

**Rural Poverty and Immigration
from Mexico in
Madera County, California**

by Rafael Alarcon
Department of City and Regional Planning
University of California, Berkeley

Working Paper No. 27
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Rural Poverty and Immigration From Mexico in Madera County, California

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Introduction

International migration to the United States experienced a dramatic change over the last two decades. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that abolished the national origins quota system established in 1924, gave rise to a more diversified pool of legal immigrants. Unlike past immigration coming from Europe, most immigrants now come from developing countries mainly from Asia and Latin America. For example, between 1971 and 1990, while legal immigration from Europe decreased five percent, immigration increased rapidly from Central America (248 percent), Mexico (159 percent) and Asia (72 percent) (INS, 1992). Due to the operation of social networks it is likely that undocumented migration followed a similar pattern. In this context, some contend that the arrival of new immigrants is accelerating the concentration of poverty in certain regions in the United States.

Borjas (1990) argues that the United States has become an importer of relatively unskilled labor and that immigrants in recent waves have relatively less schooling, weaker labor market attachment, lower wage rates, higher unemployment rates, higher poverty rates, and higher welfare participation rates than immigrants who arrived in the 1950's and 1960's. As a result, recent immigrants do not perform as well in the U.S. labor market as natives, nor as well as did earlier immigrants. This author states that a relatively generous welfare system increases the attractiveness of the United States for those potential immigrants most likely to qualify for public assistance. "America of the 1980's is vastly different from America of the 1880's. Now we have social service and welfare programs that are easy to deceive and exploit. We have a cash-wage economy with high unemployment, vastly different from the empty frontier that greeted previous immigrants. And we have a new social phenomenon wherein all groups can "demand" almost instant entry into the American middle class, not as a result of hard work but as a matter of entitlement." (Borjas, 1990:151).

According to Valenzuela (1991) some researchers and policy analysts argue that Hispanic poverty is primarily attributable to the increased inflows of immigrants from Latin America. They claim that the low socio-economic status of immigrants, especially new immigrants, significantly skews downward the socioeconomic indicators of Hispanics. In this sense, most of poverty among Hispanics is isolated within the immigrant population.

The California Health and Welfare Agency (1993: 6) stated in 1993 that the children of recently legalized immigrants under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), and the children of undocumented immigrants, represent the fastest growing segment of California's new AFDC (Aid to Families and Dependent Children) caseload. This agency estimated that for fiscal year 1993-94, 108,500 children of IRCA parents and 206,100 children of undocumented parents were supposed to receive AFDC at a cost of \$409 million annually.

Images and interpretations such as these clearly played an important role in the overwhelming victory of Proposition 187 in the 1994 November elections in California. This proposition prohibits the provision of publicly funded social services such as education and health care to undocumented persons residing in California. A federal judge in Los Angeles barred the enforcement of the proposition's measures regarding the provision of education and other social services.

To shed light on this debate, this paper examines the relationships between labor migration from Mexico and the growth of poverty in rural California. Two questions are addressed: 1) Has the acceleration of Mexican migration accentuated the concentration of poverty in rural California; and 2) is this concentration of poverty the result of the skills distribution of immigrants or the result of labor market demands?

The study focuses on Madera County, located in the San Joaquin Valley which is one of the most successful agricultural regions in the world. Data come mainly from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing and from fieldwork conducted in Madera County in 1992. Fieldwork consisted of ethnographic research and a survey of a random sample of 30 families which are originally from Chavinda, Michoacan in Mexico. Families from Chavinda have formed a community of more than 150 families in Madera County. Data from the survey include general demographic information and job and immigration histories of household members. Some data and many ideas used in this paper were originally developed in a report written for the California Institute for Rural Studies (See Alarcon, 1995).

The paper is divided into five parts. The first two sections offer a general overview of the most relevant demographic and economic trends that took place in Madera County in the 1980's. The third section focuses on the analysis of the incidence of poverty in the county and the performance of ethnic groups in the labor market. The fourth section, based primarily on field work research, examines the experiences of immigrants from Chavinda in the labor market. Finally, the last part is used to discuss the main conclusions of the study.

Demographic Change and Immigration from Mexico

Madera had 88,090 inhabitants in 1990. The county is located in the geographical center of California in the San Joaquin Valley, a region where agriculture is the economic backbone. The San Joaquin Valley extends from the Tehachapis in the south to the Sacramento River in the north. The coast and the Sierra Nevada mountains form the western and eastern boundaries respectively. The counties located in the region are Merced, Madera, Fresno, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Kings, Tulare and Kern.

