracting particular groups of people to the state from Mexico and from other parts of the United States.

As pioneering immigrant communities from Guerrero, Michoacán, and elsewhere established themselves, they tended to attract relatives and compatriots. People living in Mexico, when deciding to emigrate, usually selected settlement communities in the United States based on the presence of these kin- and comradeship networks. As such, it was important to recognize that the distinctions in regional and familial affiliations, while oftentimes overlooked by the popular press, offered valuable insight into the study of transnational migration and how an immigrant’s world in the United States were constructed.

### **Social Networks and Migration Trajectories**

What is a social network? In its most elemental form, it is a collection of relational ties between people. These bonds occurred in different ways. One of the most basic is the biological relationship formed within a family. The collection of

relatives that an individual has served as a point of departure for his/her creation of personal identity. This occurred in both positive and negative ways. In the process of transnational migration, however, kinship social networks extended across political boundaries. Fernando Herrera-Lima in *Vidas Itinerantes en un Espacio Laboral Transnacional* emphasized the importance of kinship bonds as *transnational families*, concomitantly transmitting local customs from their places of origin and returning information about life in the settlement area. When family members moved into a region in the United States they tended to communicate information relating to living conditions and economic opportunities to relatives in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> This interaction began the process by which sending and receiving regions were connected together. As an immigrant community matured, identity expanded beyond the kinship level. Regional affiliation influenced the larger migration framework.

As particular families became permanent residents in a settlement area, they served not only to attract relatives to the area, but also as linkages for the larger regional community in their place of origin. These individuals operated as go-betweens, for example, working with local businesses in Georgia to contract labor from Mexico. The study *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* highlighted the importance of regional connections in the establishment of Mexican immigrant communities in Dalton, Gainesville and Macon, Georgia. These relational ties with a particular Mexican state served as a conduit by which additional immigrants arrived in the settlement area. Furthermore, regional immigrant networks also carried symbolic representation. Sociologist Cecilia Imaz wrote: “These clubs constitute

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<sup>4</sup> Herrera-Lima, *Vidas Itinerantes en un Espacio Laboral Transnacional* (Mexico City: Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, 2005), 265.

networks of support for migrants, distinct from relatives, that form themselves in the establishment process.”<sup>5</sup> Her study examined cultural transmissions between California and the Mexican state of Nayarit. Georgia experienced similar connections. In the article “Mexican Places in South Spaces: Globalization, Work and Daily Life in and around the North Georgia Poultry Industry,” Greg Guthey applied social network theory to Gainesville. He expanded upon Imaz’s definition, however, by including private enterprises alongside community organizations. He argued that ethnic groceries, media outlets, restaurants, and related businesses all functioned as components within immigrant social networks. They contributed to a multi-layered process, where family members, regional comrades, and economic agents interacted to establish and grow an immigrant community in a particular settlement area.<sup>6</sup>

The dynamic between sending and receiving regions was an important one that will be considered throughout my thesis. The former described those places in Mexico which tended to export labor to other areas. This not only included destinations in the United States, but also intermediate points on the migration trajectory, such as the borderlands. The term “receiving region” identified those areas which imported labor. While economic language tends to describe much of the historical immigration experience, this process was not driven solely by these motivations. Receiving regions emerged also in response to pre-existing social networks; people arrived in order to reunite families or to capitalize on personal

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<sup>5</sup> Cecilia Imaz, “Las Organizaciones sociales de migrantes mexicano en Estados Unidos.” in *Nuevas Tendencias* (Mexico City: Universidad Autonoma de Zacatecas, 2004), 47-8.

<sup>6</sup> Greg Guthey, “Mexican Places in South Spaces” in *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 57-8.



connections to find work. Tamar Jacoby wrote extensively on this topic in her article “Immigration Nation,” noting that “Immigrants already here [in the U.S.] communicate to their compatriots still at home [in Mexico] that the job market in, say, Detroit is flat, while the market in Las Vegas is booming -- and this produces a just-in-time delivery of workers wherever they are most needed.”<sup>7</sup> It is when information is passed between sending and receiving regions that the communicative contours of transnational migration emerged. By this idea, I mean that as much as the *idea* of opportunity drove migration, the process of people talking to one another through social networks was also a crucial component. Technology played a role in facilitating communication across borders.

Social networks used different types of technology in order to maintain personal and cultural linkages with their places of origin. Manuel Castels emphasized the importance of technology as a means to produce a highly interconnected economy. He wrote in *The Network Society*, “New information technologies, by transforming the processes of information processing, act upon all domains of human activity, and make it possible to establish endless connections between different domains, as well as between elements and agents of such activities.”<sup>8</sup> In relation to transnational migration, new information technologies eroded the spatial barriers that existed in previous centuries. In the past, communication was restricted to letters that had to physically cross great distances. Technological innovation in the twentieth

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<sup>7</sup> Tamar Jacoby, “Immigration Nation,” *Foreign Affairs* 11 (2006) <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20061101faessay85606-p10/tamar-jacoby/immigration-nation.html> (Retrieved: September 20, 2007), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, vol. I, *The Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 67.

century made it easier for immigrants to communicate with and maintain their original cultural metropole. Furthermore, the geographic proximity of Mexico to the United States also provided easier transfer of information between social networks in sending and receiving communities. People had less distance to cross when traveling and the cost of communication was also less. Telephones were a principal device used by many immigrants, either with private lines, voice-over-IP through internet connections, and also phone cards. For the poorest of immigrants living in the United States this final option was widely used as it presented an affordable and flexible means of communicating with “home.”

The word “home” is placed in quotations, because the very process of transnational migration undermined the firm sense of place for immigrants. While they maintained connections with a sending region, this did not mean powerful forces of identification were not at work redefining the individual’s socio-geographic identity. Social networks transported cultural symbols and customs of one region to another and allowed for persistent connections, but they were also augmented by the receiving region. The first chapter is dedicated to a full consideration of social networks’ composition and operation relating to Georgia’s migration experience.

Within this framework of transnational migration, immigrants’ trajectories also played an important formative role. The directions selected by individuals relocating from Mexico to the United States was influenced by the sharing of information between regions. A reciprocal relationship existed between migration trajectories and social networks, in that the frequency of the former contributed to a strengthening of the latter. Furthermore, the presence of social networks in a

particular area influenced the directions taken. Immigrants tended to follow similar paths when relocating to settlement areas like Georgia. This included intermediate stops in Mexico as well as the United States. Immigrants relocating to Georgia often had experience living in at least one other receiving community, usually Texas, but also other mature settlement areas including New York City. Early arrivals into Georgia were made by individuals already familiar with the migration process. As the state became a major new settlement area and social networks became further established in the local community, direct relocation from Mexico to Georgia became more frequent. Chapter Two examines broader historical factors within migrant trajectories and how they interacted with Mexican immigrant social networks.

My research of this subject tended to indicate that social connections played a primary role in the migration process. Family and regional networks were crucial for the exchange of information, while immigrant trajectories solidified these connections spatially. Oftentimes, however, when one discusses immigration, economic factors took a central position. We cannot ignore the role of positive and negative economic incentives when examining the components that affect transnational migration. I review this element in the following section.

### **Economic Incentives and Migration**

Economic factors, such as jobs and a general lack of opportunities in one region versus the presence of opportunities in another, operated as underlying contributors to the migration process. They functioned not only at the transnational level, but also regionally and locally. In order to fully appreciate why people relocated, one must consider the social-economic environment in the sending regions.

Mexico experienced acute economic pressures from Neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s, which produced unintended consequences that led to increasing trends in emigration. Industrial growth in the northern states contrasted with economic stagnation and political unrest in the central and southern areas of the country. Attempts to integrate rural economies into the developing national economy by building new roads and other infrastructural improvements inadvertently contributed to the mobilization of labor populations. It is incorrect to assume, however, that Mexicans only left home because their living conditions were so untenable they had few other options. It was the combination of economic hardship, on the one hand, and perceived economic opportunity, on the other, that led people to select emigration. Furthermore, structural improvements at the regional and local level also contributed to this process in unexpected ways.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government in Mexico City renewed a nationwide project to improve infrastructure. They built new highways that connected remote regions of the country with areas experiencing rapid development. In the north, the government initiated industrialization programs that brought factories to the area, expanded cities, and created many thousands of job opportunities. Concomitantly, state-level governments extended road-systems into rural areas, brought electricity, and sought to connect their territories to the national economy. This process raised the living standards of many Mexican citizens, however, it also created the potential for a more mobile work force. It became easier for people living in one area of Mexico to travel to another part of the country to capitalize on economic opportunities. Rapid industrial increases in the northern states attracted

labor from places, such as Oaxaca,<sup>9</sup> which experienced slower growth or, as in Guerrero's case, persistent political turmoil.<sup>10</sup>

People living in these states made the decision to migrate internally in order to capitalize on the northern job market. Economic opportunity, combined with better roads and information-sharing, contributed to the creation of this mobile class of laborers. Internal migration between Mexico's core and its borderlands provided the experiences and knowledge that facilitated transnational journeys into the United States. As people moved to northern cities, such as Ciudad Juarez or Tijuana, their geographic proximity to even greater perceived opportunities in the United States contributed to border crossings. To understand the full scope of economic factors on migration, however, one must look beyond just the positive incentives to those negative pressures that affected people's decision-making process.

Economic crisis in Mexico facilitated transnational migration, because it undermined confidence and diminished opportunities that guided the creation or intensification of emigration from sending regions. For instance, two major national emergencies, the 1982 debt crisis and the 1994 peso devaluation ravaged parts of the Mexican economy. Many of the states listed as major sending regions to Georgia were negatively affected by these events. During the former, the federal government was forced to restructure welfare and social spending; realigning itself under a Neoliberal model that pleased investment banks, but created greater uncertainty for everyday Mexicans. The latter crisis, which came during a tumultuous year that saw

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<sup>9</sup> Rafael Reyes Morales, "Características de la migración internacional en Oaxaca y sus impactos en el desarrollo regional," in *Nuevas Tendencias*, 197-207.

<sup>10</sup> Armando Bartra. *Guerrero Bronco: Campesinos, Ciudadanos, Guerrilleros en la Costa Grande* (Mexico City: Ediciones, 2000), 117-38.

the passage of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the *Ejercito Zapatista Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) uprising, created further insecurity by undermining Mexico's international prestige, increasing unemployment, and damaging people's savings.<sup>11</sup> On each of these accounts, data indicated that immigration to the United States from Mexico increased in response.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, one must recognize that as Mexico experienced these lows, communities in the United States embarked on periods of growth, enjoying an expanding job market in the housing and service sectors. The peso devaluation occurred at the same time as Georgia was suffering labor shortages in the face of rapid economic expansion. The city of Atlanta desperately needed workers to help prepare it for the 1996 Summer Olympics, while across the state a population boom was beginning that demanded expansion in the stock of available housing. The thirty year period between 1970 and 2000 was marked by a Georgian economy that outperformed much of the rest of the United States. Furthermore, the collapse of the oil economy in Texas between 1982 and 1987 redirected migration flows to newer settlement areas in the U.S. South.<sup>13</sup> Near the center of these broader socio-economic processes, Georgia gained tens of thousands of low-wage workers who arrived to fill job openings in a variety of industries, including poultry-processing. Mexican labor arrived at a crucial time in this history and allowed the state to continue its dramatic

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Hogenboom, *Mexico and the NAFTA Environment Debate: The Transnational Politics of Economic Integration* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: International Books, 1998), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Johnson, *Illegal Immigration*. (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2006) [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/atissue/AI\\_406HJAI.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/atissue/AI_406HJAI.pdf) (Retrieved: August 28, 2007), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Puente, "Newcomers encounter disparate greetings," *USA Today*, July 3, 1995, Final Edition, 8A.

economic growth into the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> Chapter Three studies the underlying economic factors that contributed to transnational migration and the role played by social networks in this process between sending and receiving regions.

### **Social Networks and Political Devolution**

Transnational social networks also affected the ways in which immigration interacted with U.S. immigration policy. Passage of the 1965 Hart-Celler amendment to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act sought to address historical shortcomings in existing immigration law by abolishing the racially discriminatory national origins quota program of 1924. The reform promoted family reunification for non-U.S. relatives of U.S. citizens, but placed artificial restrictions on other immigrants originating in the Western hemisphere. While the federal government sought to prevent unauthorized entry into the country, thousands of individuals entered the country as undocumented immigrants. Subsequent legislation addressed this growing trend, but focused on enforcement programs and failed to develop flexible regulations that adjusted to social and economic needs in Mexico and the U.S. Concomitant enforcement programs constructed new permanent barriers along the southern border and increased the threat of “INS raids” inside the nation, but were unable to deter growing rates of unauthorized entry.

Chapter Four examines how transnational social networks, in their ability to transit information between sending and receiving communities, presented an alternative to State-endorsed migration procedures. I use the term “informal

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<sup>14</sup> Maria de los Remedios Gomez-Arnau, Mexican Consul-General Atlanta, interview by author, 30 March 2007, Atlanta. Tape recording. Author’s collection, Statesboro, GA.

immigrant” to describe those individuals who decided to enter the U.S. outside formal channels authorized by the government. This idea departs from the inherently negative words “illegal” and “undocumented” that relied heavily upon government authority to define themselves and obscured essential elements of the migrant. While sensitive to the role of the State, informal immigration encompassed the social and economic factors present in individuals’ decisions to relocate from Mexico to the United States. Furthermore, the federal government inadvertently contributed to growth in the rates of informal immigration due to its emphasis on enforcement at the expense of reforms that could have adjusted formal entry channels to migration trends between 1965 and 2006.

As a result of federal failure to achieve meaningful reforms, immigration policy began to devolve to state and local entities in the 1990s. Many cities refused to comply with INS raids out of concern for public safety within the immigrant community, while a number of states took an opposite approach. Georgia emerged as a leading proponent of heightened restrictions against informal immigration within its jurisdiction. Passage of the Security and Immigration Compliance Act of 2006 sought to create an untenable situation for informal immigrants by order state agencies to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement programs. At different ends of the spectrum, both accounts identified a trend of political devolution in the U.S. immigration discourse. This chapter considers how these various state and local programs undermined the federal government’s ability to control immigration policy, while transnational social networks also presented their own challenges to formal, State-endorsed entry options.



## A Word about the Title

Anyone familiar with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* will recognize the inspiration for the title of my thesis. Anderson wrote of the nation-state: "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." In a broader sense, the boundaries that separate Mexico from the United States and give Georgia its shape are also *imagined*. Cartographical lines do not originate in nature, but are recognized as divisions by human beings. Governments may appropriate natural geography for this purpose, but ultimately all of these boundaries are imaginary.

The border between two nations is a point of departure from where one community of individuals defines itself in opposition to another. I return to Anderson on this point: "The nation is imagined as *limited* because the largest of them, encompassing, perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself as coterminous with mankind."<sup>15</sup> Borders are essential to the creation of the nation-state and elements which undermine this framework can, at times, be perceived as security threats. Transnational migration reveals the fragility of *imagined* borders even as governments attempt to emphasize their presence through the construction of physical and representational barriers.

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<sup>15</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991 2nd Edition), 6-7.

## **CHAPTER 2 THE CREATION AND PROCESSES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN GEORGIA.**

Georgia emerged as a new settlement area for Mexican immigration to the United States beginning in the 1970s. Social networks played an important role in this process and permeated many aspects of human life and activity. They could be defined broadly as the associations individuals made as members of a group formed along varying sets of criteria. For example, the extended family was a kind of social network that bound people together by heritage, friendship and genetic relationships. Another form of social network was the one derived from regional affiliation. The dialect and values with which one was familiar could provide a sense of “belonging” to some specific geographic place. These two categories of social networks, kinship and geography, are central to the study conducted in this chapter and the roles they played in the development of Georgia as a settlement area.

