Chapter 6

Newcomers from South of the Border

SINCE WORLD WAR II there has been a continuous increase in the Latino presence in this country. With the *bracero* movement during the war, Puerto Rican migrations to New York City and other East Coast locales after the war, and the migration north from Mexico in the late 1940s and 1950s, Hispanics have carved a niche for themselves that rivals that of the Germans in the nineteenth century. Moreover, since 1968 a plurality of all immigrants to the United States has come from Mexico. By the end of the twentieth century, in fact, Mexico had already passed Great Britain, Italy, Ireland, and even Germany as a source for immigrants. In 1998 25.7 million people born abroad lived in the United States—nearly 10 percent of the American population, the highest percentage since prior to World War I. Of that number, seven million, more than one quarter of the total, were from Mexico.

Newcomers and their children from Mexico and other nations in Latin America made up a growing proportion of the American population. Census records of 1980 revealed that there were more than 14 million people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other Latino origins in the United States, a substantial increase over the figures for 1970. In 1980 Latinos constituted 6.4 percent of the nation's people; but in 1997, swelled by immigration, high birth rates, and the 1986 amnesty granted by the Immigration Reform and Control Act, they were 29 million, over 10 percent of the population. Sometime in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Latinos will replace African Americans as the nation's largest minority group. This growth, along with that of Asians, is indicative of major demographic shifts in the United States since the end of World War II.

The signs of Latino vitality are evident almost everywhere in America. More than a hundred television and radio stations broadcast in Spanish. In February 1998, for example, the top-rated television station in Miami, Florida, WLTV, broadcast exclusively in that language. Other major Spanish-speaking television stations thrive in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Pacific Telephone puts out a Spanish-language supplement in California; Chicago bus notices and Philadelphia civil service examinations appear in both languages; and shops from California to New York display *Aqui se habla español* placards in their windows. In Miami, shops display Cuban flags and CUBA LIBRE signs. One can walk for blocks in

that city hearing only Spanish and stop at cafés that serve rich, dark Cuban coffee. In 1997 a slick magazine catering to upwardly mobile Latinos, called *Hispanic*, celebrated its first decade.

By 1970 Spanish had replaced Italian as the nation's most frequently spoken foreign language. The changes were reflected in the nation's schools. Beginning with the arrival of Cubans in the 1960s, Miami's schools developed bilingual programs. In 1967 the federal government passed a bilingual education act that provided support for such schools; buttressed by a Supreme Court decision in 1974 that said that children must be taught in a language they can understand, bilingual programs expanded. The vast bulk of the classes were held for Spanish-speaking children. The *Mariachi Hunachi* (Spanish spelling for "Wentachee") band was reportedly the most popular school marching band in the central part of Washington State in the late 1990s, and rapid growth of the Latino population in that community, which accounted for about one quarter of the city's students, forced the Wentachee board of education to scramble for Spanish-speaking teachers. The state bilingual education director reported, "It's taking school districts by surprise. It's a situation we're not ready for." The 1990 census revealed that 32 million Americans spoke a language other than English at home, and in most cases that language was Spanish. Given the high rate of Latino immigration in the 1990s, the figures will be even greater in the census of 2000.

Although large Latino communities exist in practically every major city in the country, different groups predominate in different areas. The Puerto Ricans (born citizens of the United States) are most significant in New York City where in recent years they have been challenged by Dominicans as the leading Latino group. Puerto Ricans also have substantial populations in Philadelphia and Cleveland. The Cubans dominate in East New York, New Jersey, and Miami. But Cubans have been augmented by other Latinos in the 1980s and 1990s in Miami; now many Nicaraguans and other Central Americans are there. Mexicans are the main minority in Los Angeles, San Antonio, San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Denver, and throughout smaller southwestern communities. Along the border separating the United States and Mexico are major Mexican communities that have grown significantly since 1980. Mexicans make up about 20 percent of the city of Los Angeles's population and 40 percent of that county's people. Chicago too has a large Mexican population.

It is important to keep in mind that Latinos represent many different countries and cultures. Most Latinos speak Spanish, but Brazilians speak Portuguese. In the 1990s Mexicans of Indian heritage, mostly Mextecs, moved across the border to work in California's agricultural fields. Although these "Latinos" were from a Latino or Hispanic nation, many did not speak Span-

ish; they only spoke their Indian dialects. A 1993 survey of California's Mexican farm workers in labor camps in north San Diego found that 40 percent spoke indigenous Indian languages rather than Spanish. Twelve languages turned up, including Cakchiquel, Chatmo, Kanjobal, Nahuatl, Otomi, Tlapaneco, Trique, Zapoteco, and Mexteco. The new wave of Latinos has included economically successful immigrants and those who are very poor. Cubans and many Central Americans are refugees who have foreign policy issues on their minds, but most Latinos pay little attention to Fidel Castro and are simply fleeing poverty or seeking their fortunes in the United States.

Mexican Americans, over 60 percent of the nation's 29 million Latinos, are the most prominent. Most of them live in the Southwest, the majority in urban areas. In 1997 they constituted approximately 31 percent of the population in California, 20 percent in Arizona, 28 percent in Texas, 14 percent in Colorado, and nearly 40 percent in New Mexico. Since World War II, however, Mexican immigrants have been spreading throughout the United States; although the vast majority of them live in the five states mentioned above, there are communities in most states, including Minnesota, Illinois, and New York.

As discussed in earlier chapters, some Mexican Americans, especially those in New Mexico and southern Colorado, can trace their ancestry back many centuries. Santa Fe, New Mexico was founded in 1609, twenty years before the Puritans set foot in New England. After the United States annexed the Southwest, Mexican immigrants crossed the border in search of work. Ever since, the history of the Mexicans in the United States has been tied to the history of the Southwest. The modern migration began with the completion of the southwestern railroads, the expansion of cotton planting in Texas, Arizona, and California, and the agricultural revolution in the Imperial and San Joaquin valleys in California. These industries needed cheap labor, and the Mexican workers provided it. Mexicans made up more than 60 percent of the common laborers on the railroad track gangs, in the mines of Arizona and New Mexico, in agricultural fields in Texas and California, and in the numerous packing plants on the West Coast. They also dominated the labor supply in the sugar beet states as far north as Montana and as far east as Ohio.

The coming of Mexican laborers coincided not only with the rapid growth and development of the Southwest but also with the curbing of immigration from China and Japan and later from Europe, and with the revolutionary upheavals in Mexico beginning in 1910. Mexican workers, cowboys, shepherds, and ranch hands had crossed the Mexico–U.S. border frequently and easily between 1850 and 1910, just as others had moved north and south or east and west within the United States. There was no border patrol before

1924, and American immigration officials were more concerned with keeping out Asians than with tracking down Mexicans. But as southwestern agriculture developed it demanded hundreds of thousands of cheap, mobile laborers who could pick the crops quickly, then move on to other areas and harvest whatever else was ripe. In Texas the migratory farm workers usually started in the southern part of the state in June, then moved eastward and eventually westward for the later harvest in the central part of the state. In California, on the other hand, more than 200 crops are cultivated and the growing season ranges from 240 to 365 days, keeping workers busy all year.