Since the 1970's, the population in Madera has grown at higher rates than California as a whole. Between 1980 and 1990, the annual population growth rate of the county was 3.4 percent, while the state growth rate was 2.3 percent. This was the result of large internal and international immigration flows. In 1990, one quarter of Madera's population reported residing elsewhere in 1985. The majority of these immigrants were living in another California county (75 percent) while the rest were distributed equally between other states and foreign countries. Given the economic and demographic expansion of neighboring Fresno, it is likely that many of the internal immigrants moved to Madera City to take advantage of cheaper housing and commute from there to Fresno.

Farm production has historically been the driving force that has attracted workers from several regions in the United States and the world. Prior to the 1920s, Armenians and Italians arrived in this area, and by the 1930s many White workers from the "Dust Bowl" areas settled in Madera. After World War II, Black immigrants from the South began working in the cotton fields, and large numbers of Mexican-origin people from South Texas were also attracted by employment in agriculture. Mexican immigrants began to arrive in small numbers at the turn of the century thanks to direct recruitment and a favorable immigration policy implemented by the United States. Although, most of the Mexicans who have come to Madera have worked temporarily and returned to Mexico, a large number have remained and settled in the county. The settlement of these immigrants is reflected in the rapid increase of the county's Mexican-origin population. Most of these immigrants came originally from Central-Western Mexico, the traditional sending region of the country. Among the largest communities of migrants from Central-Western Mexico residing in Madera is a concentration of families from Chavinda, Michoacan (Alarcon, 1995).

In recent years, Mexican immigrants have contributed greatly to the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in

Madera County. This process explains, in part, the ethnic composition of Madera. In 1990, the population of the county was mainly composed of two groups: non-Hispanic Whites (60 percent) and Hispanics (34 percent). The remaining population included Blacks (3 percent), American Indians (1.5) and Asians (1.5 percent). Ninety three percent of the Hispanic population in Madera was of Mexican-origin that includes native and Mexico-born.

Table 1 shows that between 1980 and 1990 the Mexican origin population grew faster than the Non-Hispanic population. Although the Asian population grew at a faster rate, the growth of the Mexican origin population seems to account for most of the rapid growth in the foreign-born population which grew five percent between 1980 and 1990 (from 9.8 percent to 14.9 percent). Table 1 suggests that the "Latinization" or rather the "Mexicanization" of Madera County is due to the combination of two processes: a large immigration flow from Mexico and a slow growth of the Non-Hispanic White population.

Table 1. Population Distribution by Race and Hispanic Origin in Madera County, 1980-1990

	1980	1990	Change
Distribution by Race			
All Persons	63,116	88,090	39.6%
White	47,715	63,369	32.8%
Black	2,174	2,494	14.7%
American Indian	1,045	1,418	35.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander	625	1,264	102.2%
Other Race	11,557	19,545	69.1%
Distribution by Hispanic Origin			
All Persons	63,116	88,090	39.6%
Hispanic Origin (any race)	16,916	30,400	79.7%
Mexican	15,593	28,310	81.6%
Puerto Rican	127	181	42.5%
Cuban	27	53	96.3%
Other Hispanic	1,169	1,856	58.8%
Not of Hispanic Origin	46,200	57,690	24.9%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Census of Population and Housing, 1980-1990.*

During the 1980's, immigration from Mexico experienced two significant changes in Madera. First, the absolute number of immigrants increased. This occurred as a result of the economic crisis in Mexico that began in the early 1980's and because of the expectations created by the legalization process included in IRCA (See Cornelius, 1992). Second, Mixtecos from Oaxaca, Mexico began to come to Madera County in unprecedented numbers in addition to migrants from the traditional sending areas. Mixteco migrants are becoming an important source of farm labor in California. Madera,

in particular, is a principal destination of Mixteco farm workers entering the United States and as a result there is a large and growing settled Mixtec population in Madera. Of 87 Oaxacan villages surveyed in 1991, 41 percent reported children in Madera (Runsten and Kearney, 1994).

Table 2 summarizes the immigration trends that took place in Madera County in the 1980's. This table shows the increase in the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) K-12 students in Madera County between 1982 and 1994. The number of Spanish speaking children grew five times in the period, highlighting the rapid growth of Mexican immigration to the county. Although many Mixteco-speaking children are classified as Spanish speaking children because they are bilingual, they constituted the second largest LEP group in the county in 1994.