Kinship and regional bonds influenced, and were influenced by, their surrounding environment in Georgia. When individuals relocated from Mexico to metropolitan Atlanta they brought with them the memories and experiences that tied them to their places of origin. The very process of migration was also an important part of the Mexican immigrants’ development as a community. Social networks were sensitive to, but not limited by the legal boundaries of the nation-state. Instead, a transnational character affected the existence of these affiliations as people moved from one place to another. Technology played an important role in the process of maintaining connections between sending and receiving regions, as well as among family and friends.

Over the course of the latter twentieth century, immigrant had increasingly easier access to a variety of technologies. In the seventies and eighties communication was mostly limited to the telephone, but later included email and ever more affordable voice-over-IP through the Internet. Individuals living in Mexico with even limited means to access these services could participate in what scholar Manuel Castels defined as the network society. This term described the advancements in communication technology and information processing in the latter twentieth century and their impact on individuals' ability to connect with others. The means to communicate and gather information between sending and receiving regions allowed for closer integration between the two places.<sup>1</sup> While legal restrictions to travel made it difficult for certain types of immigrants to move between Mexico and the United States these technologies provided a way to circumvent such barriers.

Individuals were not forced to lose connection with their familial relationships 'back home,' as may have occurred in previous eras of migration. The ability to communicate, in conjunction with the geographic proximity of Mexico to the United States, allowed for the formation of robust social networks. Not only did migrants living in a settlement community form associations in order to survive and thrive, they could also maintain contact with home and encourage others to make the decision to relocate. This interconnected relationship allowed for immigrants in one region to share information on the availability of jobs with those in another place or even with individuals contemplating the decision to relocate from their place of origin.

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Castels, *The Information Society*, 2-3.

In the 1980s, the Houston oil economy collapsed, which encouraged a redirection of migration trends to newer settlement areas in the United States. Georgia's burgeoning economy emerged as a popular destination for immigration from Texas.<sup>2</sup> One element that contributed to this process was the prevalence of labor shortages in Georgia, either as a result of management practices in the carpeting mills and poultry industry during the seventies, or later during Atlanta's preparation for the 1996 Summer Olympics. Existing Mexican immigrant social networks helped attract new flows of Mexican migrants to the state, oftentimes just by word-of-mouth. Tamar Jacoby described the process: "Immigrants already here [in the U.S.] communicate to their compatriots still at home that the job market in, say, Detroit is flat, while that in Las Vegas is booming -- and this produces a just-in-time delivery of workers wherever they are most needed."<sup>3</sup>

An interview with the Mexican Consulate in Atlanta, confirmed the process articulated by Jacoby. Maria de los Remedios Gomez-Arnau explained, "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...." Immigrants already living in the Southwestern United States and elsewhere began "moving out from California... coming to where they perceived economic growth."<sup>4</sup> The existing socio-economic relationship along the border, in conjunction with a small, but growing Mexican immigrant community already living in Georgia, facilitated the arrival of new migrants to the state. While preparations for the

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<sup>2</sup> Puente, "Newcomers encounter disparate greetings."

<sup>3</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "Immigration Nation," 1.

<sup>4</sup> Consul General Maria de los Remedios Gomez-Arnau, interview.

Olympics served as an important catalyst, these additional characteristics also played significant roles.

Furthermore, the interplay of these influential factors, fostered by social network communication, allowed additional transnational characters to emerge. This process encouraged the opening of new business ventures that did not exist before the arrival of immigrants to a new settlement area. On the one hand, ethnic groceries and related types of businesses opened to meet the demand for goods desired from immigrants' sending regions in Mexico. On the other hand, existing companies in the receiving region also adjusted their practices to accommodate the emergent demographic. For instance, a radio station may change its line-up to a Spanish-language format, the local Wal-Mart may stock certain "ethnic" items, or a church may develop services to attract particular segments of the immigrant community.

These processes broadened the availability of goods and services in immigrant communities. As expansion occurred, Georgia matured as a settlement area; no longer could individuals rely solely on their familial connections, but a vast array of socio-economic choices were available to them. Social networks contained not only the relationships persons shared with one another, but also the contingent market of economic, cultural, and religious goods being offered. This unfolded not just in one geographic place, but rather as a transnational entity that bonded sending and receiving regions together. Before examining the specific experience of Georgia, it may be useful to consider the case study of another Mexican settlement community that did not evolve along the southwestern border. This is the development of New

York City as a receiving region for migration from Mexico and the connections that formed with the states of Puebla and Tlaxcala.

**Comparative Study: From Puebla and Tlaxcala to New York City.**

During the latter twentieth century, New York City became an important settlement area for Mexican immigrants. 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 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. Furthermore, he examined four generations of *Rosa's* family life to gain a clearer picture of how the relocation of one person can influence an entire family. 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

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<sup>5</sup> Herrera-Lima, *Vidas Itinerantes*, 114.

others, after living in the United States for a number of years, later returned to their ancestral homeland.<sup>6</sup>

*Rosa's* decision to emigrate served as an attraction factor for subsequent relatives. Her presence 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 persisted as an integral factor of the immigration issue. Additional types of networks also provided for arriving individuals.

Migrant associations, such as church groups, sports clubs, and youth organizations sustained immigrants outside of typical family connections. While relatives remained the primary source of support, these additional groups were popular outlets for meeting new individuals among male and female immigrants.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of type, social networks allowed migrants to integrate into the local ethnic community, develop personal contacts, and find jobs. In the case of New York City, employment for Mexicans often came in the form of unskilled labor in restaurants or sweatshops. The majority began work in small businesses with fewer than ten workers. After about two years, undocumented workers, during the seventies and eighties, usually left the community for their homes in Mexico.<sup>8</sup> Those migrants, however, who had residency status or discarded the sojourner expectation of returning

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<sup>6</sup> Herrera-Lima, 232-7.

<sup>7</sup> Herrera-Lima, 193.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 62-3.

to Mexico and remained, represented a growing percentage of workers 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. Additionally, products popular in these Mexican states eventually arrived in New York City.<sup>9</sup>

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. As seed communities formed they 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 goods and services became in themselves attracting forces for additional migrants.<sup>10</sup> The 1970s and 1980s experienced a profound increase in the national Mexican immigrant population. During this period the state of Georgia also received new migrants arriving to work in a variety of industries.

### **The Emergence of Mexican Social Networks in Dalton and Gainesville.**

Beginning in the late seventies, a combination of factors fostered an environment conducive for the entrance of new immigrants to the state. On account of generally low population density combined with economic growth that outpaced the national average, the State Department chose Georgia, and other parts of the Southeast, as a target settlement region. The Office of Refugee Resettlement directed

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<sup>9</sup> Herrera-Lima, *Vidas Itinerantes*, 318-9.

<sup>10</sup> Herrera-Lima, 193



Vietnamese and others to the Atlanta area. Concomitant trends of Mexican immigration followed for related reasons, but with far less bureaucratic oversight. Though agencies and businesses did play a less formal role in this process, this immigrant cohort came, initially, in search of job opportunities thanks to growth in Georgia's economy.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the collapse of the Texas oil economy between 1982 and 1987 contributed to the loss of more than 210,000 jobs in Houston alone. Mexican immigrants sought out new settlement areas to escape this downturn; a burgeoning economy and nascent Latino community contributed to Georgia's profile as a labor destination during this period.<sup>12</sup>

Poultry processing became one of the leading industries that attracted Mexican labor to the state. This occurred for a variety of reasons. Starting in the 1970s, Gainesville earned the title "Poultry Capital of the World" as it exported this product across the United States and the world. In order to maintain profitable margins, management expanded their facilities in states such as Georgia, where local laws did not favor organized labor. In 1972, the average worker earned \$5.72 an hour. A marginalized labor force, combined with a work environment that required close contact and handling of hundreds of slaughtered birds contributed to employee turnover. Management sought ways to grow their labor pool without increasing wages. It is this point that is key to understanding how Mexican labor first arrived in Gainesville.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Greg Guthey, "Mexican Places," 64.

<sup>12</sup> Puente, "Newcomers encounter."

<sup>13</sup> Guthey, 62-3.

To draw new workers to the area, poultry facilities actively used state employment agencies and immigrant networks as recruitment tools. The earliest Mexican arrivals came from Texas through paid referrals from labor agencies in Texas. In certain instances, immigrant labor was specifically sought out as an affordable alternative to raising wages. Sociologist Greg Guthey interviewed a number of Mexican immigrants to Gainesville who confirmed this process: “The [poultry plant] owner was asking us for more Hispanic people. He would pay \$50 for each Hispanic worker we brought....” Furthermore, social networks based along familial relationships played a key role in the dissemination of employment information. When new openings became available migrants contacted relatives living elsewhere about the opportunities: “He called his cousin... gave money to one of my friends to pay for twelve people to come from Houston.” The practices of paid referrals through employment agencies, as well as intra-family recruitment, both features of social networks as discussed in this chapter, established the earliest Mexican immigrant communities in northern Georgia. Other industries and cities also benefited from labor recruitment through existing social networks.<sup>14</sup>

Dalton became another important early settlement area during this period. As in the last case, local poultry processors were the initial entry point and source of employment. This changed, however, as the carpeting mills in Dalton became aware of Mexican labor. Much like the poultry industry, employment practices and expansion plans used by management in the mills created structural deficits in the labor supply. In the 1960s, the method for producing carpets in Dalton became the

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<sup>14</sup> Guthey, 64.

avored process among consumers on account of its affordability. Demand increased dramatically nationwide and their industry's managers grew their business operations as a result. While some did so by opening facilities elsewhere in the Southeast, most of Dalton's mill owners decided to remain in the area. This decision to concentrate industry around the county of Whitefield facilitated subsequent labor shortages. As evidence, county unemployment where Dalton was located rarely exceed the five percent mark in the 1970s and 1980s. The scenario that emerged with the need for additional workers made it very difficult for management to turn away applicants.<sup>15</sup>

Economic incentive served as an underlying factor in the growth of Mexican immigrant communities in Dalton and Gainesville. Migrants selected both cities on account of employment opportunities provided by the carpeting and poultry processing industry. Recruitment practices, however, bridged these components. Managers relied upon social networks, in the form of family contacts and labor agencies, to attract low-wage workers from other regions. Both cities became early settlement areas, serving as seed regions that facilitated later population increases as Georgia experienced additional growth in the 1990s. It is also worth noting that the influence of social networks and transnational cultural connections did not end with their recruitment services.

Immigrants began to establish permanent ties within the Gainesville and Dalton areas. They opened businesses and purchased homes, two important indicators contradicting the notion that Mexican immigrants were a purely itinerant

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<sup>15</sup> James Engstrom, "Industry and Immigration in Dalton, Georgia," in *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 47-9.

demographic. Keeping in mind the case of New York City, Gainesville came to experience a variety of transnational and cultural linkages with Mexico. Guthey emphasized this development in the introduction to his study of poultry-processing plants:

Down the street from... two chicken processing plants in Gainesville, Georgia is a small enclave of Mexican business where one can purchase food that is not available in mainstream supermarkets, or step up to a *taquería* for an authentic Mexican meal, and seldom hear English spoken. In the surrounding region, there are churches of all kinds holding Spanish-language services and perhaps evening English language classes as well. Regular bus service leaves Gainesville for Mexico. On weekends, Latino soccer teams may be seen playing on local athletic fields.<sup>16</sup>

The passage highlighted the emergence of social networks based on family, comradeship and religious practice. Furthermore, the individuals were not isolated from their cultural roots, but rather imported goods from Mexico and even maintained regular transportation services between sending and receiving regions. Within the shadow of industrial growth an entire community and its support network provided a foundation for the arrival and development of additional immigrants. We will return to this subject in the following chapter, examining the direct linkages of migration out of specific sending regions in Mexico's core to receiving areas in Georgia. For now, it is sufficient to be aware of the presence and composition of these groups, as well as the factors contributing their growth. We now turn our attention to the development of metropolitan Atlanta as an important new settlement area in the 1990s.

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<sup>16</sup> Guthey, "Mexican Places," 57.

### **The Integration of Mexican Social Networks in Metropolitan Atlanta.**

On September 17, 1990, 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.<sup>17</sup>

The victory, however, necessitated considerable development in order to prepare Atlanta to receive sixteen thousand athletes and officials, as well as the estimated 625,000 spectators. This project required the construction of more than 350 million dollars of new facilities including an 85,000-seat stadium, hotels, and additions to existing buildings. 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.<sup>18</sup> The activation of thousands of new construction and labor sector jobs, served as attracting factors that opened space for the arrival of new workers to the city. In conjunction with additional economic growth that occurred after 1996, as well as general population increases, the Hispanic/Latino cohort identified by the state as "Latin American-in-origin" topped four hundred thousand persons by the beginning of the new century. Within this

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<sup>17</sup> *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 17 September, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> *AJC*, 19 September 1990.

figure, it is also important to note that more than 235,000 were recognized as Mexican immigrants or their descendents.<sup>19</sup>

The following data came from a University of Georgia study, which based its methods on parameters set by the U.S. Census Bureau. The report uncovered interesting figures on the increase of this community. It rated twenty-five counties in the state with “explosive growth,” including Forsyth and Gwinnett registering Hispanic/Latino 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 percent. 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.<sup>20</sup>

Within this process of growth a variety of political and social institutions served to link the existing Georgia community with its burgeoning Mexican and Hispanic/Latino population. These organizations included religious associations, such as churches as well as advocacy groups that represented the particular causes of this demographic. One of the key entities of the latter was the Georgia Association of Latino-Elected Officials, which sought to facilitate political networking among Hispanic/Latino groups in the state, educating the public on the needs of this community, and promoting a legislative agenda sensitive to the needs of the

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<sup>19</sup> University of Georgia Business Outreach Services, *Hispanics by the Numbers in Georgia* <http://www.sbdc.uga.edu/pdfs/hispanicfactsheet.pdf> (Retrieved: August 30, 2007), 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> University of Georgia, *Hispanics by the Numbers in Georgia*, 1-2.

Hispanic/Latino community in the state assembly. The executive director of this organization, Jerry Gonzalez, identified the stimuli that fostered the dramatic growth in the state's Mexican immigrant community after 1990 as the demand for labor in construction due to the housing boom, in conjunction with the preparations in advance of the 1996 Olympic:

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.<sup>21</sup>

Gonzalez referred to the reports of delays in the Olympic preparations timetable and subsequent criticism levied in the press. As happened in Barcelona, site of the 1992 Games, construction in Atlanta 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, went on the record discussing this policy. He noted that city wanted to "present a nice face... to international visitors," but also indicated the underlying motive of this policy shift: attract new workers in order to end labor shortages. While Maus's conversation with the officials involved occurred off the record, contemporary census data marking the spike in Mexican immigrant

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<sup>21</sup> Jerry Gonzalez, director of Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials, interview by author, 2 March 2007, Atlanta, tape recording, author's collection, Statesboro, GA.

rates to Georgia in the 1990s appeared to coincide with this allegation made by the former consul-general.

Both Gonzalez and Maus reinforced the assessment that news of labor shortages in Atlanta moved through established social networks, attracting additional Mexican migrants to the region. This also supported the Mexican consulate's view that informal "word-of-mouth" practices passed information of job opportunities in northern Georgia onto other settlement areas, as well as sending regions.

Communication fostered by social networks allowed individuals living in one part of the United States to alert family members and comrades elsewhere of particular opportunities. Established Mexican immigrant communities already existed in north Georgia thanks to economic ties with the carpeting and poultry-processing industries. These communities likely played a role in serving as initial cultural and social nodes of support for new groups of immigrants arriving in the state to respond to Atlanta's labor shortages.