Before 1910 most of the Mexican migrants were temporary laborers, but after the upheaval caused by the Mexican Revolution many permanent settlers arrived. Although the overwhelming majority were lower-class agrarian workers, the migration also included artisans, professionals, and businessmen whose property had been destroyed by the violence accompanying the revolutionary chaos.

The Mexican Revolution spurred movement, but so too did a number of other factors. From 1877 to 1910 Mexico's population increased from 9.4 million to 15 million without a commensurate increase in the means of subsistence. A small percentage of *haciendados* (feudal barons) controlled most of the country's land, which was tilled by the agricultural proletariat. There existed between hacienda owners and their laborers a patron-peon relationship, and each role was well defined. As the economy boomed, though, prices rose while daily wages remained constant or even declined to an amount well below that needed to care for a family. At the beginning of the twentieth century the construction of the Mexican Central and Mexican National railroads, as well as the opening of mines in northern Mexico, encouraged movement.

Once the exodus from central and eastern Mexico began, many workers saw no need to stop at the border. Wages in the United States were at least five times higher than in Mexico and American businessmen avidly sought foreign peons. As two scholars who have studied Mexican migration pointed out, their inability "to speak English, their ignorance of personal rights under American law, and their recent experience as virtual serfs under the exploitative dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz made them ideal workers from the growers' viewpoint." The northward migration brought about 10 percent of Mexico's population to the southwestern borderlands.

The first Mexican migrants in the twentieth century were overwhelmingly males, mostly transient, who found work on the railroad track gangs. They lived in boxcars and moved from place to place with the Southern Pacific or the Santa Fe or the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific. By 1910 they could be found from Chicago to California and as far north as Wyoming. They were

cheap laborers who worked for $1 to $1.25 a day, less than their predecessors—the Greeks, the Italians, and the Japanese. Employers found Mexicans desirable because of their tractability and their willingness to work at more arduous jobs for longer hours, at lower wages, and in worse living conditions than the Europeans or Asians. Many of today's Mexican American *colonias* (settlements) originated as railroad labor camps. Women accompanied some of the men heading north and they too found employment in the low-wage sectors of the economy. In El Paso and other Texas cities with Mexican populations, women worked largely as domestics in the homes of European Americans or as service workers in the growing tourist industries. Some women also joined their husbands in the fields during harvest time. As the canneries of California expanded, they began to employ women. One historian noted, "the canning labor force included young daughters, newly married women, middle-aged wives and widows. Occasionally three generations worked at a particular cannery—daughter, mother, and grandmother."

With the influx of Mexicans, El Paso, Texas became a major placement center and assembly point for workers in an arc of twenty-two states reaching from Louisiana to the state of Washington. Three major railroads passed through this border city, where railroad, mine, and seasonal agricultural employers recruited. Representatives from labor-contracting companies also took thousands of immigrants to distributing centers in Kansas City, Missouri; Los Angeles; and San Antonio.

After 1910 more Mexican newcomers found work in agriculture rather than on the railroads. Nonetheless, the major southwestern railroad employed more than 50,000 Mexicans. During World War I, European immigration fell drastically, American residents went off to war, and the expanding southwestern agricultural acres needed hands. As a result the laws governing contract labor were temporarily suspended in 1917, and those Mexicans who were otherwise ineligible for immigration visas, were brought in to cultivate the crops and work the harvest. The depression of 1921–1922 left many of them unemployed, but then the return of prosperity and the immigration restriction acts of 1921 and 1924 curbed European immigration, thereby stimulating a further demand for Mexican labor. Large southwestern agricultural growers put great pressure on Congress to exempt Mexicans from the quota for their area, and their intensive efforts succeeded. To be legally admitted to the United States, Mexicans still had to pay fees for visas and medical examinations, show that they were literate and not likely to become public charges, and prove that they had not violated the contract labor laws. These restrictions, plus an inadequately patrolled border (not until 1924, in fact, was money appropriated for a border patrol), made it easier for Mexican agricultural workers to enter illegally than to go through the rigmarole of formal ap-

plication. Scholars estimate that in the 1920s there were at least 450,000 documented immigrants, and about the same number without appropriate immigrant papers. The 1920s immigrants worked primarily in the agricultural areas of five southwestern states—California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado—as well as in the Michigan sugar beet fields and in the industrial areas in and around Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and western Pennsylvania. Chicago's Mexican population, in fact, shot up from 3,854 in 1920 to 19,362 ten years later, and the city claimed the largest Mexican population east of Denver.

The depression of the 1930s curtailed immigration, and many Mexicans and their American-born children were encouraged—even forced—by local government officials to return to Mexico. More than one third of the Mexican American population was removed between 1929 and 1940. About half the Mexicans who remained in the United States experienced severe deprivations. In Gary, Indiana, social workers found them living without furniture and with only boxes for tables and the floor for beds. Moreover, they fell victim to tuberculosis and rickets, and malnutrition was common among their children. One report, noting the poor housing, the large numbers of unemployed, and the deteriorating health, observed, "The agony and suffering that all of these people endure is beyond comprehension of any who have not experienced it." Southwestern agricultural wages fell from 35 cents to 15 cents an hour. In Texas, Mexican cotton pickers, working from sunrise to sunset, were lucky to earn 80 cents a day; other Mexican farm workers had to be content with 60 cents a day. In California by the late 1930s migratory Mexican families averaged $254 a year, and even there American whites were given preferential treatment. By 1939, in fact, more than 90 percent of the Golden State's field workers were dust-bowl refugees who had replaced the minority group members. In 1940 one investigator found that most of the Mexican agricultural workers in Hidalgo County, Texas, earned less than $400 a year. That same year a quarter of the Mexican children between 6 and 9 years of age worked in the fields with their parents; 80 percent of those in the 10–14-year age group did so as well.

The coming of World War II opened up new opportunities for Mexican laborers in the Southwest. Many of those in California and Texas moved out of rural areas to urban centers, where they found jobs in airplane factories, shipyards, and other war-related industries. In the Midwest, steel mills, foundries, and automobile factories (which were now manufacturing for military needs) could not fill their job vacancies fast enough as those eligible for military service went off to war. The southwestern agricultural fields were also starved for workers.

At this juncture the governments of Mexico and the United States inau-

gurated an entirely new program: the importation of contract laborers, known as *braceros*, to work in the fields and on the railroads. According to the bracero agreement, Mexicans came into the United States for temporary seasonal jobs, then returned home when their tasks were completed. Begun in 1942, the initial program ended in 1947; while it lasted, the United States received about 220,000 braceros. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administered the program and the agreement stipulated that there would be a guaranteed minimum number of working days, adequate wages, and suitable living accommodations. Braceros worked in 21 states, with more than half of them going to California. The Mexican government would not allow any of its nationals to work in Texas because of intense discrimination in the Lone Star State.