Table 2. Limited English Proficiency Students in Madera County in 1982 and 1984

	1982	1994
Arabic	0	28
Armenian	0	5
Cambodian (Khmer)	0	4
Cantonese	2	2
Farsi (Persian)	0	2
Hmong	0	17
Korean	0	1
Lao	0	1
Mandarin (Putonghua)	2	0
Mixteco	no data	84
Filipino (Tagalog)	0	2
Portuguese	5	0
Punjabi	no data	17
Russian	0	1
Spanish	878	4,611
Vietnamese	0	2
Other	4	30
Total	891	4,807

Source: California Department of Education, Language Census. Spring 1994

The Transformation of the Labor Market

Since the 1940s, Madera has experienced a profound transformation of its local economy becoming more diversified. The agricultural sector continues to be the primary component in the county's economy but its development has allowed the emergence of other industries, primarily manufacturing. Employment in Madera has experienced two different trends in the last two decades: a very strong diversification accompanied by rapid expansion in the 1970's and slower growth in the 1980's.

Between 1969 and 1979, employment in the county grew 68 percent, far surpassing the state's employment growth (39 percent). In contrast, between 1979 and 1989, Madera's employment grew much slower (28 percent) while California's employment rose 33 percent (See Table 3). During the 1970's, Madera's economic base underwent a remarkable diversification with the rapid expansion of several non-farm industries such as construction, wholesale trade, finance-insurance-real state and manufacturing. The 1980's were a period of slow or negative growth in employment for many industries in Madera County. In particular, the farm industry experienced an important decline that reflected a statewide trend (See Table 3).

As a result of these trends, Madera now has a more diversified labor market with an important number of manufacturing workers. Data from County Business Patterns (Bureau of the Census, 1992) show that in 1990 there were 3,982 manufacturing workers in Madera County. One third of them (33 percent) worked in the food and kindred products industry. There were approximately 50 manufacturing plants in the city in 1986 and the major employers in this group were wineries, followed by a glass bottle manufacturer, food processing plants, farm equipment manufacturers, and mechanical and construction material manufacturers (City of Madera Planning Commission, 1986: 7-8).

Table 3. Employment by Industry in Madera County, 1969-1989.

Industry	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989	Total % Growth 69-79	Total % Growth 79-89
Farm	4,648	5,193	5,124	4,667	4,933	10.2	-3.7
Agric. Services., Forestry, Fisheries	1,029	1,758	1,945	2,479	3,282	89.0	68.7
Mining	62	75	135	142	141	117.7	4.4
Construction	337	681	1,346	1,623	1,961	299.4	45.7
Manufacturing	1,391	2,193	3,394	3,288	4,094	144.0	20.6
Transportation and Public Utilities	430	556	1,007	996	1,111	134.2	10.3
Wholesale Trade	237	382	793	1,017	724	234.6	-8.7
Retail Trade	2,481	2,712	3,530	3,915	4,626	42.3	31.0
Fire	423	663	1,248	1,403	1,539	195.0	23.3
Services	2,231	2,954	4,060	5,024	6,305	82.0	55.3
Government and Gvt. Enterprises	2,369	2,775	3,745	3,915	4,998	58.1	33.5
Total Employment	15,638	19,942	26,327	28,469	33,714	68.4	28.1

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1969-1989.

The decline in farm employment during the 1980's did not translate into a decline in agricultural production in Madera County. The most important trend in agriculture between 1970 and 1989 was the use of agricultural land in a more profitable way, driving lower valued crops such as wheat and cotton out of production and diverting the land to the production of higher valued crops (fruits and nuts). Fruit and nut crop acreage bloomed, growing 207 percent between 1970 and 1989. Table 4 depicts this increase in fruit and nut production that occurred at the expense of vegetables, field crops, pasture, and range.

Table 4. Agricultural Production in Madera County, 1970-89

Commodity Group	1970	1989	Total % Change
Field Crops	176,150	156,990	-10.9
Vegetable Crops	3,260	1,523	-53.3
Fruit & Nuts Crops	49,397	151,658	207.0
Seed Crops	1,800	950	-47.2
Nursery Products	150	170	13.3
Pasture & Range	525,600	414,000	-21.2
Total	756,357	725,291	-4.1

Source: Table adapted from (Kroll et al, 1990: Table A-1).