Additionally, Gonzalez noted that the challenges for immigrants moving to, and living in, Atlanta was a recent phenomena related to growth in the 1990s. "The Southeastern states were not considered a traditional receiving states for immigrants," he explained. However, economic development in Georgia and neighboring states saw a rapid demand for low-wage labor emerge during this period. Since this happened quickly, the developing Mexican minority demographic made many local residents "nervous." He described the typical Mexican immigrant to the state as a



young male who was working in order to provide for his own existence while sending remittances back home to Mexico.<sup>22</sup>

### **Local Responses from Religious and Business Operations in Atlanta.**

Within the system of inter-related support networks, faith organizations played a central role. While the Hispanic/Latino demographic was quickly broadening its religious affiliations, the Roman Catholic Church continued as an important component in this formula. The Archdiocese of Atlanta encompassed all of Georgia north of Macon and operates 103 churches in this field. In 2006, sixty percent of these parishes maintained active ministries that catered to the Spanish-speaking community. This included full- and part-time social workers and priests stationed throughout the diocese; a central office in downtown Atlanta coordinated all of the programs. The Regional director of the Hispanic Youth Association for the Archdiocese, Leonardo Jaramillo, in an interview for this thesis, expressed the objective of the Catholic Church's programs in the metropolitan area: "The Archdiocese is concerned with developing processes for cultural integration, not assimilation." This included the maintenance of family networks, as well as the promotion of youth leagues offering socialization opportunities for Spanish-speaking men and women. Furthermore, he saw the debate between cultural assimilation and integration as an important issue.<sup>23</sup>

Additional Christian denominations also initiated very successful in the Hispanic/Latino community. While this cohort, including Mexican immigrants,

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<sup>22</sup> Gonzalez interview.

<sup>23</sup> Leonardo Jaramillo, director of Archdiocese of Atlanta Hispanic Youth Ministry, interview by author, 2 March 2007, Atlanta, tape recording, author's collection, Statesboro.

tended to arrive in the United States as Catholic, fifteen percent identified themselves as Protestant. The evangelical Christian movement was one of the most popular among converts. Not only did this group offer parallel services like the Archdiocese, but enterprising Spanish-speaking ministers also launched fully independent churches that catered exclusively to the Hispanic/Latino and immigrant populations. As an expression of the ethnic community, religious practices were an important component in the construction of identity and the development of ties within cultural enclaves in Georgia. The presence of these sophisticated Spanish-language programs offered by existing faith institutions, as well as new ones started specifically for the purpose of addressing immigrants' needs, reflected the growth of the Hispanic/Latino cohort in metropolitan Atlanta and throughout the state.<sup>24</sup>

The existing business community also responded to the emergence of a Mexican immigrant community in the Atlanta area. This upward trend in population numbers saw corresponding development of sophisticated consumer markets. Hispanics wielded 580 billion dollars in spending power within Georgia in 2006. Their presence saw the emergence of ethnic media, businesses, and associations to serve the community.<sup>25</sup> In November of that year, 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/Latino community. Furthermore, ethnic groceries opened, stocking their shelves with traditional Mexican

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<sup>24</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, *Changing Faiths*.

<sup>25</sup> University of Georgia, *Hispanics by the Numbers in Georgia*, 4.

and pan-American goods, while *taquerías* and other forms of ethnic restaurants became staples across metropolitan Atlanta's dining scene.

### **Conclusion.**

Social networks represented a diverse number of associations, including family and regional connections, as well as contingent institutional programs and business ventures that served the community. As noted in this chapter's case studies economic factors were closely linked to the creation and processes of social networks in Georgia and across the United States. They operated as informal mechanisms that circulated information about employment opportunities from one region to another. Technology also facilitated this process as clusters of individuals communicated news about their settlement areas and, in Jacoby's words, offered "just-in-time" delivery of workers to an area. The transformational potential of social networks, however, did not end with the possibility of broadening an area's labor pool.

Like the cases of Gainesville, Dalton, and New York City, the emergence of ethnic social networks created transnational linkages between these settlement areas and sending regions in Mexico. These expressions of regional, ethnic, and national identity influenced the local host community. Cultural bonds formed between sending and receiving regions as immigrants brought certain cultural preferences to their new homes. Existing institutions adapted themselves to the growing demographic once it was recognized and new ventures were started by the immigrants themselves, such as stores, restaurants and even churches.

The discourse between sending and receiving regions did not occur in a vacuum, but instead components of each were felt by the other. Places of origin were

no less influenced by this process. Not only did representations of settlement areas appear, such as New York gang graffiti in Puebla, but also the sending of remittances and gifts, as well as occasional visits from expatriate relatives. Furthermore, it must also be noted that the departure of individuals from a sending region, perhaps immigrating in response to a job offer passed along by a cousin, had ramifications for those who stayed behind. As will be discussed in the following chapter, immigrants' trajectories out of Mexico were influenced by the geographic location of social networks in receiving regions. While families often stayed intact thanks to these inter-related processes offered by communication, the decision to relocate from one's home in order to pursue opportunities elsewhere had lasting consequences for both locations.

### **CHAPTER 3 SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES FROM MEXICO'S CORE TO GEORGIA.**

Between 1970 and 2000, tens of thousands of Mexican immigrants settled in Georgia. Social networks influenced the paths they selected relocating from sending to receiving regions. The term migration trajectory described the journey made by an immigrant from her place-of-origin. This process did not occur at random; the decision to relocate, and the course that brought individuals from point A to point B was contingent upon a host of factors. Within this framework, social networks played a vital role. The development of transnational linkages between regions influenced the direction and concentration of immigrants from a place-of-origin to the settlement area at their destination. Furthermore, once a community was established the initial ties that formed across national and cultural boundaries affected future developments. In essence, a reciprocal relationship emerged between social networks and migration trajectories. The established identity of a particular settlement community not only tended to attract related immigrants, but the arrival of these new persons deepened the existing bonds and social dynamics between sending and receiving areas.

This chapter examines the characteristics of the Mexican immigrant community across the State of Georgia, especially in the communities of Dalton, Gainesville, and metropolitan Atlanta. I argue that that these migration trends occurred within a shared relationship between sending and receiving regions. Once a seed community of immigrants formed, its creation facilitated the arrival of additional immigrants to the “new settlement area” from sending regions in Mexico. Information about opportunities in the receiving location was spread through social networks that

maintained particular kinship, regional, or cultural bonds. Thus, these transnational connections tended to draw immigrants from particular areas in Mexico. People did not migrate randomly, but rather utilized information shared through social networks to make their decisions regarding where to locate to in the United States. While exceptions certainly existed, this model of socially related migration patterns explained the concentration of immigrants from certain Mexican states in Georgia. The relationships that extended between sending and receiving regions contributed to these patterns.

At its most basic level, social networks are composed of human beings interacting with one another. These individuals shared information about goods, services, and opportunities. A fundamental association that embodies this idea is the family. In the case of migration trajectories, relatives living in receiving regions communicated their experiences in the settlement area. Furthermore, information related to job availability was passed between these networks. It was through this process of information sharing, occurring across state boundaries, that transnational linkages emerged. Additionally, the broader association of regional comradeship also influenced migration trajectories. As this chapter will demonstrate, new immigrants tended to relocate to settlement areas in the United States where there existed a community of people from the same region of Mexico as themselves. Like the example of family, regional networks attracted persons based on varying degrees of acquaintance. When arriving in a new area, people from the state of Guerrero, for instance, may have felt more comfortable with established immigrants from that area.

By moving to settlement communities inhabited by regional comrades, individuals recreated their sense of familiarity in an otherwise unfamiliar territory.

Douglas Massey also stressed the importance of familial and regional connections in this process. Using data from the Mexican Migration Project, Massey found that forty percent of first-time migrants had a parent who made the trip north, while others had siblings, relatives, or friends living across the border. Social connections in the United States, in conjunction with stories from returned family members who had made past journeys, attracted new migrants to established or nascent settlement areas. Once arrived, additional social and economic networks that served the local immigrant community assisted travelers in finding long-term living accommodations and work.<sup>1</sup> As considered in the previous chapter, social networks played an influential role in immigrants' decision to relocate from Mexico to the United States. This process occurred through the transnational connections that formed between areas in both countries.

The reciprocal and transnational relationship that emerged between sending and receiving locations strengthened particular group identities over others in an immigrant community. One should resist the temptation to conceptualize these regional factions as a homogenous whole; important sectional distinctions existed within Mexican immigrant identity. In this sense, I return to the earlier point noting that immigrants tended to seek out settlement areas where family members or regional comrades were present. Within this framework, Herrera-Lima's *Itinerant*

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<sup>1</sup> Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, xx.

*Lives in a Transnational Labor Space* provided useful analysis on the topic of migration patterns.

Herrera-Lima described the creation of “transnational families” through the process of migration between Mexico and the United States. As individuals relocated to new settlement areas in Georgia, they likely maintained contact with comrades and relatives in the sending region. These bonds contributed to subsequent migration trends, as new immigrants tended to select a receiving community in the United States based on the presence of existing relationships in that area: “families and the networks of social relations play a fundamental role in the construction of labor trajectories in transnational spaces.”<sup>2</sup> Herrera-Lima found that ninety-seven percent of Mexican immigrants received help and information from family and friends when migrating to the United States. The process by which established immigrants passed information through social networks, encouraged additional individuals to migrate to the area. Once arrived, Herrera-Lima noted that new immigrants shared “habitations with family, friends, or simply *paisanos*” within a mutually beneficial relationship that eased the difficulties of living outside their places-of-origin.<sup>3</sup> This chapter draws from Herrera-Lima’s observations on the relationship between social networks and migration trajectories in order to understand how Georgia developed as a new settlement area.

Chapter Two describes the direct linkages that formed between sending and receiving regions as immigrant social networks attracted individuals with regional and familial affiliations moved to a settlement area in Georgia. To demonstrate these

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<sup>2</sup> Herrera-Lima, *Vida Itinerantes*, 84.

<sup>3</sup> Herrera-Lima, 189-92.



connections, I examine a recent historical period from U.S. Southern that shared a number of parallels with the current migration issue. During much of the early and mid-twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of Southern whites and African Americans relocated to northern cities in a process known collectively as the “Great Migration.” I utilized this example to show that the discussion of social networks and economic motivations was not limited to immigration from Mexico, it across other migratory experiences as well. Furthermore, the Great Migration is a reminder that the South was not unfamiliar with similar socio-economic processes occurring in Mexico. Following this case study, I consider how migrant trajectories developed between Georgia and states within Mexico. This examination also considers the intermediary destinations traveled to by immigrants en route to settlement areas such as Atlanta, Gainesville, and Dalton. This case study draws parallels between the various trends of out-migration from Mexico and the role of social networks as a central factor in an immigrants’ selection of a particular settlement region.

Secondly, chapter Two examines how migration trajectories occurred at the national level between Mexico and the United States. I consider historic trends after 1846 in the borderlands, as well as more recent developments in this issue. My focus, then, shifts to a specific examination of Georgia’s experience. I identify the Mexican states most represented within its boundaries and consider the composition of these particular immigrant communities in Atlanta as well as other parts of the state. What we learn from this examination is that a variety of sub-divisions and regional enclaves existed within Georgia’s Mexico population. My study is meant to complicate the perception of this community, not as one homogenous mass, but rather as a collection

of groups united by their national identity, but also informed by regional and familial loyalties. A specific analysis of these relationships among economic factors across Mexico and the United States and their affect on the transnational processes occurring in Georgia is considered in greater detail in the following chapter.

For now, let us turn our attention to an important period in U.S. history, which witnessed the migration of more than one million African Americans and Southern whites. Occurring over a period of decades, this event shared many parallels with the experiences of immigrants from Mexico. Pioneering migrants arrived in response to economic conditions, but their presence and the formation of communal identities outside the South created opportunities for additional migratory flows. Understanding the course of these trajectories as well as the underlying motivations and destinations for these journeys can help us appreciate past and present migrations from Mexico.

### **Comparative Study: The Great Migration.**

How can we integrate this case study into our understanding of Mexican migration to the United States and Georgia? What the Great Migration demonstrates is that the characteristics facilitating linkages between sending and receiving regions can operate within a context that occurs across cultural, political, and historical lines. Mexican relocation patterns to settlement areas in the U.S. operated within the larger framework of immigration processes that were not limited to just one group or historical epoch. The examples from the Great Migration highlight the importance of social networks in the development of migrant trajectories. The influence of letters sent from settlement areas in the north cannot be ignored as an key factor, nor the role of group associations.

Between 1916 and 1930, more than one million whites and African-Americans left their communities in the Southeast.<sup>4</sup> They migrated to cities including Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Detroit in search of jobs and better lives. Called the first “Great Migration” it represented a mass movement that saw roughly sixteen thousand African-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 due 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.”<sup>5</sup>

Other important factors also contributed to this migration. While labor agents initiated the process, it required pioneering individuals to make the first northward relocation. Chicago became one of the primary destinations for African American immigrants. Its mills and stockyards, starved for labor during the First World War,

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<sup>4</sup> Carole Marks, *Farewell: We're Good and Gone* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 1

<sup>5</sup> Marks, *Farewell*, 22-3.

employed many thousands of workers. 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 pages.<sup>6</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup> 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 relatives communicated the advantages of life outside Dixie. Scholar Carole Marks argued that family letters convinced nine out of every ten migrants to make this 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' ...."<sup>8</sup> Towns throughout the South saw large portions of their African-American

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<sup>6</sup> Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 129-30.

<sup>7</sup> James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Marks, 24.

population migrate. Many of these new arrivals chose urban centers with family members already present as their new homes.

As the Great Migration continued after the Second World War and subsequent trends emerged. Prominent, new social networks, from additional regions in the South, formed in Northern cities. In 2004, scholars Thomas E. Wagner and Phillip J. Obermiller produced a study on the formation of African American social organizations, especially the Eastern Kentucky Social Club (EKSC), that started in the north during the 1950s and sixties. As economic hardship befell the Appalachian coal regions in the 1940s families began looking for new homes. Della Watts, an EKSC member described the early formation of this network as it emerged through family ties: “Our parents were coal miners... when coal mining started shutting down... my parents came [to Cleveland]. [My husband] Willie’s parents came here also and his sister and myself, we went to school together in Kentucky, so when she moved up to Cleveland... we just made contact with one another.”<sup>9</sup> Started in 1967 on Cleveland’s East Side, the EKSC spread to ten additional cities including Detroit and New York. It affirmed the identities of African-Americans from the coal regions, filling an important communal space in the lives of its members.

Once pioneering immigrants, with the help of labor agents, made the initial relocation their presence outside the South drew more people away from their places-of-origin. The creation of trans-regional associations and family linkages proved to be persistent elements that existed, not only through-out much of the Great Migration

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas E. Wagner and Phillip J. Obermiller, *African American Miners and Migrants: The Eastern Kentucky Social Club* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 104.

era, but also afterward. As noted earlier in the chapter, parallels existed with the Mexican immigrant community. We will now turn our attention to this multi-layered group, first, by looking at historic U.S. migration trajectories from Mexico, and then move to a more specific study of Georgia's experience.

### **Historic Trends in Mexico-U.S. Migration Trajectories.**

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) that ended the Mexican War and the Gadsden Purchase (1853) established the modern United States-Mexico border. 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 northernmost Mexican territories, 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.<sup>10</sup> 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. Thus, 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

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<sup>10</sup> Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 7.