From the braceros' point of view the program was a good one. Most of the workers were men who could not provide adequately for their families at home, and the jobs in the United States offered what they considered good wages. Although they earned only 30 cents an hour and less than $500 a year, this rate still provided them with enough to send money back to their families.

Although protective provisions had been written into the law, many observers were later appalled to find braceros living in converted chicken coops, abandoned railroad cars, and rickety wooden structures that were on the verge of collapse. The braceros themselves, however, were attracted by the wages and kept returning whenever they could. In *The Bracero Program*, published in 1971, Richard B. Craig explained why these people accepted conditions that others would find deplorable and degrading. The Mexican laborer, Craig noted, is "accustomed to living, and indeed thriving, in a virtual state of physical and mental peonage. The Mexican . . . bracero or wetback* probably found little except language (and not always that) to distinguish between the *patron* and the strawboss. It would appear, in sum, that the sociopsychological milieu in which the average Mexican peasant was reared prepared him ideally for his role as the servile, hard-working, seldom complaining, perpetually polite bracero."

Although the original bracero program ended in 1947, there were temporary extensions until 1951 when the clamorings from southwestern growers and the impact of the Korean War combined to induce Congress to reestablish it. The new law lasted until 1964. Table 6.1 shows the numbers of braceros entering the United States during the 22-year program. The appar-

*The term "wetback" (*mojado*), which designates an illegal immigrant, originated because many Mexicans swam across the Rio Grande River, which separates Mexico from Texas, and waded across during relatively dry periods when the water was shallow.

Table 6.1 *Braceros* Entering the United States Under Contract, 1942–1964

1942	4,203	**1950**	67,500	**1958**	432,857
1943	52,098	**1951**	192,000	**1959**	437,643
1944	62,170	**1952**	197,100	**1960**	315,846
1945	49,454	**1953**	201,388	**1961**	291,420
1946	32,043	**1954**	309,033	**1962**	194,978
1947	19,632	**1955**	398,650	**1963**	186,865
1948	35,345	**1956**	445,197	**1964**	177,736
1949	107,000	**1957**	436,049		

SOURCE: U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Temporary Worker Programs: Background and Issues*, 96th Congress, 1st Session (1980).

ently bottomless reservoir of cheap labor from south of the border helped build up the multibillion-dollar agricultural concerns from California through Texas, which, unlike during the war years, were now included in the revised program. One appreciative and callous grower acknowledged: "We used to own slaves but now we rent them from the government."

In the 1950s braceros earned 50 cents an hour (30 cents for cotton chopping in Arkansas) and upset American laborers. The Mexican Americans in the Southwest were particularly resentful. They did the same work as the braceros, often side by side, but for lower wages, worse housing and facilities, and no transportation. The humiliation and bitterness that these citizens felt when they compared their situation to that of the imported foreign laborers eventually reached the ears of liberal politicians in Congress and prominent labor officials. Both groups protested the continuation of the bracero program, but they lacked the numbers or the influence to prevail in the 1950s. In the 1960s the Democratic administrations proved more sympathetic and helped bring the program to a close.

Other factors also militated against continuing the bracero program. The southwestern growers had already begun to increase mechanization and thereby decreased their need for more hands; in 1962 Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg imposed a $1-an-hour minimum wage for these people; and at about the same time, labor shortages below the Rio Grande made the Mexican government eager to end the agreements. During the 22 years of the program's existence, from 1942 to 1964, almost 5 million braceros came into the country, and they were viewed as indispensable to the southwestern economy. Moreover, their earnings contributed to the Mexican economy as well, because they sent more than $200 million to their relatives at home.

Besides braceros, whose wages and living conditions were stipulated by agreement, the southwestern farmers also employed an untold number of illegal immigrants. For the most part, they were not selected by the Mexican government for the bracero program but had backgrounds and needs similar to those who were admitted. The conditions these aliens were willing to accept in the United States—wages of 20 to 30 cents an hour, housing without plumbing or electricity, washing in irrigation ditches—hint at what life must have been like in Mexico. Certainly, the inhumanity and cruelty that they experienced here must have been an improvement over what they left behind; otherwise they would not have struggled to enter the United States. A more plausible explanation, however, might be that with wages double or triple those in Mexico, workers might be willing to endure great hardships in exchange for economic gain. The growers, of course, found them ideal laborers. Fearing disclosure of their illegal status, the Mexicans performed their tasks well; they neither argued nor complained, and they cost practically nothing. In fact, some unscrupulous southwestern agricultural entrepreneurs turned these undocumented aliens in to immigration officials before payday, thereby saving themselves the cost of the workers' meager wages. Between 1947 and 1954, when the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) inaugurated a major campaign to round up and deport illegal aliens, more than 4 million of them were apprehended in the United States, but an unknown number escaped detection. From 1946 to 1954, however, undocumented Mexican entrants were the most important source of southwestern farm labor.

Although a great many illegal migrants were deported to Mexico, the number of legal Mexican immigrants began to rise in the 1950s. Since then, except for refugees, Mexico annually has sent the largest number of people to this country. From 1960 to 1995 Mexican immigration amounted to over four and a half million. In 1991, when the numbers were swelled by amnestied aliens, nearly one million entered. And the list of those awaiting visas in Mexico was long. Beginning in 1957 the American government stopped counting those who left the United States; some experts believed, however, that Mexicans returned home at a fairly high rate. Latinos from the Caribbean also returned frequently in a circulatory migration pattern.

Mexicans looked north because their nation's economy did not develop fast enough to absorb its rapidly growing population. The devaluation of the peso in 1976, and again in the early 1980s following the collapse of the oil market, only served to worsen the economic situation and stimulate further movement. Valued at 24 to the dollar in 1982, the peso exchange rate fell to 750 to the dollar in 1986, and to 948 in January 1987. Then the government was unable to meet its debt obligations in the 1990s. Only a bailout by the United States prevented default, and although Mexico was able to weather

the storm, the faltering economy served to further stimulate immigration north.

Many Mexicans who could not obtain visas crossed the border without them. Like the braceros, a large number of these newcomers to the United States labored in agriculture, but most worked in urban service, construction, or industrial jobs, undertaking tasks shunned by most American citizens. In 1977 a Los Angeles resident remarked, "You couldn't eat at a hotel in this town if a vacuum cleaner scooped up all the illegal aliens." A number of Americans viewed the influx of so many undocumented aliens with alarm, and they proposed that the federal government take action to stem the flow. They wanted tighter border controls and above all a law outlawing the employment of those without proper immigration documents. Congress hesitated, but after much debate and compromise the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed in 1986. It outlawed the employment of illegal aliens but also granted an amnesty to many of those already here. Nearly three million people were able to take advantage of the amnesty. But Congress failed to provide effective controls to halt illegal immigration.