The expansion of fruit and nut production has had important consequences in the demand for farm labor. These products require large numbers of workers because their production is labor-intensive. Since at least the 1970's, labor demand for the production of grapes, the most extended staple in the county, has been met by Mexican immigrant workers. The labor requirements are mostly seasonal, since the grape harvest falls between July and September. For this reason, during the summer Mexican farm workers work in the fields picking grapes. Many of the seasonal workers are Mixtecos who come from Oaxaca, Mexico (Zabin et al, 1993).

Rural Poverty and Immigration

This section examines the extent to which the rapid growth of the Hispanic or Latino population and its performance in the labor market translates into higher concentration of both poverty and dependence on public assistance.

Madera County has a higher concentration of poverty than the state of California as a whole: In 1990 the percentage of families below poverty level was 9 percent in California while it was 13 percent in Madera County. Data in Table 5 along with the demographic transformation of Madera County shown in Table 1

underscore the complicated relationship between labor migration from Mexico and the concentration of poverty in Madera. First, Hispanic families experienced the highest rate of poverty growth between 1979 and 1989, nearly doubling its number. This rapid growth, the highest in real numbers, is probably due to the arrival of poor immigrant families from Mexico. Second, although in small real numbers, poor Asian families which also include immigrants, grew at a similar rate in the period. Finally, while the number of poor families of most ethnic groups increased in the 1980's, the absolute number of Black poor families decreased in the period.

The increase in the number of poor Hispanic families did not lead to a faster increase in the number of families receiving public assistance. This reflects the fact that recent immigrant families are not entitled to receive federal cash benefits even though they are poor (Fix and Zimmermann, 1994: 268). Unlike immigrants, the majority of Black and American Indian families below poverty level received public assistance in 1990.

Table 5. Poverty Status by Race and Hispanic Origin in Madera County, 1979-1989.

	1979	1989	Change
Families Below Poverty Level			
White, not Hispanic	no data	1,125	
White	1,293	1,598	23.6%
Black	155	147	-5.2%
American Indian	34	52	52.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	29	55	89.7%
Hispanic	856	1,634	90.9%
Families with Income Below Poverty Level Receiving Public Assistance			
White, not Hispanic	no data	429	
White	296	579	95.6%
Black	58	76	31.0%
American Indian	17	32	88.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	25	12	-52.0%
Hispanic	271	454	67.5%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Census of Population and Housing, 1980-1990.*

Although the number of poor Hispanic and Asian families increased in the 1980's, they did not become dependent on public assistance at the same rate than other groups. In fact, between 1980 and 1990 there was a dramatic reduction in the number of poor Asian families depending on public assistance.

The remainder of this section examines the relationship between the concentration of poverty and the performance of ethnic groups in the labor market by

focusing on the distribution of employment and some of the prime indicators of socioeconomic status and well-being: educational attainment, labor force participation, unemployment, and household income.

Ethnic diversity has its spatial dimension in Madera, making it a fractured city. The best residential area in the city is occupied mainly by the White population. A large portion of the Mexican population lives in areas surrounding downtown and in some of the new subdivisions. A large segment of the Black population is concentrated in the section called "Okie Town." In addition, many Mexican families whose members work on the farms, live at those farms outside of the city in housing provided by the employers. Temporary immigrants from Oaxaca tend to live in farm camps and also near downtown in an area that is heavily populated during the summer. When the harvest of grapes takes place, these migrants live in overcrowded houses, back yards and other unfit places to dwell.

Labor markets in Madera County also seem to be segmented along ethnic lines. Table 6 shows how the civilian labor force is distributed by occupation and ethnicity in Madera County. Whites and Asians are more likely to have the highest share of the better jobs in the county. In 1990, nearly half the populations of both groups had jobs as managers or professionals or in the technical sales and administrative support sector. On the other end of the spectrum, most of the Hispanics worked in the farming sector.

Education is a critical labor market resource. While in 1990, 24 percent of California's population did not complete high school, in Madera County, the corresponding figure was 36 percent. Figure 1 (in the appendix) portrays the dramatic gap that exists in terms of educational attainment by ethnicity in Madera County. Clearly, Latinos occupy the most disadvantaged position, having the highest percentage of people not completing

high school and the lowest percentage of people with graduate or professional degrees. In contrast, Asians and Whites have the best stock of human capital.