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 border. This development continued with labor imported from Mexico dominating the unskilled jobs in the vegetable, cotton, fruit, mining, and brush-clearing sectors.<sup>11</sup>

Cross-border communication for jobs and trade emerged as early linkages between the two nation-states after the establishment of the modern boundary during the early twentieth century. Political exigencies created by the onset of the Second World War influenced an important development 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.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 44-5.

<sup>12</sup> Carlos Marentes, *Los Braceros, 1942-1964*. (1997)  
<http://www.farmworkers.org/benglish.html> (Retrieved: October 7, 2007).

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.<sup>13</sup> The Bracero Program continued until cancellation in 1964 during the Kennedy Administration.

Concomitant demographic and economic trends in Mexico 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 lost more than thirty percent of its employment capacity.<sup>14</sup> 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.

In more recent years, this population and economic growth accelerated the transnational linkages between the United States and Mexico. Furthermore, the development of social networks outside of the borderlands and American Southwest augmented the course of migration trajectories. What began as internal relocation within Mexico, in response to economic and social incentives along the border,

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<sup>13</sup> Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 134.

<sup>14</sup> Agustin Escobar-Latapí, *La Dinamica de la Emigracion Mexicana* (Mexico City: Ciesas, 1999), 15.



became a process that tied cities and regions across the United States with those in Mexico.

### **Recent Developments in Mexico-U.S. Migration Trajectories.**

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 in its northern territories outpaced growth in the American Southwest.<sup>15</sup> 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 also emerged as a critical urban sector with fifty-five percent of Mexican immigrants to California settling inside its limits.<sup>16</sup>

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 a variety 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

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<sup>15</sup> John M. Hart, ed., *Border Crossing: Mexican and Mexican-American Workers* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1998), 118.

<sup>16</sup> Hart, *Border Crossing*, 118.

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.<sup>17</sup>

The Zacatecas study reinforced social networks as an important factor in the formation of these immigrant communities. It noted that members of informal networks shared information on job availability and recognized the need to develop permanent associations. Clubs formed in the community providing social outlets and the opportunity to develop bonds of mutual obligation to help fellow immigrants. As the population grew, these associations matured to include legal and financial services.<sup>18</sup> 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 across California and the western United States. Consisting mostly of Mexican nationals from the state of Nayarit, this group represented three decades of activity in the U.S. Similar organizations formed across the country.<sup>19</sup> The presence of social networks helped contribute to the mobility of Mexican labor within the United States. Additionally, one survey conducted within this group for the University of Zacatecas project noted that: “Traditionally, the great

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<sup>17</sup> Raul Delgado-Wise and Margarita Favel, eds., *Nuevas Tendencias y Desafios de la Migracion Internacional Mexico-Estados Unidos* (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad de la Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 2004), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Delgado, *Nuevas Tendencias*, 38-9.

<sup>19</sup> Delgado, 58-9.

majority of international Mexican migrants has come from the west of Mexico, particularly from the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato.”<sup>20</sup>

Herrera-Lima underscored the motivations of would-be immigrants within this process: “...the explicit motivation of a great part of those who migrate is to go north to earn income that will permit them to return to their places of origin to have a better life for themselves and their families.”<sup>21</sup> Individuals who relocate selected areas where they received mutual aid from family members and regional comrades. As such, cultural enclaves emerged within the community itself, resulting in expressions of identity distinct from the general immigrant community. In California, for example, a robust organization formed in support of former residents from Zacatecas. The Zacatecano Civic Front proved to be active in both Californian and Zacatecano politics. Similar organization across the country strengthened immigrant identity in their communities, facilitated easier arrivals for later migrants through mutual aid, and continued to process that tied far-flung regions in the United States and Mexico closer together socially and economically. Philip Martin provided insight into this process and its underlying influence on migration patterns. He noted that “the slogan ‘go north for opportunity’ is deeply embedded in Mexican culture, especially among rural youth.”<sup>22</sup>

Population and economic increases along the border served as a spring board for the creation of these new settlement areas. The U.S. southeast became an emergent receiving region, first, in the states of North Carolina, Alabama, and

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<sup>20</sup> Delgado, 160.

<sup>21</sup> Herrera-Lima, *Vidas Itinerantes*, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Martin, “Mexican Migration to the United States: The Effect of NAFTA,” in *International Migration* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 120.

Arkansas. Before long, however, communities formed within the state of Georgia. In the previous chapter, we considered the creation of these entities and the extension of transnational linkages between sending and receiving regions. The following section examines how migration trajectories out of Mexico's core states interacted with this process.

### **Mexico-Georgia Migration Trajectories.**

Migration trajectories from Mexico to Dalton made the city one of the earliest and most important settlement locations in Georgia. Víctor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León working with the Universidad de Monterrey observed the movement of people to this area. Conducted in 1999, their report surveyed three distinct groups of Mexican immigrants living in Dalton. The first included those individuals who arrived before the passage of the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). The second group came shortly after passage of the law, while the last group was composed of arrivals after 1991. Interestingly, they discovered that of this community as a whole, only four percent had lived in Dalton for more than twelve years; the average length of stay was 4.6 years. What the researchers noted, however, was that while many immigrants “are new to Dalton... they are not new to the migration process. Dalton is, in effect, a new destination for seasoned international migrants.”<sup>23</sup>

While twenty-five percent of respondents in this survey came directly to Georgia, most made an intermediate stop elsewhere before arriving at Dalton. Both

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<sup>23</sup> Victor Zuniga and Ruben Hernandez-Leon, “A New Destination for an Old Migration,” *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 129.

California and Texas were popular initial destinations for immigrants from central and southern regions of Mexico. This is important, because the poultry industry in Texas generated early sources of labor from which managers in Dalton recruited to move to their region. Zúñiga and Hernández-León found that fifteen percent of respondents reported “a Mexico-Texas-Mexico-Georgia or a Mexico-Texas-Georgia course.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, social networks contributed as an outlet for immigrants who sought to escape the collapse of the Texas oil economy. Between 1982 and 1987, the city of Houston lost more than 210,000 jobs alone, influencing the direction of migration flows between Mexico and the United States. One Mexican immigrant who had moved to Texas in 1980 characterized this emergent trend in migration trajectories when he relocated to Atlanta six years later: “We thought the town of Houston had moved here. Since the collapse of the oil economy in Texas, people began to flock here and they haven’t stopped.”<sup>25</sup> These patterns indicated the historic importance of the borderlands as an intermediate destination for immigrants making a longer trip into the United States. It must also be noted, however, that Texas did not represent the only area selected as an intermediate destination. This list included New York City, Illinois, Florida, and Colorado.

The variety of locations indicate the participation of social networks as a mechanism reporting availability of jobs and living conditions for immigrants across the United States. Mexicans who had yet to emigrate usually selected their destination based on these economic criteria. Zúñiga and Hernández-León provided insight on this matter: “Employment-related reasons account for two-thirds of the responses,

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<sup>24</sup> Zuniga, “A New Destination,” 131.

<sup>25</sup> Puente, “Newcomers encounter disparate greetings.”

although... one-third of those we interviewed offered family-related reasons (e.g., to keep the family together) to explain their move.” Furthermore, they argued that experienced immigrants, who had already moved through-out the U.S. and settled in Dalton, encouraged their family to move directly to the area. They used this observation to explain the high number of immigrants’ children in the local school system.<sup>26</sup>

Their study benefits my work with two important points. First, while most of the immigrants surveyed had lived in Dalton for fewer than five years the Mexican immigrant community had been in the area since the 1970s. This indicated the importance of Dalton’s integration as a destination for migration trajectories, continuing the local Mexican population’s continued existence. Though some immigrants may have relocated elsewhere after their entrance to Dalton, the institutions and networks of the community persisted. In part, this occurred because of overlap among immigrant arrivals; long-term immigrant residents also contributed to this process as they opened businesses (as in the case of *Dona Rosa*’s family from chapter One) that serviced the larger itinerant population.

Secondly, Zúñiga and Hernández-León demonstrated the fluidity of migrant patterns with trajectories that passed through a variety of destinations. Most immigrants in Dalton were already familiar with the process of relocation. This integrated Georgia into the broader framework of migration, revealing the underlying connections between old and new settlement areas, as well as places of origin in Mexico. When sharp labor shortages before the 1996 Summer Olympics made

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<sup>26</sup> Zuniga, 132-3.

metropolitan Atlanta a favorable market for low-cost workers, Mexican immigrants answered this call not only from their homeland, but also from California and Texas. The process was linked to geographic regions outside of the South, as well as historic trends. Mexico's consular office in Atlanta provided valuable data on the places of origin for all Mexican immigrants living in the state.

Their data were based on the matriculation cards and other services applied for by Mexican immigrants living in the United States. It was not compulsory and thus likely underestimated the number of people living in a particular area. Nevertheless, the consulate's information on immigrant regional demographics sketched the contours of these communities. Five states from Mexico emerged as major sending regions to Georgia. As of 2006, the largest was Guerrero, making up thirteen percent of the Mexican immigrant community in the state. Michoacán and Guanajuato followed with eleven percent, while Hidalgo and the *Distrito Federal* had eight and seven percent, respectively. Interestingly, all of the states with at least five percent or more of the Mexican immigrant population in Georgia all came from much the same area of Mexico. The abovementioned states as well as others, including Oaxaca, Estado de Mexico, and Veracruz represented south-central Mexico. They states made up a congruent bloc that represented some of the nation's most active exporters of labor to the United States.<sup>27</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

In one sense, Mexican communities in Georgia are a result of chain migration, the concept that a single immigrant can be responsible for the later arrival of dozens

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<sup>27</sup> Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, *Sistema de Información*.

more. What I have sought to achieve here, however, is a deeper appreciation for Mexicans' community and identity in the United States. Though it may be unavoidable, at times, to treat it as a homogenous group, regional loyalties, as much as national allegiance, influenced immigrants' self-perception. These underlying characteristics helped explain how particular migrant trajectories were formed and the distinctions that developed within various settlement areas across Georgia and the United States. Mexican immigrants did not arrive at random, but rather followed employment opportunities or family members to receiving regions.

The processes of social networks were important to the development of Mexican immigrant communities in the United States. Bonds formed between individuals and organizations, in conjunction with attendant products offered in the marketplace, drove the creation of identity. This framework was supplemented and refreshed by the entrance of new immigrants to a particular settlement area. Studies used in this chapter demonstrated that additional arrivals nourished an existing community and allowed it to persist for years, long after many of the original core of pioneering immigrants had moved on. Established migrant trajectories created a familiar conduit for this process to occur, creating an environment that favored individuals from certain areas of Mexico over others.

The prevalence of immigrants from Guerrero, Michoacán and Guanajuato denoted the strength of these regional social networks and their ability to draw additional migrants from those places. The report authored by Zúñiga and Hernández-León noted the arrival of immigrants mostly from Mexico's south-central region. Many of these Mexican states represented in Georgia also made up some of the



poorest regions in Mexico. The relationship between economic hardship in the states of Guerrero and Veracruz and employment opportunities in the U.S. will be further examined in the next chapter. The influence of Georgia's Mexican immigrant social networks and the reasons individuals emigrated from their places of origin is also considered in a greater economic context.

#### **CHAPTER 4 THE EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND CRISIS ON TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION.**

Over the thirty year period examined in this study of social networks and migration trajectories to Georgia, a consistent and underlying theme was the role of economic factors, such as labor demand and market growth. They acted in both positive and negative capacities. For instance, unemployment and recession facilitated the desire to emigrate. Opportunities, such as higher wages and ample jobs also provided reasons for people to relocate elsewhere. When positive and negative elements occurred along concurrent timelines, however, powerful forces emerged to compel individuals to leave their places of origin. Within the structure of transnational migration from Mexico to the United States, important economic events and trends affected the relationship between a variety of sending and receiving regions.

The current chapter integrates these economic processes into the larger framework of Mexican migration. It considers how events, such as the 1982 Debt Crisis and the 1994 Devaluation of the Peso negatively impacted Mexico's economy and created an environment favorable to relocation. Economic growth in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s opened new space, in the form of employment opportunities, for the accommodation of immigrants. Furthermore, the collapse of the oil economy in Texas between 1982 and 1987 helped to redirect migration flows from cities like Houston to metropolitan Atlanta. Labor shortages in northern Georgia operated within this web of economic relationships, as information was spread through transnational social networks and attracted immigrants to the area.

Furthermore, implementation of large-scale plans, such as the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* and the North American Free Trade Agreement created new pressures within transnational migration patterns.

I conceptualize these elements as economic ‘crises’ and ‘opportunities’. The impact of the former fostered an environment that increased an individual’s willingness to relocate to capitalize upon the latter. This reciprocal relationship was integrated into the larger framework of transnational migration. In order to emphasize how this process functioned at the global level, I utilize the patterns of internal migration across Mexico itself. Economic conditions played an important reciprocal role alongside social and political factors. Each of these elements influenced the other, producing a loose system that facilitated migration decisions. As considered in the previous chapter, the processes of social networks and immigrant trajectories responded to the local environment present in sending and receiving regions; it was a relationship that occurred at a variety of levels and was dependent upon the separate parts of this framework, in order to operate as whole. By this concept, I mean the mixture of economic, social, and political factors that gave rise to the conditions necessary for relocation; social networks and migration trajectories worked within this paradigm, attracting new immigrants from areas perceived to be economically depressed to places perceived to be experiencing growth. The operative word is “perception” since the processes I am describing did not occur as precise mathematical functions, but rather developed as a result of human emotion, fear, and desire. In order to trace how economics underlined the formation of these trans-regional bonds and influence migration to Georgia, I return to the volume *New Trends*

*and Challenges of International Migration from Mexico to the United States* in this chapter.

The study raises intriguing points related to the economic conditions of Veracruz and Oaxaca, examining how these states emerged as important labor exporters to the United States. A team of researchers studied the relationship between geography and migration patterns in Veracruz; they discovered that while economically marginalized areas, such as the region of *Grandes montañas*, experienced some of the highest rates of emigration additional factors caused comparable results in other areas of the state. The study on Oaxaca followed similar parameters, examining how migration patterns affected the state's regional development and vice-versa. The study also considered the impact of financial remittances on the local economy. By utilizing both of these regional inquiries, I seek to demonstrate, not only the reasons for emigration that occurred within Mexico, but also how the process of transnational migration was affecting and transforming these places. Additionally, the state of Guerrero, with its central role as a sending region to Georgia's Mexican immigrant communities, is also studied here in detail. This chapter investigates recent historical trends, especially those related to the economic hardship experienced by Guerrero, as factors that indicate the rationale for emigration. Afterward, I shift attention from developments in Mexico to the perceived economic opportunities that have emerged in Georgia since the late 1980s.

This examination builds on my earlier analysis of carpet mills and poultry-processing facilities in Dalton and Gainesville by broadening the scope to include much of metropolitan Atlanta. The economic growth experienced in this area, as it

prepared to host the 1996 Summer Olympics, was an important factor that developed it into a prominent receiving region for Mexican labor. Furthermore, economic downturns in Texas saw immigrants relocate to other locations in the United States. Concomitant housing and population booms in Georgia nourished the continued growth in the state's Mexican immigrant community. This chapter outlines the increased labor demands that came from a variety of industries from across the state and how Mexican workers filled these positions. It compares average wages among whites, African Americans, and Hispanic/Latinos in Georgia. Furthermore, I utilize a variety of statistical data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, state organizations and universities to track how these various trends emerged and intensified during the 1990s. This decade was critical to the establishment of Georgia, not only as a major new settlement area, but also as a central destination among other southeastern regions for itinerant and permanent relocation of Mexican labor.