As a result, illegal immigration began to rise again in the 1990s. By the end of the decade, border patrol guards were catching more than one million people annually trying to enter the United States without documents. In 1996 Congress passed new legislation and gave INS additional funding to hire more agents and beef up walls and barriers along the border. How effective these measures would be was a question that could not answered by the legislation. One problem in the 1990s was that about half of the undocumented population was estimated not to have successfully crossed the border, but rather to have entered legally on visitor or student visas and then simply stayed on when the visas expired. It was nearly impossible to track such people down and deport them.

While undocumented aliens from Mexico had previously been single males with few skills and little education, the situation in Mexico deteriorated so drastically in the 1980s that border agents reported catching new types of illegal entrants: skilled workers and highly educated professionals. An immigration official in Washington, D.C. observed, "There is a perception on the border that there are more people with higher-level skills coming in. We seem to be running into more middle-class people and family units than we did before the big influx at . . . the start of their economic crisis."

The reference to family migration meant that more women were crossing the border. Mexico, unlike most other nations after World War II, sent more men than women to the United States, but by the 1990s the gender totals were about even. Some women followed or accompanied their husbands, but others came on their own. Like male undocumented aliens, women knew of

the ethnic networks that led to housing and jobs. For Mexican women this often meant work as domestics or in the garment shops of California.

Both Mexicans and Mexican Americans were victimized and exploited. But why they endured such abuse for decades, with few protests until the 1960s, requires a deeper inquiry into their backgrounds. A majority of them in the Southwest were products of several centuries of intermixture between Spaniards and American Indians (there was also a "rica" class of landowners and ranchers), and they came from a culture of poverty. For generations, both in Mexico and in this country, they had been forced to assume the lowest position in the social order. The Roman Catholic Church, which in Mexico combined traditional doctrine with native folk practices, preached a certain fatalism about life, and the relationship of the rural poor to the major landowners, or *patrons*, reinforced these teachings. Education for the peons in Mexico prior to 1930 was practically nonexistent, and they came to regard it as a luxury for the upper classes. The immigrants brought such attitudes with them to the United States, and this, combined with the prejudices and inadequacies of schoolteachers and administrators ill prepared to handle Spanish-speaking children, prevented many Mexican children from exploiting educational opportunities in the ways that Jewish, German, Greek, Armenian, and Asian children had. Finally, it must be noted that many Mexican workers looked upon their years in the United States as a temporary expedient. They expected to return home; their sojourn north of the border more likely than not gave them an improved status in their native communities. As one Mexican newspaper explained it, in the United States these workers "learn many good things, to be temperate, to dress well, to earn good wages, to live properly, to eat properly, to speak English and much of modern agriculture. That is, they become cultured and when they return to Mexico, they progress rapidly."

The Mexican peasants who moved to the United States may have crossed an international boundary, but for the most part they continued to dwell in a land whose physical characteristics were familiar and among people who might easily have been their neighbors at home. The Mexican communities in the Southwest, for example, were so well developed that the newcomers did not have to relinquish their faith, their language, or their cultural ties to be accepted. Continued migrations sustained Mexican *colonias* in the United States and to a considerable extent retarded acculturation and assimilation.

In this country large farmers and industrialists welcomed the Mexicans for the labor they provided. Lack of familiarity with Mexican customs allowed the Americans to misinterpret good manners and respect for authority as docility, illiteracy as ignorance, and a lack of the Puritan work ethic as

laziness. Moreover, the scarcity of good jobs and the fact that illegal entry compromised a migrant's position also kept Mexican resentment and anger from surfacing at the wrong moments. The Mexicans' willingness to work has sometimes been misrepresented in a paternalistic and prejudicial manner. A brochure to entice large employers to Tucson in 1977 stated, "Employers who have established plants in Tucson say that our Mexican Americans are easy to train, will follow instructions, are more loyal, and equal or exceed the productivity of workers in other parts of the country." The advertisement created controversy within the city; Mexican American inhabitants resented its tone as well as the stipulated characteristics.

That Mexicans are docile is belied by their history in the past century. In Mexico the revolution of 1910 was at least in part a peasant movement, and in the United States too there were enough incidents of labor strife to call for a reexamination of careless characterizations. Mexicans led strikes in the Texas Panhandle in 1883 and on the Pacific Railway in Los Angeles twenty years later. To protest labor conditions, thousands of Mexican workers walked away from sugar beet, onion, celery, berry, and citrus crops in California, Texas, Idaho, Colorado, Washington, and Michigan in the 1920s and 1930s. That these protests produced few permanent advances does not reflect defects in the Mexican character. Instead, it reflects the harshness of reprisals, the intense competition for jobs, the shifting nature of the migrant work force, the mechanization of agriculture, and the movement of the more prosperous and accomplished to urban areas where industrial jobs promised greater remuneration.

Mexican women were also involved in the trade union movement, and they joined *mutualista* (political organizations) to further their goals of providing a decent living for their families. Historian Vicki Ruiz reports that in 1939 two women were the main leaders in *El Congreso de Pueblos de Hablan Espanola* (the Spanish-speaking People's Congress), the first national Latino civil rights assembly. During the 1930s women activists joined the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, and they participated in strikes in cotton fields. They also organized a pecan shellers union and had some success in organizing canneries.

In our own era, about 10 percent of Mexicans are members of trade unions, a figure only slightly below the national average. They have joined the United Auto Workers, the United Steel Workers, and the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers; and within these unions they have sometimes formed Hispanic caucuses. However, the industrial unions have been in decline, and the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers was charged with being communist-led and ran into hard times during the McCarthy era (the 1950s). In the 1970s some unions, such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union

(ILGWU), recognized the sweat shop conditions of many Mexican women in California and moved to organize them, even those without documents. It was difficult for the ILGWU to organize shops that paid low wages, demanded long hours, and, at times, maintained unsafe working conditions. In the 1970s one of the bitterest strikes was against Farah Manufacturing Company in El Paso. Most workers were Mexicans; 86 percent of them were women. Managers knew that they could find other Mexican women to take the place of strikers, and they resisted the union drive. After several years of conflict, Farah finally recognized the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers as the representative of its employees.

Another problem that Mexicans as well as other minorities had in the United States was that Americans could or would not understand why any group was reluctant to part with its own heritage and embrace the values of the dominant culture. But Mexican peons struggled merely to provide the essentials of life for their families. Often they did not see the long-range benefits that might accrue to their children from a good education. Even when they did, they may have been shrewd enough to recognize that American education would lead their children away from family traditions. Even in rural Mexico in the 1930s schools were built faster than students could be found to occupy them. Peasants were not enthusiastic about educating their children, for they cherished a family life in which everyone had a prescribed role. The status quo provided too much comfort and security for them to sacrifice it for another culture whose values they had difficulty in comprehending. Given Mexican American uneasiness with acculturation and the continued influx of newcomers from the old country, it is not surprising that many Mexican American families speak Spanish at home. And while in the past few broke away from their cultural patterns, in the 1990s far more newcomers recognized the benefits of education for their children.