The labor force participation rate (LFPR), that is, the percentage of people who are actively employed or looking for work shows that Hispanic men and women are the most active participants in Madera's labor force. The LFPR calculated for California in 1990 was 67 percent. The same year Madera County had a much lower rate of 60 percent. Hispanic men and women had the highest LFPRs in Madera County: 78 percent and 52 percent respectively (See Figure 2 in the Appendix). Between 1980 and 1990 the rate for Hispanic males decreased 2 percentage points and the rate for females increased 8 points. This shows an interesting trend: as the number of Hispanics grows in the county, so too does the participation of women in the work force. However, unemployment undermines the position of Latino women since they reached the highest unemployment rate (28 percent) in this period of time (See Figure 3 in the Appendix). Madera's unemployment rate was nearly two times higher (12 percent) in 1990 than the unemployment rate of the state of California (7 percent).

In 1990 the median household income in Madera (\$27, 370) was much lower than that of the state (\$35, 798). Seventy-nine percent of Black households, 72 percent of American Indian and 69 percent of Hispanic households in Madera County earned less than \$35, 000. On the other hand, Asians and Whites by far had the highest percentage of households with high incomes. Hispanics had also the highest percentage of households with low incomes. (See Figure 4 in the Appendix).

This section has shown that even though Latino males and females have the highest labor force participation rates, they also have high unemployment rates. Among women there has been a substantial increase in both rates since 1980. Data also show that Hispanics have low household incomes. This indicates that the concentration of Hispanic workers in the farming sector prevents them from improving economically.

Table 6. Occupation of Employed Persons 16 Years and over by Race and Hispanic Origin in Madera County, 1990.

Occupation	Percent of Total Civilian Labor Force				
	White	Black	Nat. Am.	Asian	Hispanic
Managerial and Professional Specialty	22.0	14.2	14.7	23.6	9.1
Technical Sales & Adm. Support	31.4	33.2	26.7	24.0	19.2
Services	11.7	23.0	19.7	21.4	10.1
Farming, Forestry and Fishing	6.8	2.1	6.4	13.7	30.7
Precision Production, Craft and Repair	12.9	3.8	15.5	1.8	10.4
Operators, Fabricators and Laborers	15.2	23.7	17.0	15.6	20.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Census of Population and Housing, 1990.*

Immigration and Ethnic Replacement

Census data offer a general but limited view of the transformations brought about by labor migration flows in Madera County. For this reason, it is necessary to include an alternative approach in the analysis that can provide a better understanding of this process. This section draws on ethnographic work to examine the migration experience of immigrants from Chavinda.

The presence of immigrants from Chavinda in Madera County can be traced back to the late 1930s, when a migrant from Chavinda came to Madera County to buy land with money he saved over a period of many years working in different places in the United States. This immigrant became the basis for further Chavindeño migration to the county as he began hiring workers from his home town. This network expanded when other immigrants from Chavinda became foremen at other farms in the area and thereafter offered employment to more people from the village. Although most of the migrants have been male temporary workers, many families have settled in Madera.

In 1992, the Chavindeño community in Madera County was formed by 153 households. The Chavindeño community consists mostly of young people with low levels of formal education. Even before the enactment of IRCA in 1986, the majority of people in these families were residing legally in the United States. This suggests that Chavindeños have formed a relatively settled community in the United States for a long time. However, IRCA has reinforced the integration of this population to the United States through the extension of legalization. In 1992, 85 percent of people were already legal residents or in the process of regularizing their immigration status.

Despite labor market diversification, the majority of male Chavindeños (55 percent of those 16 years and over) had jobs in the agricultural sector in 1992. Nineteen percent of the rest held non-agricultural jobs, mainly in construction. The remaining 26 percent included students, retired, and disabled persons. However, it is important to point out that male Chavindeños were heavily concentrated in the best jobs in the area's agricultural industry: year-round positions as foremen, farm employees, tractor drivers, and irrigators. Nearly 67 percent of the household heads had this kind of jobs.