While Georgia's history as a receiving region for Mexican immigration is rather brief, its emergence as a settlement area since the 1970s had an important influence on its regional identity. How the local public responded to the growing presence of Mexicans over time is considered in greater detail in the following chapter. The economic crises and opportunities that facilitated the migration of individuals to Georgia, however, help to explain how these perspectives formed and evolved as the Hispanic/Latino community grew. The current chapter connects these events and trends within a transnational context, considering why people left their places of origin in Guerrero and elsewhere for settlement areas in the United States. For now, let us consider the lessons that can be learned from the relationship between

economic crises and opportunities, by considering Mexico's economic history since the establishment of the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo*.

### **Opportunity and Crisis in Mexico, 1961-1982.**

In 1961, under the leadership of President Adolfo Lopez Mateos, Mexico initiated a new economic policy known as the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (PRONAF). It sought to increase productive output among the nation's six northernmost states. In order to achieve this goal, PRONAF directed capital flows into the region's cities, including Ciudad Juarez, Nogales, Tijuana, and Nuevo Laredo. Prior to this program, many of the economic benefits that existed along the international border tended to favor the "lado Americano." Day laborers crossed over into the United States seeking employment, while the Mexican side remained less developed. With PRONAF and its promotion of capital investment, the federal government in Mexico City hoped to increase living standards for border-dwelling Mexicans and stimulate industrial growth in the region. Within four years the program invested more than four hundred million dollars in land, construction, and urbanization.<sup>1</sup>

One element of a two-pronged scenario, this stimulus package helped initiate dramatic economic increases. Manufacturing and the rise of agribusiness fueled growth along Mexico's side of the border. Private corporations in the state of Sonora consolidated family-owned farmlands.<sup>2</sup> In Ciudad Juárez, PRONAF made available

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<sup>1</sup> Wilebaldo Martinez-Toyes "Programa Nacional Fronterizo: El caso de Ciudad Juárez," (Ciudad Juárez: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez) <http://docentes.uacj.mx/rquinter/cronicas/pronaf.htm> (Retrieved: January 25, 2008), 1.

<sup>2</sup> John M. Hart, ed., *Border Crossing*, 118.

funds for infrastructural development, such as new roads, bridges, and an industrial park that brought factories, known as *maquiladoras*, to the area.<sup>3</sup> Similar developments across the region facilitated rapid population expansions. Essentially, the federal government sought to substitute nationally produced items for imports in the states along the border, increase exports, and improve living conditions.<sup>4</sup>

During this period, the rate of population growth in Mexico's border states outpaced increases in the American Southwest. Internal migration brought individuals from cities and rural areas in Mexico's core to its northern periphery. While California and Texas maintained the largest border populations, growth trends in five of the six Mexican border states (Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Sonora and Tamaulipas) saw these areas, each, exceed one million inhabitants. The second component in this scenario occurred in Mexico's core states, which encouraged internal migration northward to the *maquiladoras* and industrial opportunities along the border.

The federal government followed PRONAF with the establishment of a Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in 1965. This plan sought to continue the stimulating regional industry and provide employment opportunities for Mexican workers after the cancellation of the *Bracero* program by the U.S. Congress. BIP facilitated the construction of new *maquiladoras*. The factories imported raw materials from the U.S. for goods produced specifically for export to foreign markets. Domestic and foreign direct-investment grew the program. By 1972, eighty percent of

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<sup>3</sup> Martinez-Toyes, "Programa Nacional Fronterizo," 1.

<sup>4</sup> David Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border* (Wilmington, D.E.: SR Books, 1999), 103-4.

*maquiladoras* were located in the borderlands, concentrated around Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez. Not only did PRONAF and BIP benefit U.S. and Mexican companies operating along the border, they also transformed these areas into centers of internal migration.<sup>5</sup>

As these programs expanded the northern border's economy, it attracted laborers who were unable to find enough work in Mexico's core, including areas such as the *Distrito Federal*, Guanajuato, Acapulco, and Oaxaca. They relocated to the northern municipalities of Ciudad Juarez, Matamoros, Tijuana and others in response to the burgeoning economic opportunities. Furthermore, concomitant programs in other sections of Mexico modernized roads, brought electricity and improved communication between city and countryside. While these developments made life better for many Mexicans, it also made these populations more mobile facilitating additional internal migration to the north. In 1982, the Debt Crisis that affected many developing countries forced the cancellation of broad welfare programs throughout Mexico. The *maquiladora* system, however, continued to grow and as new factories opened they absorbed additional migrant workers from other states.<sup>6</sup>

The twenty year span of time that began with the establishment of PRONAF and ended with the Mexican Debt Crisis represented an important growth period for the borderlands. *Maquiladoras* opened throughout the region, drawing workers from across the nation and concentrating them in cities like Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana. While these programs proved useful during times of crisis in the 1980s, concurrent developments in states around Mexico's core were not as helpful. I have reserved

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<sup>5</sup> Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border*, 104-6.

<sup>6</sup> Lorey, 108.



further examination of these conditions for the section investigating the cases of Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz later in the chapter. These states experienced political, economic, and social changes that affected their local populations and encouraged emigration. Infrastructural developments, such as highways, brought cheaper products and also allowed for greater mobility among the rural poor.

Additionally, the cancellation of the *Bracero* program contributed to the creation of BIP, which expanded the Mexican borderland's manufacturing (and thus, employment) capacity. U.S. foreign direct investment into these enterprises also helped increase the border's importance within Mexico itself. Subsequent developments between the United States and Mexico brought the border economies closer together. Crises and opportunities within both nations during the 1980s and early 1990s contributed to the expansion of migration flows from Mexico's central states. The 1982 Debt Crisis forced the Mexican government to restructure its programs by Neoliberal economic formulas, which had powerful affects throughout the country. Furthermore, the institution of the North American Free Trade Agreement created unexpected consequences for migration. The following section considers Mexico's internal developments between 1982 and 1994, then integrates this study into an analysis of three important Mexican sending regions to Georgia.

**The Era of Neoliberal Reform in Mexico, 1982-1994.**

This section considers the institution of economic reforms in Mexico following the debt crisis, which forced cancellation of various statist welfare programs. Furthermore, the government sold and consolidated various state-owned enterprises during this period. The nation's technocrats sought to systematically

restructure the economy along lines urged by the international community through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In conjunction with the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and subsequent events that occurred as a result, this process of economic liberalization affected the lives of millions of everyday Mexicans.

On January 1, 1994, NAFTA went into effect between Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The treaty arrived as the capstone to a series of economic liberalization policies initiated by Mexican officials after the 1982 debt crisis. Begun under President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado, this process continued when his successor, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, assumed control of the government in 1988. Both leaders sought to cooperate within the global financial system, especially in relation to the United States. Salinas saw the passage of NAFTA as a key component in this process of economic liberalization and integration. The agreement sought, among other provisions, to “strengthen the special bonds of friendship.. reduce distortions to trade... [and] ensure a predictable commercial framework for business planning and investment” between the ratifying states. It achieved these goals through the elimination of trade barriers to “facilitate the cross-border movement of goods and services....”<sup>7</sup> Welcomed by many in the business community, it received criticism from U.S. labor and human rights’ groups fearing destabilization of workers’ wages.

Inside Mexico, the arrival of NAFTA coincided with the first uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) as masked gunmen captured a series

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<sup>7</sup> NAFTA Secretariat, North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) [http://www.nafta-sec-alena.org/DefaultSite/index\\_e.aspx?DetailID=79](http://www.nafta-sec-alena.org/DefaultSite/index_e.aspx?DetailID=79) [Retrieved: March 1, 2008), article 101.

of towns in the state of Chiapas. They condemned the agreement and called for the government to pay greater attention to the concerns of the poor and indigenous populations. That same year, underlying economic problems finally came to the forefront of the nation's political stage.<sup>8</sup>

It began with the devaluation of the Mexico peso. On December 20, 1994, the new Finance Minister, Jaime Serra Puche announced policy shifts in order to correct the overvalued currency. Mismanagement of this process, however, led to insufficient stabilization measures. Within one month the peso fell precipitously against the dollar; the Mexican economy further destabilized as inflation increased and interest rates climbed to forty percent. Local and foreign investment money fled the country, igniting serious alarm in the international community. The Clinton administration sought to engineer an aid package, and with the help of the European community, injected fifty billion dollars into the ailing Mexican economy. Consequences proved serious as foreign backers, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank felt disillusioned by Mexico's economic situation. The late 1980s had appeared as a time of considerable growth and the nation was presented as a model of Neoliberal policies by the West. The peso crisis harmed Mexico's international reputation, but also affected the everyday lives of its citizens. Subsequent unemployment and lost savings in regions of the nation's core states, in conjunction with growing economic activity along the border and in the United States, encouraged rises in migration trends.

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Hogenboom, *Mexico and the NAFTA*, 20.

In the north, the *maquiladoras* continued to attract laborers. Despite fears that the border would become less important economically under NAFTA, scholar David Lorey noted that “the comparative advantage of the far northern regions of Mexico was certain to continue into the foreseeable future.”<sup>9</sup> The agreement did not necessarily revolutionize already close economic ties between the United States and Mexico. It must be remembered that many of these bonds were in existence for decades and had already begun growing closer as Mexico liberalized its economic policies and entered into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986. Nevertheless, federal pro-growth policies, as embodied by NAFTA, influenced population trends among Mexico’s border cities and facilitated intensification of existing linkages and industrial productivity.

Ciudad Juarez continued as one of the fastest growing urban centers during this period. American computer and automotive companies relocated their manufacturing operations there, as well as other northern Mexican cities. Soon, new workers arrived in Ciudad Juarez looking for employment opportunities. Fueled by legal and illegal trade, new neighborhoods, lacking proper public facilities, grew up around the city’s core. As happened under PRONAF, the new free trade agreement accelerated economic and industrial activity, expanded existing population centers, and drew migrant workers from elsewhere inside Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

This combination of factors created an environment conducive for emigration. The devaluation of the peso and subsequent economic instability created

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<sup>9</sup> Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border*, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Lourdes Portillo, *Senorita Extraviada, Missing Young Woman*, (Mexico: ITVS Productions, 2001), DVD, 74 minutes.

unemployment and damaged the incomes of many Mexicans. Political pressure from groups, such as the EZLN, challenged the official political discourse and undermined support for existing Neoliberal policies. Furthermore, as Mexico experienced disruptions in the growth initiated in the 1980s, the market in the United States began to expand much faster. Following a brief recession between 1991 and 1992, it embarked on a period of sustained growth that lasted for much of the remaining decade. Data provided by a series of academic and government studies of migration and the economy, which I will examine in detail later in this chapter, show linkages between these two components as the demand for labor in the United States drew additional Mexican migrants northward for employment opportunities, not only in the borderlands, but also settlement areas across the U.S.

At the national level, Mexico suffered not only losses in international political prestige, but also reductions in the standard of living. Let us now inquire into the particular conditions that drove emigration by studying the cases of three Mexican states integral to the development of new settlement areas in the U.S. These examples, selected among the leading and emergent sending regions to Georgia, highlighted how these states coped with developments in Mexico's economic history during the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, the combination of opportunity and crisis, which formed in this period, facilitated the migration trajectories of laborers in these three states.

### **Conditions in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Veracruz.**

Local and regional conditions in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Veracruz reflected the problems occurring on the national stage. Unemployment, recession and economic

marginalization encouraged residents to entertain the idea of emigration. As noted in previous chapters, these communities received information through transnational social networks on the conditions in the United States and opportunities for economic growth. While this knowledge played a critical role in the process, it must not obscure the presence of additional factors. There were specific elements endemic to each of the three states selected as studies for this chapter.

I chose Guerrero, not only because it was the most important sending region for Georgia's immigrant settlement community, but also since this example highlighted the impact of social and economic unrest, brought out by persistent political infighting, crises, and inequality. On the other hand, Oaxaca underlined the importance of infrastructural improvements and intra-regional economic connections, which made the state's population more mobile. As highways expanded into this region, rural laborers were able to expand their employment options and many relocated to the *maquiladoras* to the north. Finally, studies conducted on Veracruz indicated an interesting relationship between migration and economic marginalization. While not the case in every instance, nevertheless, this state's poorest region was also its most active exporter of labor to the United States. I examined why this occurred and what it can tell us about economic linkages between sending and receiving regions from the Mexican perspective. For now, however, let us begin with Oaxaca's example as an emergent sending region for labor inside and out of Mexico.

Internal and international Mexican migration intensified with the construction of federal highways, a network of local roads, and other improvements. Following the

Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Oaxaca was isolated from the national government's attention for twenty years. Beginning in the 1940s, however, a national development program, which built new roads across Mexico, arrived in this state. With it came new opportunities as inexpensive manufactures from the central and northern regions of Mexico began to replace local goods produced by the indigenous populations. Roads also linked Oaxaca to transnational labor prospects, making it easier for the state's workers to leave and participate in the U.S. *Bracero* program. It initiated a preference for migration as a means of support among the working poor in Oaxaca that continued even after the U.S. Congress cancelled the program in 1964. Furthermore, tourism to Oaxaca increased, allowing for a rise in the production of some indigenous goods for sale to this market, but also heightened the importance of the regional capital at the expense of rural communities. The mid-twentieth century and its decades of development began to transform Oaxaca's popular composition; its residents became familiar with migration as an opportunity to increase one's well-being.<sup>11</sup>

The 1982 Debt Crisis also greatly affected the lives of Oaxaca's residents. As the federal government reformed policy along Neoliberal lines, it shuttered welfare programs. Scholar Rafael Reyes-Morales co-authored a study that examined these developments, concluding: "The new model... worsened the problem of income distribution... emigration [in Oaxaca] was increasing in accord with the national economic crisis through every presidential cycle." At one point, this rate of

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<sup>11</sup> Rafael Reyes-Morales, et al. "Características de la migración internacional en Oaxaca y sus impactos en el desarrollo regional," *Nuevas Tendencias y Desafíos de la Migración Internacional México-Estados Unidos* (México, DF.: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2004), 197-201.

emigration grew to sixty-one percent of the population among seven of Oaxaca's poorest districts. These areas were heavily represented by rural and indigenous groups, which suffered in the restructure of Mexico's bureaucracy under pressure from the International Monetary Fund.<sup>12</sup> Economic marginalization is both an important and complicated theme in Mexican society during this period. The emergence of Veracruz as a major sending region of immigrant labor to the United States, highlighted the complexity surrounding this issue.

University of Veracruz professor, Cristina Nunez Madrazo, identified this state as an emergent exporter of labor to the U.S. Southeast.<sup>13</sup> Crises in Veracruz's agriculture and petroleum sectors coincided with increases in its migration rates.<sup>14</sup> Patricia Zamudo-Grave and a team of demographers considered the relationship between geography and migration as these components related to Veracruz. Their study uncovered interesting data indicating that areas with the highest grades of economic marginalization tended to see correspondingly high rates of emigration.

While not every location in the state conformed to this model, the area of *Grandes Montañas* represented a compelling example. Between 1995 and 1999, *Grandes Montañas* was both the most economically marginalized region in Veracruz, as well as its highest center of international migration. Its rate of work

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<sup>12</sup> Reyes-Morales, 207.