For those immigrants who sought to mix more with other Americans, societal prejudices until about the 1980s formed an almost insuperable barrier. Although discrimination existed throughout the American Southwest, it was not entirely uniform. For example, Mexicans were expected to live in their own *barrios*, and if they did find housing elsewhere it was usually in deteriorating neighborhoods. They were often blocked from using many public recreational facilities, could obtain mostly menial and relatively unskilled jobs, and in general were expected to accept a subordinate role in society. In New Mexico, however, there was a tradition of Hispanic participation in government, and upper-class Americans of Mexican background moved easily throughout society. In New Mexico also, those of Mexican descent, regardless of class, have been active in local politics, and their numbers (until recently almost half the population) have determined where and

when they could hold office. In Colorado, Mexican *colonias* date back to the 1850s, and there too prejudice existed but was not intense. Nor was Arizona, despite its segregated schools and movie theaters, a particularly harsh place for Mexicans.

But in California and especially in Texas, bigotry toward Mexicans was extreme. In the Lone Star State, with its strong southern heritage, Mexicans encountered more overt discrimination than anywhere else in the country. Restaurants and merchants routinely refused to serve them; kindergarten teachers called their children "greasers"; churches held separate services "For Colored and Mexicans." One Texas farmer told an interviewer "You can't mix with a Mexican and hold his respect, it's like the nigger; as long as you keep him in his place he is all right." And during World War II, when the Mexican government, incensed at the treatment those of Mexican ancestry received in Texas, refused to allow braceros to work in the state, one Mexican American weekly noted: "The Nazis of Texas are not political partners of the Führer of Germany but indeed they are slaves to the same prejudices and superstitions."

It was also during World War II that two particularly heinous events involving Mexican Americans took place in Los Angeles. One, in 1942, involved the arrest and conviction of a gang of teenage boys for murder although the prosecution presented no evidence at the trial to justify their conviction. Existing community prejudices, combined with the unkempt and disheveled appearance of the youths (the prosecuting attorney instructed the sheriff to prevent them from bathing or changing their clothes during the first week of the trial) sufficed to bring forth a guilty verdict. Similar miscarriages of justice reflecting community prejudices have been rendered in other sections of the country toward other minority group members at different times, but few have been marked by such gross disregard of evidence. Unable to raise bail, the defendants were forced to spend two years in San Quentin prison before a California appeals court unanimously reversed the lower court's decision "for lack of evidence" and reprimanded the trial judge for his behavior during the proceedings.

The other event that won national attention and pitted Mexican Americans against Anglos took place in June 1943. The Zoot Suit Riots involved Mexican American youth sporting the then faddish zoot suits: baggy trousers with high waists and tight cuffs, long coats with wide shoulders and loose backs, and broad-brimmed flat hats. On the evening of June 3, 1943, a group of sailors was assaulted while walking in the Mexican *barrio*. The sailors claimed that their assailants were Mexicans. They reported the incident to the police, who returned to the area but could find no one to arrest. The following night 200 sailors took the law into their own hands, went into

the Mexican district of Los Angeles, and beat up every zoot suiter they could find. One naval officer explained their mission: "We're out to do what the police have failed to do, we're going to clean up this situation." Not surprisingly, the Los Angeles police did nothing at the time to deter the servicemen from their course. For the next few nights sailors, soldiers, and marines paraded through the streets of Los Angeles indiscriminately attacking Mexicans in what *Time* magazine called "the ugliest brand of mob action since the coolie race riots of the 1870s." It took the intervention of the Mexican government with the U.S. Department of State to curb military leaves in the Los Angeles area, which put an end to this mob action. The Zoot Suit Riots led to the formation of the Los Angeles Commission on Human Rights in 1944, but the new organization did little to alter established prejudices.

In retrospect it is difficult to imagine positive effects from a miscarriage of justice or from a bloody riot; yet the two events focused attention on Mexican Americans in an urban setting. Most writing about Mexican Americans portrayed them as living in rural areas and as being exploited by money-hungry large-scale growers. Although this picture is not totally inaccurate, after World War II only the Mexican American minority, not the majority, was still tied to the land. In 1950 two thirds of Mexicans in the United States lived in urban areas; today about 90 percent live in cities.

Urban Mexican Americans came to resemble other immigrants and minorities in American history. The second and third generations began to break away from familiar traditions and place more emphasis on American values. The extended family was gradually replaced by the more typically American nuclear family, and work horizons expanded. During World War II, when opportunities developed in airplane plants and shipyards, urbanized Mexicans did not have to leave at harvest time to earn more money in the fields.

After the war opportunities continued to expand as the economy grew and discrimination declined. The growing popular disdain toward bigotry led to the enactment of civil rights laws and affirmation action programs. Professional, semiskilled, and skilled jobs opened up opportunities for advancement and assimilation for minorities. Enrollments in colleges and universities went up, as did the number of those who were becoming lawyers and health professionals. Even so, minorities were underrepresented in these elite occupations and on college campuses. The attack on affirmative action in the late 1990s led the University of California's campuses and professional schools to eliminate affirmative action programs, and the number of minority students dropped.

The education situation pointed to one of the key problems for Mexican immigrants: lack of skills. Latinos lagged behind European Americans and

Asians in educational attainment. In 1995 only 6.5 percent of Mexicans were college graduates, compared to 23.6 percent of the total population. Approximately three quarters of the adult immigrants had not finished high school (the average number of educational years was about 8); and of more than 6 million immigrants, only 120,000 (less than one percent) had college degrees. Moreover, while their children and grandchildren were proficient in English, half of the immigrants reported difficulty with the language.

Mexican immigrants also earned less than others. In 1996 their incomes were only about 60 percent of the national average of white Americans, and approximately 30 percent of their families lived below the government's standard for poverty. Studies done of the immigrants themselves indicated little improvement in status in the 1980s and 1990s, and their real wages dropped.

Although too many Mexican American families lived in poverty or struggled with low incomes, a growing number succeeded in business. María Elba Molina immigrated with her family to Arizona when she was eight years old. Through education and hard work she became a vice-president of Home Federal Savings and Loan in Tucson. Still dissatisfied, however, she began her own company, the J. Elba Corp. Inc., to sell products in the Hispanic community. "I decided I would incorporate my own firm, do what I had always wanted, which was to be on my own; I would try it," she recalled. She successfully sold not only to small clients but also to television stations and banking institutions.