Chavindeños have gradually replaced White and other workers from the better agricultural jobs in Madera. A similar situation was found by Waldinger (1987: 397) in New York City where the shift from goods to services was accompanied by a decline in the availability of White

workers, creating a replacement demand for non-White workers. The case of one of the most important milk-producing farms in Madera illustrates this trend. In the late 1970's, most of the stable operators were White. Chavindeños only assisted White machine operators. By 1992, all of the White workers had left and Chavindeños had taken over the operators' jobs. At another farm specializing in the production of grapes and cotton, Chavindeños have also replaced White and Mexican American workers. In 1992, out of seven full-time workers five were from Chavinda and the other was a good friend of one of the Chavindeños. There was only one White worker who lived with his family on the farm. Furthermore, when the farmer needs additional temporary workers, he usually hires other Chavindeños (Alarcon, 1995).

Among the Chavindeños not employed in agriculture, many have jobs in the construction industry, most working as roofers. One Chavindeño couple in the sample had embarked in the formation of a small business, a taqueria located in one of the commercial districts of the city.

Fifty-seven percent of women 16 years and over were employed or went to school (18 percent). The rest, (25 percent), were housewives with no other occupation outside the home or were disabled. A high percentage of women (39 percent) were employed in agriculture, the majority of them as seasonal farm workers. Women with some education have jobs such as forewomen in manufacturing plants, teacher's aides, and bilingual receptionists.

Access to these permanent, year-round jobs has been the most important element that has promoted settlement for many Chavindeños (See Alarcon, 1995). This finding was also uncovered by Palerm (1991) in his study of four California rural communities in which he found that settlement or the sedentarization of farm workers was encouraged by the new opportunities created by the proliferation and expansion of fruit and vegetable specialty crops, offering longer and steadier periods of employment.

A very important consequence of this is that the improved condition of Chavindeños has allowed the employment of poorer immigrants like the Mixtecos. While Chavindeños are taking the best agricultural jobs which were previously held by White and other workers, Mixtecos are taking the seasonal jobs left behind by Chavindeños, especially in the grape harvest. Chavindeños who have reached a relative upward mobility reject taking seasonal jobs. The Mixtecos are taking these jobs because their networks are not as developed as mestizo networks and do not control access to jobs in many places (Runsten and Kearney, 1994: 37).

Compared to the average farm worker, Mixtecos work in more low-paying short term jobs, migrate more, make more side payments to labor market intermediaries, and are more often the victims of non-payment of wages and other law violations (Zabin et al. 1993; Bade 1990).

Currently, Madera is the center of the Mixtec universe in California. A survey conducted in 1991 found a total of 2,444 Mixtec immigrants in Madera County. Of a total of 203 Oaxacan villages, 60 percent of them send migrants to Madera (Runsten and Kearney, 1994). This heavy migration flow has led to the permanent settlement of some families and to a continuous circulation of a large number of workers.

Final Considerations

This study has demonstrated that in the 1980's Madera's farm labor force became mainly Mexican. A similar process took place at the state level with the "Mexicanization" of California's farm labor force since over 90 percent of this work force was from either Mexico or Central America with a majority being Mexicans (Martin, 1987; Runsten, 1991; Palerm, 1991).

Madera County is currently one of the fastest growing counties in California. During the 1980's, high levels of internal and Mexican migration led to a rapid population growth. Due to this migration movement, the Mexican origin population grew very fast. During the same period of time, Madera County reached a higher concentration of poverty. Although the arrival of poor families from Mexico increased the number of families with incomes below poverty level, the percentage of Latino families receiving public assistance did not grow as fast because of legal restrictions.

Many Mexican immigrants arrived in Madera during the 1980's to meet the labor demands spurred by the expansion of the production of fruits such as grapes. The establishment of manufacturing plants has added to the expansion of employment and to the diversification of the local labor market in the county. The growth of nearby Fresno has also augmented the number of jobs for Madera residents.

The concentration of Mexican immigrants in rural California has encouraged the formation of Chicano and Mexican enclaves or colonias. Palerm (1991) uses the term Chicano and Mexican enclave to describe rural communities in California with substantial numbers of Chicanos and Mexican immigrants. Although these enclaves have recently become demographic boom towns because they are young and vigorous, they also contain the

vast majority of the state's rural poor and often present grotesque images of blight and deprivation. According to Rochín and Castillo (1995) colonias are communities in rural California where the majority of the population is Latino. These settlements are the result of the large concentration of Chicano and Latino immigrants and of absolute and relative decrease in the number of White people. Colonias have an exceptional incidence of poverty that seems to be associated with employment in agriculture and by the poorer educational attainment of colonos.