<sup>13</sup> Cristina Mardrazo, "Living Here and There: New Migration of Undocumented Workers from Veracruz to the U.S. Southeast," delivered at Conference on Latino Immigration to New Settlement Areas, University of South Carolina, 11 October 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Zumudio-Grave, et al. "Geografía y patrones de la migración internacional," in *Nuevas Tendencias y Desafíos de la Migración Internacional México-Estados Unidos*. (México, DF.: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2004), 146.



force participation, described as “*población económicamente activa ocupada* (PEAO),” declined by more than six percent among primary sector jobs. The report also noted that if this decrease was not “compensated by PEAO in other sectors of the economy, international migration increases.”<sup>15</sup> *Grandes Montañas* consistently ranked ahead of all other regions in Veracruz as a sending area for immigration. In 1995, as much as thirty-one percent of its male population left to find work outside of Mexico; four years later this rate decreased slightly, but remained above twenty-six percent.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, some regions had contradictory experiences or even inversions of what occurred in *Grandes Montañas*. For instance, *Las Selvas* also had a high rate of economic marginalization, but one of the lowest for migration. The study’s authors sought to address this problem: “we can only conclude that marginalization constitutes one growth factor for regional international migration when it is accompanied by other situations related to the use of limited resources, such as recurrent crises in the coffee crop for regions like *Centro* and *Grandes Montañas*.” Their inquiry into Veracruz’s migration trends highlighted the complexity of economic factors within this process. If a region, such as *Las Selvas* relied on local resources to accommodate economic hardship its residents may have felt less inclined to migrate. On the other hand, recurrent crises that limited individuals’ access to local supplies could serve to convince them to move. In this sense, crisis played an important role in the decision-making process and whether a particular region became a major sending area for labor. Persistent economic hardship in Guerrero, the state

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<sup>15</sup> Zumudio-Grave, “Geografía y patrones,” 154-7.

<sup>16</sup> Zumudio-Grave, 152.

most represented by the Mexican immigrant community in Georgia, supported this conclusion.

In 1972, the governor of Guerrero, Alfredo Bonfil, authorized a new development agenda that initiated structural improvements within the state. The *Plan de Desarrollo* included the building of irrigation networks, hospitals, roads, water treatment facilities, and agro-industry. It sought to commercialize local industries by commoditizing agriculture and forestry. Mismanagement, however, worsened economic inequalities; popular opinion gave its support to the state's endemic guerilla movement. The regional government restructured the program, but was not able to forestall agricultural and economic crises that damaged Guerrero during the 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

The insurgent forces, known collectively as *Partidos de los Pobres*, that initially opposed Bonfil's program, responded to the growing accumulation of wealth by the coastal magnates. The *sexenio* of President Luis Echevarria Alvarez, beginning in 1976, alongside the rise of Ruben Figueroa as Guerrero's governor appeared to usher in change. Both men were recognized as reformers, however, problems persisted. Instead of moderation, Figueroa initiated a campaign to undermine and neutralize the guerilla forces. Additionally, the importance of coffee production to the regional economy made it a contentious issue throughout this decade and into the early eighties. Local caciques battled against interest groups for power, as agricultural organizations sought to assert themselves in the public sphere.<sup>18</sup> The arrival of the 1982 Debt Crisis and the subsequent Neoliberal restructure of the federal government only emphasized these political and economic uncertainties.

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<sup>17</sup> Bartra, *Guerrero Bronco*, 117-8.

<sup>18</sup> Bartra, 122-4, 130, 138.

Within this context, Guerrero emerged as a major emigration center during the 1980s and 1990s. The Mexican human rights organization, *Servicio Internacional Para La Paz* (SIPAZ), calculated that seventy-three thousand Guerrerans relocated to the United States each year with an estimated expatriate population of 950,000 living within that country. Additionally, the borderland states of northern Mexico, including Sonora, Baja California, and Sinaloa attracted 128,000 Guerrero-based migrants every year. SIPAZ attributed this population hemorrhage on the failure of federal and regional governments to provide employment alternatives to migration for its indigenous populations. The human rights organization claimed that more than seventy-three percent of Guerrero's Nahuatl- and Mixtec-dominated municipalities lacked the infrastructure to support their people. Additionally, military operations to combat rampant nacro-trafficking within the state contributed to this problematic socio-political environment.<sup>19</sup> Even more than Oaxaca and Veracruz, political strife contributed to the social and economic hardships that stimulated relocation from Guerrero.

While the model that connects economic marginalization to migration has its limitations, it does highlight the overall complexity of the issue. As considered in the first and second chapters, individuals chose to emigrate for a variety of reasons. The presence of "transnational families" in the United States vis-à-vis economic inequities and political unrest in Mexico contributed to the list of reasons why people became motivated to relocate from a particular place of origin. Nevertheless, in the case of Veracruz these components also contributed to a rationale for why people chose not

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<sup>19</sup> SIPAZ, *Guerrero en Datos* [http://www.sipaz.org/data/gro\\_es\\_03.htm](http://www.sipaz.org/data/gro_es_03.htm) (Retrieved: April 2, 2008).

to migrate. The demographers who conducted that study on Veracruz linked this process to a population's access to local resources and their level of scarcity. Furthermore, they also admitted that more research still needed to be done. The questions that surround the economic rationales in support of (and against) migration to the United States from Veracruz remain open to debate.

Nevertheless, in the larger framework of study on international migration to the United States, Mexico did provide a host of reasons to emigrate, either through persistent economic crises or infrastructural improvements that made populations more mobile. Furthermore, as mature settlement areas in the United States, such as Texas, experienced their own economic crises, immigrants sought out other destinations.<sup>20</sup> In turn, Georgia emerged as one of those new settlement areas that presented opportunities to these prospective immigrants. As noted in chapter One, the state already enjoyed an evolving relationship with sending communities dating back to the 1970s. In conjunction with a long-term resurgence of the U.S. South during this period, the rise of Atlanta following its selection for the 1996 Summer Games created labor shortages. This economic boom continued after the Olympics, fueled by population increases that drove construction of new homes and increased service sector employment. The following section examines how Mexican labor's expansion in Georgia continued in the latter half of the nineties, specifically, by studying their economic contribution to local industries and markets.

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<sup>20</sup> Puente, "Newcomers encounter."

### **Economic Influences on Immigration to Georgia after 1990.**

Throughout the nineties, undocumented immigration roughly corresponded with U.S. unemployment rates. Between 1990 and 1992, when the American rate of unemployment rose above seven percent, the annual number of undocumented 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 inbound trends of undocumented immigrants. 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 undocumented immigrants at seven hundred thousand persons.<sup>21</sup> Combined with Mexico's rapidly expanding working-age population since the 1970s and the failure to absorb these increases, the presence of jobs north of the border increased the allure of emigration for many young Mexican nationals.<sup>22</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, the state of Georgia presented a settlement area that existed along the periphery of Mexican migration trajectories to the United States. The largest communities of documented and undocumented immigrants lived in the Southwest, as well as major urban centers such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. Economic crisis and subsequent difficulties that occurred in Mexico after 1982, however, began to influence this traditional pattern. Furthermore, the economic ties that strengthened between the two nations following passage of NAFTA contributed to the formation of new migration lines that brought people to Georgia.

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *Undocumented Immigration*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Frank D. Bean, ed., *Mexican and Central American Population and U.S. Immigration Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 16.

This settlement area also offered new incentives for arrival. It began with the 1996 Summer Olympics, but continued after this event.

The state of Georgia experienced general increases in its population as U.S. and international businesses began to relocate or expand their operations to Atlanta. Saskia Sassen argued that increases in investment capital and the emergence of an increasingly sophisticated financial services network generated new demands for low-paying labor in the areas of housekeeping, childcare, and restaurant staffing. Her sociological models defined the creation of “world cities,” citing the examples of New York City, London, Tokyo, Miami and Mumbai as major urban centers that developed sophisticated financial districts. The arrival of these highly-paid professionals opened space for the migration of low-end workers to service this growing class of people.<sup>23</sup> While not quite a “world city” as defined by Sassen, Atlanta benefited as an established “gateway” to the South. Its presence as one of the few major urban centers, centrally located in this area of the United States made it a preferred destination for regional headquarters and transportation hubs. Population growth contributed to this increase in Georgia’s profile.

Between 1990 and 2000, the city of Atlanta’s population expanded by just under six percent, while the rest of Georgia grew more than twenty-six percent. Even more interesting, however, Atlanta’s metropolitan area saw robust increases in the number of its residents. In 1970, this region held 1.8 million people; by 2000, this figure more than doubled to 4.1 million residents (estimates in 2006, put it at 5.4 million). Furthermore, much of this growth occurred during the 1990s and continued

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<sup>23</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Cities in the World Economy*, Third Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2006), xx.

into the new century.<sup>24</sup> With more than just the Olympics, Atlanta was becoming an important regional hub for the Southeast. This emergent role created new jobs for immigrants in a variety of sectors, including construction and services.

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* covered this 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 wage was calculated at an annual thirty-eight thousand dollars for workers, eighty percent of Mexican construction employees earned between ten and thirty thousand dollars.<sup>25</sup> This source of cheaper labor, combined with intense demand for workers, saw Mexican nationals utilized in a variety of Georgia industries.

Manufacturing, entertainment services, 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 of agricultural workers were Mexican. The entertainment service industry, which included hotels and

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<sup>24</sup> David Firestone, "Census Shows Growth in Atlanta's Population," *New York Times* (Online Edition, U.S. Section, March 23, 2001) <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/23/national/23ATLA.html?ex=1205812800&en=059bcf8b4bbffef&ei=5070> (Retrieved: March 8, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Beata D. Kochut and Jeffrey M. Humphreys, eds., *Going North*, 11-12.

restaurants, employed nine percent of the community, while manufacturing, especially in northern counties, utilized 6.5 percent of the labor force. In total, these sectors employed more than 130,000 individuals of Mexican-origin.

In the manufacturing sector, seventy-three percent of Mexican-origin workers earned less than twenty thousand dollars a year.<sup>26</sup> 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* 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.<sup>27</sup> These employment figures matched the experience of Mexicans in the state's third largest employer, entertainment services, which includes hotel housekeeping and food service workers.

Maintaining jobs as housekeepers and dishwashers, ninety percent of entertainment service 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 noted that thirty-one percent of engaged Mexican labor worked in construction, seventeen percent in manufacturing, and fourteen percent in entertainment. While often covered by the news media, agriculture employed fewer Mexican laborers than the other

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<sup>26</sup> Kochut, *Going North*, 11

<sup>27</sup> Rakesh Kochhar, et al., *The New Latino South: Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center), 41.



industries mentioned above. The U.S. Census Bureau found that only 2.5 percent of the Mexican labor force in Georgia worked in this field.<sup>28</sup>

Despite all of the information covered by the Selig Center, their study failed to answer one major question: how many jobs did a typical Mexican laborer hold? Considering the cost of living in urban areas, it is reasonable to believe that workers maintained multiple jobs in order to cover living expenses and provide money to send to Mexico as remittances. Nevertheless, the report demonstrated that the majority of Mexican workers filled lower paying jobs in a variety of industries. This trend continued into the new century.

As previously noted, Georgia's general statewide population, across all demographics, expanded by twenty-six percent during this period; demand for labor reflected this growth. In 1990 the labor market employed forty-seven thousand Mexican migrant workers; this figure increased to 193,321 by 2000. Seventy-five percent of this community participated in the labor force with less than six percent unemployment. An average twenty thousand new migrants entered the workforce each year.<sup>29</sup> By 2004, Georgia ranked ninth among states with the largest Hispanic labor markets.<sup>30</sup> This last figure is important, because it indicates that the state was maturing as a settlement area. As the South increased its economic profile within the United States, the city of Atlanta benefited. It moved from the periphery of receiving regions, taking a central position as an emerging magnet area for Mexican immigrants.

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<sup>28</sup> Kochut, *Going North*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Kochut, *Going North*, 8-11.

<sup>30</sup> University of Georgia, *Hispanics by the Numbers in Georgia*, 3.

This occurred as a result of economic increases that facilitated general population growth within Georgia and its cities. The early employment opportunities offered by industrial sectors in the state's northern counties (see chapter One), forged a pioneering immigrant community. Labor shortages in Atlanta, following its selection as the Olympic site for 1996, in conjunction with economic downturns in Mexico, facilitated increases in migration to Georgia. It must not be overlooked that the 1994 devaluation of the peso, which affected the livelihoods of many Mexicans, occurred just as Atlanta required new, low-wage labor to build millions of dollars worth of Olympic facilities. This combination of economic crisis and opportunity created new incentives for relocation to Atlanta. Furthermore, subsequent construction booms across the state, as well as cross-sector growth in other industries, made Georgia an enduring employment destination for migrant labor from Mexico.

**Conclusion.**

As a theoretical tool, if social networks can be conceptualized as the building blocks of immigrant settlement communities, then economic factors are the mortar. Without one, then the other alone cannot easily build the framework that facilitates the formation of transnational linkages between regions. Locations in Mexico and the United States became sending and receiving areas, in part, from the presence of trans-regional and transnational families and mutual aid associations. It also occurred thanks to the underlying economic elements that motivated individuals to migrate. These components originated within both nations and contributed to a reciprocal relationship that bequeathed closer, more intense linkages between regions throughout North America. Additionally, some unintended consequences emerged as

key characteristics in this process, which revealed the complexity of connections formed across the border.

For example, this chapter demonstrated that the demise of the Bracero program did not stop migration trajectories from Mexico. New programs such as PRONAF and BIP, instead, created outlets for these flows. Additionally, regional agendas, which sought to build new roads and improve infrastructure tended to create the potential for more mobile populations. Workers relocated to industrial centers along the border, and in the process, gained necessary experience as itinerant labor. This informal “training” as trans-regional migrant workers contributed to the available pool of willing *transnational* migrants. As noted in the previous chapter, the typical trajectory taken by Mexican immigrants to Georgia included stops, frequently, in Texas and California. With such a large population of mobile laborers already working in *maquiladoras*, it should come as no surprise that many of these individuals participated in the networks that facilitated transnational migration between Mexico and the United States.

Economic factors played an underlying role throughout Mexico. Whether from political instability or marginalization, local workers made the decision to relocate from poorer economies. They arrived in new areas with real and perceived growth, competing for employment opportunities. This occurred as a result of social network information sharing as family and friends already living in one receiving community attracted new migrants to the area. People left their homes in places like Guerrero, initially traveling to the *maquiladoras*, but eventually moving across the border as (documented and undocumented) immigrants. Perceived economic

opportunities in the United States helped in this process. Furthermore, regional downturns, such as the oil economy collapse in Texas, also redirected existing migration flows to other locations.

Georgia emerged as an important new settlement area, because its economy and population experienced robust growth after 1970. Poultry and carpeting industries provided the initial entries for Mexican immigrants to the area. The rise in Atlanta, however, as a gateway to the Southeast, in conjunction with the Summer Olympics and subsequent economic booms also contributed to its profile as a receiving region. Immigrant laborers came in search of a variety of jobs, taking employment in construction and service sectors. The 1990s witnessed dramatic increases in the core population of Mexicans. Furthermore, their presence expanded beyond the northern counties and metropolitan Atlanta; they moved to communities across the state, especially in southern agriculture endeavors. The close of the twentieth century and beginning of the new one saw Georgia become more reliant on the benefits of competitive, low-wage immigrant labor as its statewide economy boomed. Put simply, this state became a major new settlement area, because of perceived regional economic opportunities that coincided with political and economic crises occurring in Mexico at a critical junction in both nations' histories during the 1990s.

The following chapter considers how social networks interacted with government attempts to regulate immigration to the U.S. It examines this theme within the context of Georgia's experience, studying specifically state-led responses to Mexican (and other) immigrants through the passage of legislation directed against undocumented immigration. Opinion polls and supporting data reveal the state's

general disposition toward the emergent Hispanic/Latino and Mexican immigrant minorities. Furthermore, the next chapter examines the representational changes that have occurred in Americans' ideas of immigration before and after September 11, 2001.