Individual Mexican Americans have been successful in various areas of American life, winning the admiration of other Americans. In 1997, the magazine *Hispanic* singled out "Movers and Shakers," the twenty-five most "powerful Hispanics in Washington, D.C." They included Maria Echaveste, an assistant to President Bill Clinton; Xavier Becerra, chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus; Raul Yzaguirre, head of the National Council of La Raza; Aida Alvarez, head of the Small Business Administration; Anita Perez Ferguson, head of the National Women's Political Caucus; and Antonia Hernandez, president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

These rising leaders attested to growing Latino influence. In the late 1960s, when African Americans and American Indians were protesting, the Chicano movement took shape. The Chicanos wanted to retain their ethnic identity while raising the standard of living of all Mexican Americans. Although they cherished the traditional values of their culture, including respect and affection for the family, the cult of masculinity (*machismo*), and sense of obligation to others in the community, their demands for equal education, training, and job opportunities awakened state and federal legislatures to problems that needed attention.

Mexican American women were also an integral part of the protests. Women active in labor and civil rights groups participated in campus activism that emphasized Latino and women's studies programs in college and university curricula. In 1971 they held the first national Chicana conference, which put forth a feminist platform. At times they criticized Mexican American men for their attitudes and neglect of women's issues.

Reflecting the goals of this emerging movement in the 1960s were four prominent Mexican American leaders—César Chávez, Reies López Tijerina, Rudolpho (Corky) González, and José Angel Guitiérrez—committed to ending the existing inequalities. The best known of the four was César Chávez. Along with 600 Filipinos and Filipino organizer Larry Itliong, he led California's grape pickers on a five-year strike that resulted in higher wages and better working conditions. Chávez's union lost contracts and workers to the Teamsters Union in 1973 and 1974, only to win most of them back later when California passed a law permitting agricultural workers to unionize. Organization among Mexican American farm workers has been successful during a period of increased use of farm machinery, which has meant a loss of jobs in agriculture. Chávez was the first Chicano leader to achieve national prominence, and he became a symbol and a unifying force.

Since the 1960s many new organizations and groups have developed: the Brown Berets, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and a Congress of Mexican American Unity representing 200 Chicano organizations, all dedicated to fostering the goals that the four leaders articulated so well. These groups are now sophisticated in using their political influence. One of the most important is a coalition of 26 Hispanic organizations founded in 1968 as the Southwest Council of La Raza and renamed the National Council of La Raza in 1973. The council's move to Washington, D.C., in 1970 reflected its national orientation.

Politicians have responded to the growing power of Hispanics. Whereas Richard Nixon appointed fewer than 10 Hispanics to presidential and policy positions in the federal government and Gerald Ford fewer than 25, by mid-1979 Jimmy Carter had appointed nearly 200 Latinos to important managerial and judicial posts. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, and the Republican Party generally, paid little attention to Latino concerns despite the 1988 appointment of Lauro F. Cavazos, the first Hispanic ever to serve in a president's cabinet, as Secretary of Education; but the administration of Bill Clinton was aware that Mexican Americans voted for his party, and he appointed several Latinos to cabinet and other important positions. Henry Cisneros became head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development; Bill Richardson (whose mother was Latino) UN ambassador; and Fe-

derico Pena head of the Department of Transportation and later the Department of Energy.

Below these national positions, a number of Latinos began to win election to state, county, and local offices as well as to Congress. Yet they remained underrepresented; in 1999 for example, in California where Latinos were 31 percent of the population, they held only 17 of the 80 seats in the state assembly and seven of the 40 senatorial seats. But their gains were impressive. In 1986 the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials reported that 3,202 Latinos were serving in public office. By 1994 the figure had increased to 5,459.

When Henry B. Gonzalez retired from Congress in 1996 he could look back and see much progress. He had been the first Latino congressman elected from Texas. When others joined him, he founded the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, which had a record high of 21 members in 1998. In Congress the Caucus worked with liberals on matters of concern to Latinos, such as welfare and education. In 1986 the Caucus worked effectively to ensure that the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) had a generous amnesty provision, and ten years later, even in a Republican-dominated Congress, it was able to join with others to weaken tough bills on immigration.

A sign of encouragement for the future of Latino politics is the surge in applications for citizenship, which is needed in order to vote. As immigrant bashing arose in the 1990s and Congress passed a bill denying certain benefits to immigrants, Mexican Americans and Latinos generally rushed to become American citizens. About a quarter of a million people naturalized in 1990, but in 1996 the figure jumped fourfold, and it leaped again in 1997. These new Latino voters overwhelmingly cast their ballots for Bill Clinton and the Democrats. In a sensational upset in Orange County, California in 1996, voters threw out archconservative Robert Dornan and replaced him with Lorreta Sanchez. That same year Cruz Bustamante became the first Latino speaker of the California assembly. When he won election as lieutenant governor in 1998, another Latino, Antonio Villaraigosa, replaced him. In Florida, even the solid Republican vote of Cubans fell off in 1996. Alarmed Republicans who had used harsh words about immigrants began to take another look in early 1997 and agreed to soften some provisions of the immigration restriction legislation passed the preceding year.

Becoming citizens and getting to the polls were important for political influence. But another issue facing Latinos was the fact that they represented a variety of cultures and nationalities, and their experiences and concerns were not always the same. On the East Coast the differences are especially noticeable among the three largest Latino groups: Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans.

The United States acquired Puerto Rico from Spain at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, and in 1917 Puerto Ricans were granted American citizenship. Ever since, Puerto Ricans have been moving to the mainland. In 1910 the census recorded 1,500 of them; by 1930 there were 53,000. Like members of other groups, those who came were escaping from a land with too many people and too few jobs. The Great Depression and World War II cut the flow to the mainland, but beginning in 1945 it swelled to a torrent. Relatively cheap air transportation and an abundance of skilled and semiskilled jobs in New York City served as the magnets. As late as 1940 New York City had slightly more than 60,000 Puerto Ricans; in a decade the figure had quadrupled. Today there are over 2 million Puerto Ricans scattered throughout the continental United States, with a third in the New York area. In 1998, the other major centers for Puerto Ricans were Chicago with a colony of about 100,000 and Philadelphia with more than 30,000, but the official figures probably underestimate the actual totals. There were also Puerto Rican communities in Bridgeport, Connecticut; Rochester, New York; Dayton, Ohio; Boston, Massachusetts; Miami, Florida; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and numerous cities in New Jersey.

By the mid-1970s the exodus from Puerto Rico had slowed and it appeared that the number of Puerto Ricans leaving the mainland was greater than those arriving. No one knew the exact figures but some experts suggested that the net flow back to Puerto Rico was around 200,000. The severe recession and inflation of that period accounted for much of the trend. Some Puerto Ricans found that the skills they picked up in New York City, Chicago, and other cities, including mastery of English, enabled them to get ahead in Puerto Rico. But those returning were not always welcome and were sometimes derided as "Newyoricans," a pejorative term meaning pushy, aggressive, and out of touch with life in Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican experience in New York and other major cities on the continent is probably closer to that of the European immigrants who landed on the East Coast and settled in urban areas than to that of the Mexicans in the West. Although there are Puerto Rican migrant workers who move up and down the East Coast according to the seasons, essentially they are an urban people with the problems of the city's poor.