Despite the continuous demand for farm labor during this decade, farm workers in California suffered a decline in their wages and working conditions, reversing the gains made through activism in the 1960's and 1970's. This mobilization of farm workers obtained many of the rights granted to industrial workers, allowing the emergence of a more stable settled farm worker population (Zabin et al, 1993) Additionally, in the 1980's the farm labor market in California became more "informal" with a steady decline in direct-hire employment by California farm crop employers. At least 40 percent of all hired farm work in California is now performed by employees of labor contractors, farm management companies, packing house operations and other businesses (Villarejo, 1989)

As a result of these changes, Madera's farm labor market has been further segmented, in the sense that jobs are divided along ethnic lines even within the Mexican immigrant population. Workers in the formal segment are characterized by the immigrants from Chavinda who have switched from seasonal agricultural jobs to year-round jobs as foremen, farm employees, tractor drivers, and irrigators. The other segment of the labor market employs workers for seasonal jobs that do not have benefits and are mostly dependent on *contratistas* (labor contractors). Mixtec farm workers comprise the bulk of the farm workers employed in this segment of the labor market.

This situation suggests that Madera County has experienced two important interrelated processes: ethnic replacement and the continuous recreation of poverty. Ethnic replacement is a concept used by Zabin et al. (1993) to refer to a process in which a more settled group of farm workers is replaced by a new ethnic group who is willing to accept worse working conditions than their predecessors. In the first decades of this century, Mexicans from Western Mexico, Blacks and Whites from the Dust Bowl region all came to substitute Asian workers. Later, *Braceros* mainly from Western Mexico added to the employer's dependence on Mexicans, who eventually replaced White workers. Presently, Mixtecos are beginning to replace mestizo farm workers from the seasonal jobs in the area.

Ethnic replacement has been accompanied by the recreation of poverty. The new demand for seasonal workers encourages the arrival of poor families, like those of the Mixtecos, whose members are willing to accept bad working conditions. Although "regular" or settled workers (exemplified by the Chavindeños) achieve relative upward mobility, they are still poor workers. These workers have high rates of labor force participation but they are poorly rewarded. Traditionally, government has protected farmers through special breaks. For instance, many farmers are exempted from providing their workers with over-time pay, housing, health insurance, workers compensation for injuries and the right to form unions. For this reason, many of the full-time Mexican farm workers in Madera do not have health insurance and therefore rely on Medi-Cal. As a result, small cities in rural areas like Madera are experiencing a disproportionate fiscal burden caused by the expansion in the demand of education and health care due to the concentration of large numbers of poor farm workers.

However, policy makers should be aware that employment in agriculture may be attractive for just one generation of immigrants. Although there is a stable and professional population of farm workers in California (Palerm, 1991), many of these farm workers do not want their children to follow their own experience. For instance, Chavindeño parents in Madera county constantly tell their children that they need to get a good education in order to get better jobs. Just to reinforce this advice, many of them get contracts to pick grapes in the summer in order to allow their children to experience the hardship of agricultural work.

The success of agriculture in California requires the continuous immigration of poor workers and therefore, the constant recreation of poverty.

This study has shown that immigrants become working poor rather than welfare recipients. The high levels of labor force participation among Latino immigrants prevents them from receiving public assistance in the form of cash payments. This suggests that their utilization of public assistance functions as a subsidy to employers.

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APPENDIX

FIGURE 1. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN IN MADERA COUNTY, 1990. PERSONS 25 AND OVER (%)