It will critique the weight of pre-9/11 legislation, such as the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, as well as the Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security amid growing security fears of "terrorist" attacks from across the border influenced national opinions of immigrants. Within this framework, chapter Four outlines the federal government's failure to achieve a meaningful immigration policy, which lead to a political devolution of the issue to state and local responses. Georgia's experience in this process is examined as increasingly xenophobic rhetoric framed legislation aimed at curbing the perceived menace of "illegal aliens" to the state.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**THE ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS AND POLITICAL**  
**DEVOLUTION WITHIN U.S. IMMIGRATION LAW IN GEORGIA.**

Since passage of the 1965 Hart-Celler amendment to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act, undocumented entry into the United States emerged as an increasingly contested issue. Subsequent legislative and executive actions sought to control and restrict access across the U.S. southern border and other points of entry. Over the past forty years, the federal government moved toward progressively more militarized language in order to legitimize attempts to “secure the border” and prevent so-called “illegal aliens” from penetrating its bureaucratic redoubt. Political language also responded to generational shifts within the national discourse. In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson described the United States as a “nation of strangers” and framed the issue of immigration within the context of the civil rights movement. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 altered this language, promoting concepts centered around economics, law enforcement, and militarization. “Illegal” or undocumented immigration was characterized as a violation of national sovereignty; subsequent federal operations in the 1990s continued this trend with the construction of new impediments to informal border crossings.

These legislative and enforcement actions, however, did not stop the undocumented entry of thousands of immigrants to the United States. Federal attempts to impose artificial quotas on immigration from Mexico (and elsewhere) failed to substantially curtail informal entry to the U.S., and instead pushed this group of people to the legal margins of the normative state. Recent laws retained many of the same inflexible statutes that restricted access to worker visas and did not respond

to economic and social developments in the U.S. and Mexico. These shortcomings repeatedly undermined the appeal of formal immigration among potential immigrants, encouraging additional unauthorized entries across the southern border. Instead of correcting these problems, however, the U.S. Congress and executive branch relied increasingly on more aggressive enforcement programs that did little to improve the existing situation beyond sensationalized the issue and militarizing the border.

The political discourse on immigration also revealed the power of language as a contextualizing tool. After 1986, politicians became ever more pre-occupied with the issue of “undocumented” or “illegal” entry into the United States. Both terms related to the same process, but framed it in very different contexts. The process these terms attempted to describe was the unauthorized presence of an individual within the national borders of the United States. The first highlighted the lack of a visa or other necessary formalities needed by an immigrant to enter the country; the second emphasized the perceived unlawfulness of entry into the U.S. without the proscribed “legal” paperwork. In both of these cases, the government was relied upon to set the parameters of normative entry into the nation-state. What these terms could not adequately address, however, was the long history of informal migration that existed between the United States and Mexico in the twentieth century. Individuals crossed the southern border from Mexico and vice versa not only for work, but also for other activities, such as entertainment and education. This chapter considers the implication of informal migration, using it as a point of departure to counter the State-centered biases of the terms “illegal” and “undocumented.”

Recent U.S. policy has sought to eliminate the possibility of informal migration through the construction of physical barriers along the southern border and increased security patrols and apprehensions. What must be emphasized, however, is that even as the federal government heightened the rhetoric of border militarization it was unable to reduce the growing number of informal entries made by immigrants during the 1980s and 1990s. Particularly, U.S. immigration law failed to reduce unauthorized crossings from Mexico after passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, because it did not take into account the economic and social realities that existed between the two nations. First, federal law did not effectively consider the potential for major increases in labor demand among U.S. businesses; second, the economic crises of the 1980s and early 1990s in Mexico (see Chapter 3) increased the pool of laborers willing to relocate to the United States.

Within this framework, transnational social networks posed an acute challenge to top-down, State-generated attempts at controlling migration trends. They often formed along lines of kinship or comradeship as individuals continued their relationships with relatives and friends in spite of geo-political separations. Furthermore, modern advancements in communication technology (see Chapter 1 & 2) facilitated these connections as migrants could maintain contact with loved ones easily and affordably via phone lines or internet connections. People became increasingly mobile and adaptable to existing legal restrictions to immigration, because of these innovations. In contrast to the centralized enforcement programs generated by the State, social networks formed through decentralized channels of acquaintance and communication. They can be conceptualized as relational processes



that facilitated connections between sending and receiving regions across the U.S. and Mexico.

In the case of informal immigration, these cross-border bonds proved essential for providing information, as well as important physical and psychological aid in the form of kin- and comradeship. Social networks challenged the structuralist urges of immigration law to “coordinate” or “regulate” the flow of people into the United States, by providing informal, de-centralized information-sharing and logistical aid among their participants. Chapter Four uses social networks as a starting point to examine the failure of recent immigration laws to control undocumented entry into the United States from Mexico. With Georgia as the locus of this study, it also considers the political devolution of U.S. policy toward undocumented immigration. As public frustration mounted toward the federal government’s failure to develop an adequate response to this issue, state and local governments answered with a variety of agendas ranging between restrictive to ameliorative. This chapter critiques Georgia’s recent legislative attempts to control its undocumented immigrant population against other local responses across the nation in order to clarify how discord over the issue of immigration reform caused considerable political fragmentation between 1990 and 2006.

Chapter Four charts transnational social networks as a process within the broader framework of informal immigration and the responses taken by federal, state, and local entities in the United States. These processes provided individuals relocating from Mexico an alternative to the less flexible options offered by the State. The subsequent section considers recent attempts at immigration regulation by the

federal government. I offer a critique of the laws and policies that emerged during the forty year period beginning in 1965 with the passage of the Hart-Celler amendment. Finally, chapter Four returns to Georgia for a study of political devolution of U.S. responses to immigration. This last section complements the previous two as a challenge to the federal government's ultimate control over the issue of immigration. I wish to demonstrate that transnational social networks and informal immigration presented potent challenges to the State's attempts to impose artificial restrictions on entry into the United States. Within this framework, I also argue that the political devolution of the immigration debate further undermined federal authority in this arena.

#### **Informal Immigration and the Role of Transnational Social Networks.**

The entry of individuals into the United States usually follows one of two tracks: formal and informal. The first encompasses the legal parameters set by the State; immigrants must apply for permission to enter the country and follow certain procedures to achieve it. They are regulated by a system that defines the purpose of their visit to the United States and restricts their actions. A variety of different visas exist allowing for work, school, vacation and other types of entry. Furthermore, the process for permanent residency can be long and arduous as immigrants must file the appropriate paperwork, usually beginning at the U.S. embassy in their home country, and expend many years and thousands of dollars working their way through long applicant waiting lists. Once granted, immigrants obtain permanent status as resident aliens and can continue the process toward citizenship.

Informal immigration describes those methods of entry that do not utilize official, government-approved channels. This includes unauthorized border crossings from Mexico and visa overstays. The inherent difficulty for participation in the normative system of entry offered by the State contributes to the appeal of informal immigration. Rather than wait for permission to enter the U.S., many individuals choose to enter outside official processes. Typically, these migrants are referred to as “illegal” or “undocumented,” however, both terms obscure important characteristics of informal immigration and defer too much control to the State. “Illegal” and “undocumented” are inherently negative terms, which imply an incompleteness in the subjects they seek to describe. They fail to take into account the social and economic motivations that underline migration trends. As a result of the less flexible options offered by State-endorsed entry, the term “informal immigration” better encompasses an appreciation for the economic and social realities inherent to this issue. It is able to address socio-economic changes through the communicative role played by transnational social networks.<sup>1</sup>

Both formal and informal migration utilize social networks. Whether traveling on a visa or not, people will maintain contact with their relationships in home countries. Communication technology facilitates that process and does not discriminate against legal status. The difference, however, emerges in the methods of relocation available to formal and informal immigrants. The latter are bound by the legal procedures established by the State. This may include the requirement to return to their home country every six months or the individual may be unable to work until

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<sup>1</sup> Tamar Jacoby, “Immigration Nation,” *Foreign Affairs*, 1.

permanent residency is approved. Violation of these rules can result in fines and denial of re-entry into the U.S. for years.

Informal immigration is not bound to the State, because it does not rely upon formal entry procedures. Instead, it is dependent on the casual relationships between relatives, friends, and acquaintances (see Chapter One and Two). Transnational social networks form bonds between sending and receiving regions, transmitting information about job availability, living conditions, and other factors. Word-of-mouth communication can direct laborers to new areas where job demand is higher. As noted previously, labor shortages in Atlanta prior to the 1996 Summer Olympics drew migrants from the southwestern United States as well as Mexico. Furthermore, the early social networks that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in Dalton and Gainesville became the seed communities, which attracted immigrants from particular regions in Mexico. By the end of the last century, ten states, particularly Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Veracruz emerged as some of the most important sending areas for Georgia's burgeoning Mexican immigrant community.

As a result, transnational social networks provided flexible options not offered by the State. Though burdened with the stigma of "illegal," informal immigrants could relocate from Mexico to the U.S. faster and begin working immediately. Formal channels, for many immigrants were too expensive or time consuming to be realistic options. Matthew Gutmann explored this dynamic in *The Romance of Democracy*. An ethnographic study, his book examined the lives of working class individuals in the Mexico City neighborhood of *Santo Domingo*. They described their desire to visit the United States, but lamented the difficult barriers to entry established

by the U.S. government as well as their own limited financial means. Furthermore, while informal immigration presented a more realistic option for entry (of which some of the subjects in Gutmann's book utilized), this path was not without its hazards. As the border became increasingly militarized in the 1990s, immigrants came to rely heavily on desert guides (known as *coyotes* in the United States), who charged exorbitant prices for passage.<sup>2</sup>

While the international boundary separating the United States and Mexico existed only on maps, these imagined lines were increasingly reinforced by very tangible walls and security patrols that forced potential immigrants to choose more desperate options for crossing.<sup>3</sup> The following section examines the laws and enforcement policies undertaken by the federal government to regulate formal immigration, while seeking to circumvent informal entries. I begin in the 1960s with the passage of an important piece of legislation that had been welcomed at the time as an enlightened reform influenced by the era's discourse on civil rights. The section, however, critiques this amendment along with subsequent developments in U.S. immigration law, exposing their shortcomings and examining why informal entry into the country remained so persistent into the 1990s.

### **Legislative Regulation and Militarization of U.S. Immigration.**

The Hart-Celler Amendment of 1965 sought to reform defects within the Immigration Naturalization Act of 1952. It arrived during the generational discourse on civil rights that had already brought forth other important legislation; its

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew C. Gutmann, *The Romance of Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 98-9.

<sup>3</sup> Gutmann, *The Romance of Democracy*, 99.

proponents utilized similar language to describe this bill's priorities. The amendment abolished the national origins quota, which had severely restricted immigration from Asia and was criticized as racially discriminatory. It also promoted family reunification, giving special preference to immigrants directly related to U.S. citizens. For all other immigrants, however, the amendment established a limited visa system that allotted 120,000 entry applications on a first come, first serve basis to countries in the Western hemisphere. This decision to institute an artificial, inflexible cap on immigration led to the rise in "undocumented" entry to the United States during the 1970s and eighties. At the time, however, President Lyndon Johnson welcomed the amendment as a necessary revision to immigration law. He framed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 within the contemporary discourse of civil rights:

For it does repair a very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice. It corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American nation. ...This bill says simply that from this day forth those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here. ...Our beautiful America was built by a nation of strangers. From a hundred different places or more they have poured forth into an empty land, joining and blending in one might and irresistible tide.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, in this speech President Johnson also declared "the days of unlimited immigration are past." It marked the beginning of what became a major government campaign of immigration regulation and border militarization over the following four decades. The imposition of an artificial cap on entry into the United States did not curtail the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants. Instead, it

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<sup>4</sup> Lyndon Johnson, "Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill," speech, Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library (October 3, 1965) <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/651003.asp> (Retrieved: February 1, 2008).

removed legal recognition of informal immigration along the southern border and contributed to the perceived increase in “illegal” or “undocumented” entry. While the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 addressed shortcomings in earlier laws, it created new problems, because of its inflexible statutes that did not consider the potential for changes in migratory flows or labor demand. Subsequent legislation sought to cope with these challenges, but ultimately committed many of the same mistakes.

The Immigration Control and Reform Act of 1986 (IRCA) modified existing statutes on the control of “unauthorized immigration into the United States....”<sup>5</sup> It provided amnesty for some 2.5 million undocumented immigrants, while tightening enforcement language against future unauthorized entries. IRCA increased the pool of H-2A unskilled worker visas from five hundred to five thousand. U.S. employers could use these to recruit casual labor for non-agricultural position, however, there remained a number of restrictions. Businesses needed to advertise openings nationally and prove that no U.S. citizens wanted the job.<sup>6</sup> This requirement limited the feasibility of the visa; Congress also set the allotted number too low.<sup>7</sup> As occurred with the Hart-Celler amendment in 1965, IRCA did not adequately reflect economic reality. The artificial ceiling of five thousand unskilled worker visas could not cope with increasing numbers of immigrants crossing the southern border in the 1990s. On average, more than 400,000 individuals utilized informal channels to enter the United

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Congress, Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986) <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d099:SN01200:@@@L&summ2=m&|TOM:/bss/d099query.html/#summary> (Retrieved: September 18, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Congress, Immigration Reform and Control Act, Title III.

<sup>7</sup> Tamar Jacoby, “Immigration Nation,” 4.

States. This high rate of “undocumented” entry far outstripped the limited, inflexible supply of worker visas that could not be easily adjusted to meet labor demand as the U.S. economy grew during this period.<sup>8</sup>

IRCA’s framers sought to address the issue of unauthorized crossings into the U.S. by strengthening INS law enforcement powers. It christened a series of dramatic militarization campaigns along the southern border, which saw the construction of new permanent barriers and increased patrols. Between 1993 and 1999, the U.S. Border Patrol conducted three major operations: Hold the Line, Gatekeeper, and Safeguard. The first two targeted El Paso, Texas and San Diego, California, respectively, constructing permanent barriers and re-assigning personnel to apprehend unauthorized border crossers. The latter addressed illegal entries through Nogales, Arizona implementing similar programs to those instituted during the earlier operations. While each of these programs apprehended tens of thousands of individuals, none eliminated the issue of unapproved crossings. As in the past, IRCA and these enforcement operations conducted by INS did not address the social and economic elements that contributed to underlying trends of so-called “illegal” immigration.

Following the September 11 terrorists attacks in New York City, new fears entered the debate on immigration that conflated the issue with national security concerns. Border protection became an even more controversial issue during this period: “Federal officials have become increasingly worried about a surge in violence and instability along the Arizona-Mexico border and will begin what they describe as

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *At Issue: Illegal Immigration*, 7.



a major air and ground initiative to help keep out illegal immigrants, drug smugglers and possibly terrorists.” In 2004, undersecretary for domestic security Asa Hutchinson framed the issue within the increasingly common wartime language used to describe the Bush administration’s response to a variety of challenges: “This is not a secure border. Arizona has become the chokepoint. It is our current battleground.”<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the Secure Fence Act of 2006, in line with earlier border militarization campaigns in the 1990s, called for “operational control” of the legal boundary between Mexico and the United States. This is an important phrase in the act, because it defined the function of “operational control” as: “the prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband.”<sup>10</sup> The passage closely identified undocumented immigrants alongside terrorists and drug smugglers, a powerful symbolic linkage that construed the former as materially associated with the latter two activities. Furthermore, it obscured the social and economic stimuli, such as social networks or the demand for low-wage labor among U.S. employers that generated transnational migration from Mexico and also failed to recognize the economic role the United States plays in this process (see Chapter Three).