In New York they replaced the European immigrants in lower-level factory jobs—especially the Jews and Italians in the garment district—and in the city's worst slums. Like the Europeans, they spoke a foreign language, but unlike them, they encountered a color problem. Many Puerto Ricans are the products of centuries of racial mixing between the island's white and black populations. Although higher status is accorded those of lighter complexions, darker skin does not have quite the impact in Puerto Rico that it

has in the United States. On the mainland, though, Puerto Ricans learned that the darker their skin, the greater the difficulty in gaining acceptance and adjusting to the dominant culture. One social worker reported that in her dealings with Puerto Rican drug addicts, inevitably the darkest member of the family was the one affected. Piri Thomas, in his moving *Down These Mean Streets*, an autobiographical account of growing up in New York City's East Harlem ghetto, recalled his own difficulties as the darkest member of his family and how bitter he felt toward his father for passing along such pigmentation to him.

To read the social and economic statistics of Puerto Ricans in New York City and elsewhere is to recall the plight of minorities in the past. Although they gained in real incomes during the 1980s, the 1990 census revealed that 38 percent of their families, and more than half of the children, lived in poverty, double the rate for the city as a whole. A distressing number of families were headed by women. Most did not work but lived on welfare, which did not provide a decent standard of living. The proportion reporting a high school diploma had increased since 1980, but still lagged behind the general average. Twenty-three percent of New Yorkers had college degrees, but only six percent of Puerto Ricans.

In addition Puerto Ricans had a higher incidence of juvenile delinquency and drug addiction, and were particularly susceptible to ailments like tuberculosis and venereal diseases. There were also greater incidents of police brutality toward them. In a word, they have been plagued with the disabilities historically associated with lower-class, poorly educated immigrants. Until American society decides to be more humane and more concerned with these people their plight will be precarious at best.

Dominicans also settled in New York City in growing numbers. Because some entered illegally and many went back, the precise number living in the United States was not known, but from 1960 to 1996 over 700,000 migrated to the United States, with a substantial majority settling in New York City; in 1990 they constituted the largest foreign-born group in New York City. On the Upper West Side of Manhattan their community was known as the second largest "Dominican" city in the world. Because many were undocumented their employment opportunities were limited. Yet even among the legal immigrants, many lacked skills and education, and few spoke English fluently. For those coming from a rural background, the adjustments were especially difficult. Restaurants, hotels, and nonunion construction jobs provided their main employment. Some Dominican families had small grocery stores (*bodegas*). One Dominican noted that his store carried special products for customers; however, running such stores did not mean high profits, and several *bodega* owners were killed or badly injured when their businesses were robbed.

Scholars find that Dominican women favor America's more liberal society compared to the one at home where their roles are clearly proscribed. As wage earners for their families, they have a definite say in household issues, and they are less likely to return home. But life has not been kind to Dominican women in the United States. They find themselves employed in the garment shops and low-paid manual jobs, and almost half of Dominican households are headed by women. In addition to public aid and what they earn, they are assisted by groups such as the Union of Dominicans, an organization of professionals. Some second-generation Dominicans have improved their lot, and as they have naturalized they have become more politically sophisticated. They are now using their growing power to better their communities.

The third Latino group that has had a major impact on the East Coast, and the first immigrant group to change the complexion of a southern city in the twentieth century, is the Cubans, whose experience has been quite different from those of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Cubans came in several waves. The first began in 1959 and lasted until the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 brought it to a halt. Another exodus began in the fall of 1965 and lasted into the early 1970s. The third migration came in 1980 when over 120,000 landed in Key West, Florida. As a group the Cubans are considerably different from most other immigrants into this country. First, the bulk of them were political refugees who left their homes because of the policies inaugurated by Fidel Castro after he led a successful revolution against the regime of Fulgencio Batista in 1958. Second, many Cuban refugees came from the elite of their society. According to one study, in the first wave about 70 percent were professional, skilled, or white-collar workers; almost 40 percent had some college education; and 80 percent had yearly incomes above those earned by the average Cuban.

The exodus of 1980 was somewhat different. Social and economic problems in Cuba and the reports coming from the United States by visiting Cuban Americans in the late 1970s set the stage for the dramatic exodus. When Castro decided to permit the dissatisfied to leave, a vast flotilla of ships, large and small, set sail from Florida to pick up refugees in Cuba. Relatives and friends of the Cubans and those eager to make money out of providing transportation were involved in the movement, as were voluntary agencies helping the newcomers settle. The Carter administration was uncertain how to handle the situation, but for the most part permitted hundreds of boats to land their passengers. Using the camps inhabited by the Vietnamese refugees in the mid-1970s, the immigration authorities worked with voluntary agencies to settle the Cubans and reunite them with their families in the United States.

Since Miami, Florida is the city closest to Havana in both distance and cul-

ture, most Cuban refugees went there. They have made an impressive impact in the city since they left Cuba a generation or more ago and have moved up the economic ladder to achieve middle-class and upper middle-class status in this country faster than any other ethnic group since the Huguenots of colonial times.

The 900,000 or so Cubans in fact revitalized a sleepy southern town and transformed it into a major international hub. Miami is now regarded as the capital of Latin America because it attracts businesspeople and financiers from the entire Western Hemisphere. Argentine ranchers, Ecuadoran manufacturers, and Colombian drug peddlers find the city enticing and exciting. Nightclubs, resorts, and hotels abound. It is perhaps the most comfortable place in the country for Latin Americans because Spanish and English are both the languages of communication. Businesspeople who speak English only are at a severe competitive disadvantage. Enterprising Cubans have taken over or established thousands of businesses. Whereas in 1970 there were fewer than 1,000 establishments owned by Cubans, a decade later the figure hovered around 10,000—banks, construction companies, radio and television stations, and so forth. No significant area of business has been immune to the Hispanic presence. Miami now has more international and out-of-state banks than any other city in the country save New York. These banks and financial institutions attract money from every Latin American nation. In addition, an enterprising Cuban thought up the now established Trade Fair of the Americas, an annual event in which practically all Latin American nations participate.

Individual success stories about Cubans abound. Carlos Arboleya was chief auditor of Cuba's largest bank when he fled his native land. Beginning anew with little money, he worked as a clerk in a shoe factory before finding his place in banking again. By 1968 he had become president of the Fidelity Bank and a U.S. citizen. He later assumed the vice-chairmanship of the Barnett Bank of South Florida, which had assets of $3.5 billion. While banking was attractive to Cubans, so was Miami's garment industry, formerly run by Italians and Jews. "The Cubans really put some zing into this industry. Almost 100 percent of the small manufacturers are Cuban, almost 100 percent of the contractors, big and small, are Cuban and almost all the top management is Cuban," noted one businessman.