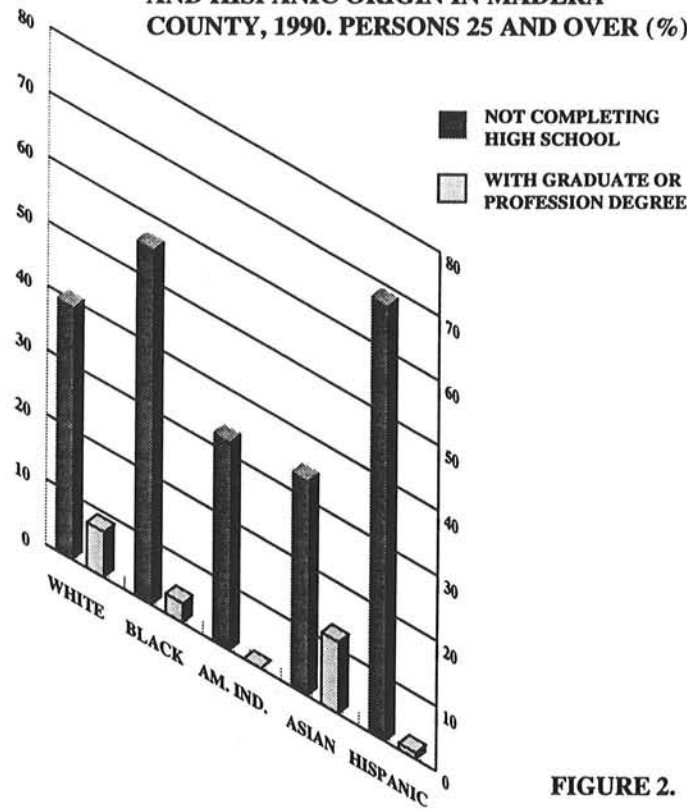


FIGURE 2. LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY RACE, HISPANIC ORIGIN, AND GENDER IN MADERA COUNTY (%)

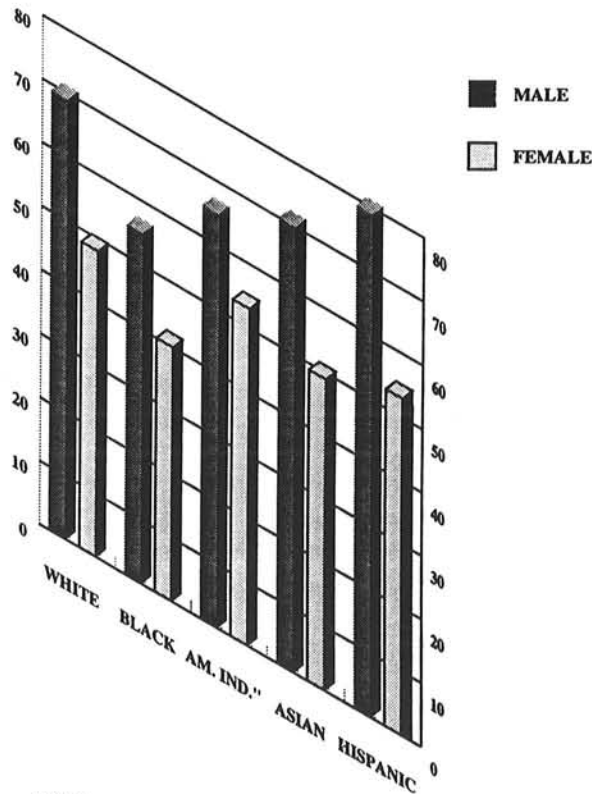


FIGURE 3. UNEMPLOYMENT BY RACE, HISPANIC ORIGIN, AND GENDER IN MADERA COUNTY (%)

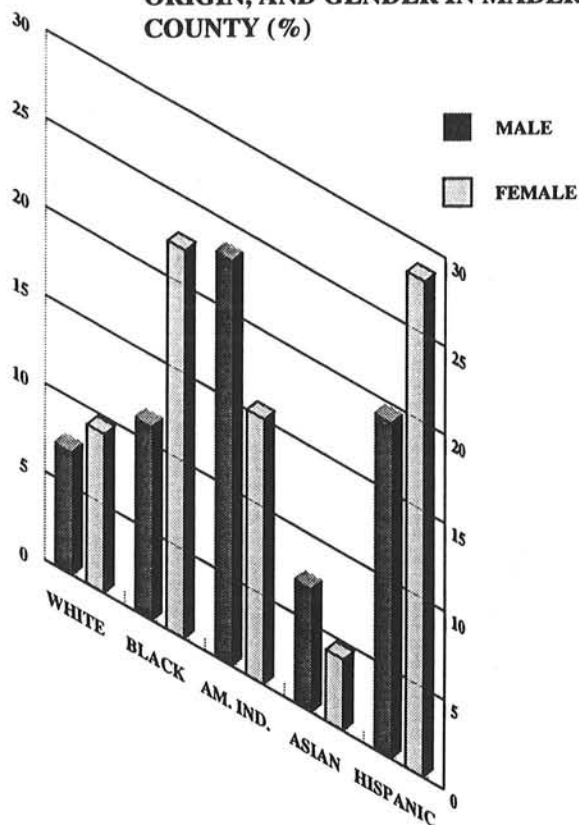


FIGURE 4. HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN IN MADERA COUNTY 1990 (%)