Nevertheless, migrants continued to select the option of informal immigration to enter the United States. Inflexible statutes at the federal level contributed to a legal

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<sup>9</sup> Eric Lichtblau, “U.S. Takes Steps to Tighten Mexican Border,” *New York Times* (Online Edition, U.S. Section, March 16, 2004) <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9803E1DC1731F935A25750C0A9629C8B63> (Retrieved: March 6, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Congress, Secure Fence Act, (2006) <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:HR06061:@@@L&summ2=m&|TOM:/bss/d109query.html> (Retrieved: March 11, 2008).

environment that could not adjust to socio-economic changes; it fueled a cycle that pushed increasing numbers of immigrants to choose unauthorized entry as an alternative. In the 1990s, even as the U.S. government initiated some of its most aggressive border militarization campaigns, Georgia's undocumented immigrant population continued to expand. Transnational social networks facilitated the process of informal entry and provided a potent challenge to formal immigration procedures. Failure of the federal government to craft a flexible policy towards this issue had its consequences. Political fragmentation devolved U.S. immigration responses to state and local levels. Georgia became one of a growing number of regional entities that fashioned its own plan directed against informal immigration. Local action took different forms across the country ranging from supportive to punitive programs. These emergent processes further undermined the national government's authority and christened a new, decentralized framework that presented often conflicting responses to immigrant communities in the U.S.

### **Georgia and the Devolution of Political Responses on U.S. Immigration.**

While transnational social networks presented an indirect challenge to intransigent U.S. immigration law, regionalization of the issue created new priorities and concerns. Local government tended to follow two different tracks along a spectrum of responses to immigrant communities. At one end, cities across the country initiated non-compliance policies, refusing to participate in federal immigration raids. Urban areas, such as New York City and San Francisco opposed programs that targeted undocumented immigrants in their communities out of varying concerns for social justice, community safety and political expediency. Their aim was

to prevent local law enforcement officers from becoming extensions of the INS. Minneapolis mayor R.T. Rybak explained the position: “Vulnerable people have always needed to see the police as being there to protect and serve, and that can’t happen when the first words out of a cop’s mouth are, ‘I need to see your papers.’” In Chicago, city administrators prohibited police and other representatives from inquiring into residents’ legal status, while hospitals in New York City maintained non-compliance policies as well.<sup>11</sup>

Cities came into direct confrontation with the federal government over legislation passed by Congress. The Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IRIA) of 1996 increased enforcement powers and penalties against undocumented non-citizens. It also empowered “an officer or employee of a State... who is determined by the Attorney General to be qualified to perform a function of an immigration officer in relation to the investigation, apprehension, or detention of aliens... may carry out such functions... to the extent consistent with State and local law.”<sup>12</sup> However, as local communities resisted federal attempts to recruit their services for immigration enforcement programs they earned the moniker “sanctuary cities.” U.S. urban areas became a legal battleground between local and federal forces; municipalities continued to discourage workers from inquiring about legal status despite attempts to the contrary made by the Department of Homeland

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<sup>11</sup> Judy Keen, “Big Cities reluctant to target illegals,” *USA Today* (Online Edition, Nation Section, June 19, 2006) [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-06-19-immigration-enforcement\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-06-19-immigration-enforcement_x.htm) (Retrieved: March 15, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress, *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* (1996), Section 133, [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=104\\_cong\\_public\\_laws&docid=f:publ208.104.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=104_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ208.104.pdf) (Retrieved: April 12, 2008), 563.

Security. When Congress passed the IRIA, New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani took the federal government to court and lost, while his successor Michael Bloomberg compromised and instituted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.<sup>13</sup>

Not all sub-federal entities proved so hostile. At the state-level, legislators proved much more compliant, however, their responses were designed with immediate political goals in mind. Georgia emerged as one of a growing number of states that sought to bring U.S. immigration law under its own authority. The goal was to create a social environment untenable to informal immigration and thus encourage undocumented non-citizens to relocate elsewhere. The state assembly passed the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance (GSIC) in 2006. It ordered all public employers and related contractors to participate in the federal work authorization program. New employees and individuals requesting state aid must be verified as legal residents. It also required all Georgia law enforcement officers to coordinate with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security in order to enforce federal immigration law. This included detention, removal, and investigation of alleged illegal aliens. The law further outlined penalties and other corresponding points relating to immigration concerns within the state. This focus on enforcement, however, lacked any corresponding section addressing the development of a temporary work program. It left this related issue to the responsibility of future

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<sup>13</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Sanctuary Cities as Battle Ground,” (Online Edition, Opinion, August 27, 2007 <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-brownstein-22aug22,0,6571076.column?coll=la-opinion-columnists> (Retrieved: February 20, 2008)).

lawmakers in the State.<sup>14</sup> Since its passage, the Act ignited heated debate on both sides of the issue with much of the history of its still impact remaining in the future.

In many ways, the law reflected complex sentiments within Georgia's public opinion. The Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia initiated a statewide poll related to immigration. Performed over eleven days in July 2006, the annual *Peach State Poll* conducted 803 telephone interviews. It uncovered a number of conflicting opinions among the state's residents. Forty-eight percent of Georgians polled said immigrants were "good for the country," while fourteen percent felt that it had been historically bad. There was also a perception that most immigrants entering the state were undocumented workers. Sixty-two percent 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 of the adult generation aged eighteen to twenty-five responded that they "were not bothered by signs in Spanish." Fifty-five percent of demographic groups aged twenty-six to sixty-six, in contrast, responded that they were bothered by such signs.<sup>15</sup>

The poll indicated that many Georgians appeared willing to tolerate the presence of immigrants in their communities, however, a solid bloc of opponents not only wished to see immigration to the State decreased, but were also bothered by public depictions of the Spanish-language. Especially revealing, fifty-four percent of

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<sup>14</sup> Georgia General Assembly, Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act (2006) [http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005\\_06/sum/sb529.htm](http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005_06/sum/sb529.htm) (Retrieved: October 1, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Carl Vinson Institute of Government, *Peach State Poll* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2006), 2-9.

white non-Hispanics responded that they would like to see current immigration levels reduced in Georgia. This figure contrasted with thirty-seven percent of non-white respondents who agreed with reduction-focused policies. A strong, but not comparable number of white non-Hispanic respondents--- thirty percent--- wanted to see current immigration levels maintained in Georgia, as did a comparable number of non-white respondents. A minority in both racial categories (7% and 16%, respectively) responded that they wanted an increase in current levels. It should be noted, however, that a major limitation of this poll was that it did 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 provided 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 of the population is counted as African-American by the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>16</sup>, forty-eight percent of the individuals responding to the Carl Vinson Institute survey wanted a decrease in current immigration levels. Thirty-four percent preferred the level maintained, while only eight percent desired an increase.<sup>17</sup> 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,

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *State and Country Quick Facts: Atlanta, Georgia*, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13/1304000.html> (Retrieved: November 2, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Carl Vinson Institute, *Peach State Poll*, 11.

reflect frustration from the perception that most immigrants entering the state lack legal, documented status.<sup>18</sup>

The Georgia Security and Compliance Act was not the first piece of legislation passed by states against informal immigration. Similar laws, such as California's Proposition 187 were promulgated in the early 1990s and reflected the complex public debate surrounding the issue. Groups have challenged these statutes in state courts, while other entities like the Minutemen Project advocated vigilante campaigns to place political pressure on the U.S. Border Patrol. Since the failure of IRCA and other federal legislation to develop flexible, realistic responses to labor demands and migration trends, the post-1986 era emerged as much more decentralized and asymmetric. Political devolution fragmented U.S. immigration policy with local and state entities following often contradictory agendas that undermined federal attempts at control of the issue.

### **Conclusion**

While the federal government sought to regulate migration trends into the United States, it lost control of the issue due to its repeated failures in crafting meaningful reforms that responded to economic and social realities. As it authorized the INS to initiate sweeping militarization campaigns along the border, labor demand among businesses increased in the 1990s. Furthermore, socio-economic hardship in Mexico (see chapter Three) ensured a steady flow of informal immigrants. Rather than address artificial limitations in the supply of H-2A worker visas or craft more

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Bess, "The Emergence of Mexican Immigrant Communities in the State of Georgia." *Working Papers Series*, 1 (Center for Hispanic Studies, Kennesaw State University) [http://www.kennesaw.edu/chs/publications/mbess\\_immigration.pdf](http://www.kennesaw.edu/chs/publications/mbess_immigration.pdf) (Retrieved: January 4, 2008), 39-40.

humane legislation, Congress responded with heavier penalties and redoubled enforcement programs. It also sought to recruit local municipalities to perform the work of the INS. This latter policy brought many cities in direct opposition to the federal government. Political fragmentation devolved U.S. immigration responses to the local and state levels. However, while the former usually opted out of compliance, state entities formed legislation that went far in the opposite. The goal of such laws as the GSIC was to create an uninviting social environment intended to discourage informal immigrants from relocating to the state. Like its predecessors at the federal level, these statutes maintained an enforcement fetish that failed to address underlying social and economic issues related to immigration.

Across this socio-political landscape, transnational social networks continued their role as an essential character of immigrant communities. They provided an indirect challenge directed against federal attempts to impose artificial restrictions on immigration through the very processes that made them relevant. Transnational social networks described the relationships that family members and others maintained across geo-political boundaries within the United States and Mexico. The information transmitted through these entities educated potential immigrants about the hazards of relocation, but also to the economic opportunities that could be gained. Social networks facilitated informal immigration, which remained a viable alternative to the intransigent statutes regulating formal entry procedures. Migrants relied on family and friends to provide information, as well as logistical aid along the path of relocation from a sending region in Mexico to settlement areas in the United States.



Georgia was no exception to this process. Receiving regions in the state coordinated with other immigrant communities in the U.S. as well as sending locations in Mexico. This process was casual, embodied by phone conversations, email, and other means of communication that helped to fuel informal immigration to Atlanta and elsewhere. The state attempted to create an unwelcome environment to the undocumented community through increasingly draconian legislation, however, so far with uncertain results. What the role of transnational social networks revealed within this framework is that the federal government did not enjoy as much control over the immigration issue as it hoped. Instead, its failure to create meaningful legislation that reflected economic realities exposed structural weaknesses that lead to political fragmentation.

Immigration policy devolved to the state and local levels, often times with mixed results for the undocumented immigrant community while municipal, state, and federal agencies pursued differing agendas. As federal and state government pushed harder for increased enforcement and punitive actions, local governments (directly) and transnational social networks (indirectly) pushed back against these policies, favoring more fluid alternatives. Nevertheless, social networks were not intrinsically at odds with government attempts at regulation, because they should be viewed as relational processes that facilitated connections between groups and individuals across geo-political boundaries. The people that composed these entities demanded (with a decentralized voice) legislation that eschewed the current border militarization fetish, in favor of policies which took labor demand as well as socio-economic needs into account.

## CHAPTER 6 GENERAL CONCLUSION.

The study of Mexican migration to the state of Georgia revealed a complex and multi-faceted process that affected social, political, and economic aspects of society. By emphasizing the role of social networks, this thesis has sought to underline the importance of human connections between sending and receiving regions. Georgia's particular experience did not occur within a historical and social vacuum, rather, it evolved within the larger framework of Mexico-U.S. relations. A reciprocal relationship based not only on economic need, but also the bonds of family and region contributed to the establishment of transnational Mexican immigrant communities in the state. These cultural enclaves formed in response to acute business needs in Georgia for low-wage labor, but were maintained and nourished by the linkages that extended across national boundaries. Individuals who relocated to Atlanta and elsewhere brought personal and group identities, which augmented the pre-existing Southern society. Mexican food and music, along with the Spanish language became familiar components of the Georgian experience.

Moving away from a purely economic survey of this phenomenon allowed for a re-conceptualization of why migration occurred between Mexico, the United States, and Georgia. To chart emigration from Mexico solely as part of a larger business cycle, obfuscated critical elements of this process. Though many individuals relocated to the United States to find better jobs, the motivations also ran deeper. As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, people migrated for personal reasons as well, such as the reunification of families. There existed an intrinsically *human* element to the story of

Mexico-U.S. migration that did not easily translate into corporate development plans and business spreadsheets. The key to understanding why certain individuals selected certain destinations rested in the study of social networks. These formal and informal communicative collections of individuals took on the idiosyncratic characteristics of their members. As shown in each of the preceding chapters, social networks consisting of persons from a particular family or region attracted additional members from related places of origin. Furthermore, the common practice of family and comrade communication transmitted information between sending and receiving regions. This process shared the migration experience with prospective participants, educated these individuals of what must be done to make the journey, and informed them of the conditions in settlement areas. Immigrants chose to relocate from their places of origin, not only based upon the allure of actual socio-economic prospects, but also *perceived* opportunities. The presence of family and friends in the settlement area reduced the risks of migration, because of the potential for temporary support and communal familiarity.

Social networks, however, extended beyond kinship and regional associations. The role of the business community within this process could not be ignored, even when we attempted to emphasize the importance of other aspects of the migration story. The desire for low-wage workers cut across political boundaries; Mexican firms attracted labor internally from economically depressed southern and central communities to the nation's burgeoning north. Georgia businesses utilized labor recruitment organizations with ties across the southwest to seek out new employees. Difficult working conditions, low wages, and high employee turnover in the poultry-

processing industry opened space in the state for the importation of foreign laborers. From the 1970s, consistent streams of Mexican workers came to the state, initially to work in the chicken preparation plants, but also to the carpeting mills of Dalton and the farms of south Georgia. This was a process that responded not only to economic opportunities, but also the major socio-political changes and economic crises that Mexico experienced between 1962 and 1994. The business community in both nations played an important role, alongside kindred and regional social networks to foster the development of persistent, large-scale transnational migration flows between Mexico and the state of Georgia.

Within this framework, the political discourse adjusted its symbolic representations of immigrants in the United States. Generational idiosyncrasies informed the conceptual language. For instance, immigration-focused legislation in the 1960s was influenced by the concomitant discussion on civil rights. Later decades, such as the 1980s and 1990s responded to this earlier language with new ideas increasingly built upon border militarization. The new century, however, saw acute shifts in political rhetoric as a result of the September 11, 2001 attacks, which heightened the language of national security. Proponents of this “protectionist turn” in the immigration debate sought to dislodge economic and social justice arguments from the political discourse. Rhetoric that promoted programs such as Hold-the-Line in the 1990s, became even more security-oriented in the climate of the so-called “war on terror.” Media outlets and the government reframed the issue of immigration within a sensationalized fortress mentality symbolized by color-coded alerts, harsher penalties, and hermetically sealed borders.

What the oppositional discourse frequently overlooked, however, was that transnational migration cannot be easily regulated and systematized. Laws, such as the Immigration Control and Reform of 1986 sought to achieve this, but failed because of inflexible statutes that did not reflect real-time conditions in Mexico and the United States. Transnational migration and the related political and socio-economic issues bonded the United States and Mexico together. The two nations shared an expansive and porous border with an increasingly integrated economy. In part, this was a manifestation of a global phenomenon that had occurred between countries over many decades. Certainly, it was not the first time that the United States experienced large arrivals of immigrants. Technological advancements in transportation and communication in the twentieth century contributed to the processes of migration. People and information traveled across greater distances, faster and easier than at any other time in human history.

As a new settlement area, Georgia was one of the latest additions to this socio-economic and historical process. The growth of the Mexican community and other immigrants groups testified to the state's increasingly integrated relationship within an inter-connected world. By conceptualizing migration within a transnational context, we could better recognize how the contours of this issue stretched beyond national boundaries. Social networks persisted across borders and created intimate relational linkages between sending and receiving regions. It was an essential component, alongside well-known economic and political factors, within the framework of migration between Mexico and the United States. Despite recent

legislation to the contrary, Georgia will likely continue as a destination for people flows from across Mexico and the rest of Latin America for the foreseeable future.

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