Another Cuban immigrant, Yvonne Santa Maria, had never held a job before leaving for Miami in 1963. She arrived with no funds. "No money. No jewels. We were not even allowed to take out phone numbers," she recalled. She worked in several of the city's banks, and at age 57 was president of the Ponce de Leon Federal Savings and Loan Association in Coral Gables, Florida. But no Cuban was as successful as Roberto Goizueta, who until his

death in 1997 headed the Coca-Cola Company. Educated at Yale University, he began to work for the corporation in Havana in 1954. When he fled Cuba he had to start over, but rose rapidly to become the company's billionaire chairman and chief executive.

Many Cubans at first did not think of themselves as Americans, but looked instead to the day when Fidel Castro's government would be overthrown and they could return home. Some did return in the 1990s, but only as visitors. To be sure, some still agitated for strong American action to bring down Castro, and were angry when the Clinton administration moved in 1994 to head off another boat exodus from Cuba to the United States. But they subsequently made rapid economic progress, became American citizens, and began to be involved in American politics. In 1985, Miami elected Harvard-educated lawyer Xavier Suarez as its first Cuban American mayor. He defeated another Cuban, Raul Masvidal; both men were born in Cuba and had come to America twenty-five years earlier. The following year, Richard Martinez, another Latino, won the governorship of Florida. In 1988 Ileana Ros-Lehten became the first Cuban American woman elected to Congress, and a second Cuban American joined the Congressional Hispanic Caucus a few years later. As the older exiles died, the younger Cubans looked more to America and less to Cuba.

Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans constituted the vast majority of Latinos coming to America in the last half century, but they were by no means the only ones. Like Cubans, some Central Americans emigrated because of political turmoil. The civil wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador in the 1980s prompted many to leave. If they did not fear direct political persecution, they still experienced violence in their daily lives. Many could not obtain visas but came anyway, hoping for a better life in the United States. The U.S. government did not wish to give these people political asylum, although the anticommunist Nicaraguans had better success than the others in gaining this status. Those who had arrived illegally before 1982 were covered by the amnesty of the 1986 immigration statute. The status of others was precarious until late 1997, when Congress and the Clinton administration agreed upon a measure to allow Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans to adjust their status and become resident aliens. Certain conditions applied, but this action gave these Central Americans a chance to be legal entrants to the United States. No one knew exactly how many people would be covered, but it was estimated that 300,000 would benefit from the measure.

Central Americans generally settled in areas that already housed other Latinos. The largest Nicaraguan community developed in the Miami area, the center of a growing population from South and Central America. In 1970

Cubans constituted 91 percent of the Latinos there, and even though their population grew, the figure had dropped to only 59 percent by 1990. Moreover, 200,000 new immigrants settled in Dade County (Miami) between 1990 and 1996. Nicaraguans joined not only Cubans but also people from Honduras, Peru, and Colombia. The parish of St. John Bosco Church was founded in 1963 to tend to the religious needs of Cuban Catholics, but in 1997 over two thirds of its members were Nicaraguans. The first Nicaraguans to come to the Miami area were the wealthy, who fled a left-wing government that took power in 1979. However, as conditions deteriorated in their homeland the middle and working classes also left. Like so many other Latino women, the Nicaraguan women became domestics or found employment in garment factories, replacing Cubans who found better opportunities elsewhere. The men worked in construction or at manual labor. Miami's Latinos did not always get along with one another. The latest newcomers were not as well off as the Cubans, who generally voted Republican and were strongly anti-Castro. In Little Havana in 1996 the banning from the Calle Ocho festival of a Puerto Rican singer suspected of communist sympathies angered Puerto Ricans. And when the president of the Latin Chamber of Commerce blamed newcomers for trash piling up in Little Havana, he drew protests from Nicaraguan groups.

Guatemalans and Salvadorans located in cities such as Miami, San Antonio, Chicago, San Diego, Houston, and San Francisco. Washington, D.C., also became a center for their settlement. Others could be found in smaller communities on Long Island or in Spring Valley, New York, doing a variety of manual jobs. Their major settlement was in southern California, especially Los Angeles.

While they had political motives for immigration, Central Americans closely resembled Mexicans in socioeconomic status. According to the 1990 census, only 3 percent of Salvadorans and 4 percent of Guatemalans had a college degree. The vast majority had not graduated from high school. Central American women were usually working for money, but in low-paid occupations. In Los Angeles over 80 percent of working Salvadoran and Guatemalan women were maids. The men also took low-paid jobs, and even though a high proportion of the women worked, two-earner families struggled to get ahead. One fourth of these families lived below the poverty line.

The situation was similar elsewhere. On Long Island, a network of Salvadorans helped their countrymen find jobs and housing. They cleaned houses, cut and trimmed lawns, or did other casual day labor. Men without their families shared housing and even beds with other Salvadorans. While they made little, they hoped to learn English and find better jobs. In the meantime, they provided a cheap labor force for other residents and still

managed to send money home. Like Mexicans, in some communities they congregated at particular street corners to offer their labor for a day.

Immigration from South America also increased rapidly after 1960. The 1990 census revealed over one million South Americans living in the United States, the bulk of them recent immigrants. They represented a variety of nationalities. The largest group came from Colombia, with its major center being New York. In the 1950s political turmoil stimulated emigration and in the next two decades economic problems pushed others out. Like so many other immigrants the Colombians sought new opportunities; over half of the Colombian women, a percentage higher than the national average, went to work after they arrived in the United States. In New York City they earned a reputation as hard workers, which helped them get jobs but also opened them up to exploitation. Colombians tended to be conservative and many sent their children to Catholic parochial schools, which they believed had better discipline than public schools, despite the fact that they resented the non-Hispanic, and especially Irish-American, control of the Church. In recent years, however, the Catholic hierarchy in the Northeast has made special efforts to reach out to the Hispanics. Spanish-speaking priests have been appointed to head parishes and to preach in the language of the parishioners.

Colombians were better off than Central Americans, as were South Americans generally. Many were well-educated professionals or members of the middle class. One scholar studying Brazilians in New York City found that 31 percent were college graduates and that nearly half had attended college. These Portuguese-speaking immigrants, like so many others, nonetheless found a tough labor market in the city, and the women were reduced to cleaning other people's houses. A few even became "go-go" girls in bars, while some of the men were reduced to shining shoes to make a living. Because they were Portuguese-speaking they formed their own groups, joined Portuguese churches, and in typical New York City fashion, held an ethnic street fair.

The sharp increase in the Latino population was not welcomed by all Americans. While the newcomers were mostly praised for their (especially low wage) labor, they aroused anxiety about America's changing demography, a topic that will be explored in the epilogue.