

THE IMPACT OF MEXICAN DEVELOPMENTS ON THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF SOUTH TEXAS 1848-1930

Armando Alonzo

Texas A & M University

INTRODUCTION

With the end of the U.S.-Mexican War, a new international border was created along the Rio Grande that led to the rise of a dynamic binational frontier in South Texas. Settled by the Spaniards in the eighteenth century, South Texas encompasses the territory along the river from Brownsville to Del Rio, northward to San Antonio and southeasterly to Victoria. The region can be divided into three districts: 1. the Lower Valley between the Nueces River and the Río Grande; 2. the Upper Rio Grande in the Eagle Pass and Del Rio areas; and 3. the San Antonio district including lands towards the Gulf Coast (See Map 1).¹ This study examines the rise of this binational border during the period from 1848 to 1930 with emphasis on economic development in South Texas and Mexico's impact on it. This long-view approach allows for comparison of two eras in which thousands of Mexican immigrants settled in South Texas. This history is divided into two natural periods: 1848 to 1900 and 1900 to 1930, a division that permits us to see continuity and change from one era to another.

While this study benefits from a growing historiography on border and transnational studies, the literature relevant to Texas and its border with Mexico is limited and generalized. There are indeed older histories of the Mexican immigrants and their adaptation to life in the U.S., while the newer studies emphasize the twentieth century and are concerned with specific themes, communities, or regions.² Rarely do any of these accounts present the story of the Tejano or native-born of Mexican descent and of the Mexican immigrant. Emilio Zamora's

history of the Mexican worker in the early twentieth century history of Texas is the best corrective.³ This study seeks to broaden our understanding of the history of South Texas by focusing on the economic role of the Mexican-origin population. This analysis shows that, contrary to popular history and scholarly study, Mexicanos came from diverse backgrounds and that they had a significant role in shaping the emergence of a binational economy and society of South Texas.

PART I, 1848-1900

In 1853 an anonymous writer in *De Bow's Journal*, a highly respected authority out of New Orleans, engaged in wishful thinking more than analysis when he matter-of-factly wrote that “the Mexican and aborigines [of Texas] are reduced to a cypher, and will soon disappear.” Contrary to such uninformed Anglo views, the number of Mexicanos in the state rose sharply, especially in the Lower Valley. Its population grew fivefold from over 15,000 in 1860 to 79,925 inhabitants in 1900. An estimated 85 percent of the total population in the Lower Valley consisted of Tejanos who were native and foreign born.⁴

South Texas towns and cities grew at varying rates, for the economy lacked uniformity in such a large territory and geographical advantages favored one town over another. As commerce with Mexico increased and as ranching expanded through the grasslands, towns grew in population and economic activity expanded. Merchants, artisans, and laborers found new opportunities in urban communities, while ranchers, cowboys, shepherds, and other rural workers went to work on the farms and ranches of the region to supply foodstuffs and livestock to local consumers, including the military, and distant marketplaces. Military contracts were an important source of income to settlers. In one of the first reports on government spending in

Texas, Col. J. K. F. Mansfield remarked that contracts, salaries, wages, and other costs amounted to \$990,957 in 1855 and \$635,322 in 1856. Brownsville and the upriver towns of Santa María, Edinburg, Río Grande City, Roma, Zapata, and Laredo served the surrounding ranchers and became bases of operation for merchants. The latter bought livestock, skins, bones, wool and agricultural produce, usually corn, cotton, and vegetables, and they imported Mexican livestock, silver, and other metals. These merchants also supplied the local populace with imported foodstuffs and luxury items. Exact figures for the commerce are difficult to locate but state legislator and merchant John L. Haynes of Río Grande City claimed that by the 1850's it amounted to several million dollars.⁵

Brownsville's occupational structure made it the leading urban and commercial center of the Lower Valley and reflected the differences between Mexicano and Anglo employment. According to census data, in 1880 478 Mexicano workers (49%) were employed as laborers, domestics, or other unskilled, as compared to only 8 percent of the Anglo males. Anglo males clearly dominated white-collar jobs (195 versus 165) with the exception of grocers and kindred businesses in which Mexicans were numerous. Artisans still played a key role in urban employment, with 287 Mexicano (30%) as compared to 86 Anglo (27%). Small numbers of Mexicans and Anglos were ranchers and cowboys, but relatively speaking, they constituted a very small percentage of the male workforce in Brownsville.⁶

Annexation brought a measure of stability to Laredo, and by the mid-1850s Laredo and Eagle Pass, together, handled a half-million dollars in trade mostly with Mexico. Still, Laredo remained a small town for more than thirty years after the war with Mexico. The town's best growth accelerated with the arrival of intercontinental railroads in the 1880s, and it displaced

Brownsville as the most important town in the Lower Valley. Laredo's population soared to 11,319 in 1890 and consisted of a sizable enclave of American and European settlers and hundreds of Mexican immigrants attracted to work activities in the ranching industry, railroad shops, coal mining, and urban jobs. The 1890s brought slower growth.⁷

Corpus Christi's fortune prior to the early 1880s fluctuated wildly. This was due mainly to its lack of an adequate deepwater port and the position of San Antonio as the main interior port for the Mexican and western Texas trade. Founded in 1838, Corpus Christi had enjoyed some trading with the Mexican frontier, but it never rivaled Brownsville. With a population of about 1,000 in 1853, Corpus Christi was a hamlet of Anglo ranchers, farmers, merchants, seamen, and artisans, sprinkled with a few *rancheros* and herders. In 1854 steamships began regular runs to New Orleans. This encouraged local business and ranching interests, as Morgan Line steamers transported beef cattle to distant markets. By 1880 its population had increased to 4,000, and its trade had a value of two million dollars. With the building of the Texas Mexican Railway from Corpus Christi to Laredo in 1881 and subsequent channel and port improvements, Corpus Christi entered a period of expansion, replacing Brownsville in the 1880s as the most important seaport in the region. In the year ending August 31, 1883 the total value of all imports and exports at Corpus Christi was \$2,711,196, compared to \$2,190,512 at Brownsville.⁸

The ranching boom also gave impetus to the growth of new towns in the interior of the Lower Valley with the founding of San Diego and Benavides in the western Nueces County. In the 1870s this district was organized as Duval County. Tejanos, Anglos, and a few Europeans were attracted to these towns. Of the two, San Diego, which catered to the local trade in livestock and wool, was the most active.⁹

In the Upper Valley district, Eagle Pass and Del Río grew slowly and served as trade centers to Mexico. Their growth was limited due to sporadic Indian raids and insulation from the more settled sections of Texas. Most of the lands in the surrounding countryside were devoted to stock raising, with only some Mexicans engaged in farming. The merchants were European and Anglo, while the artisans, cowboys, and herders were nearly all Mexicano. A few Mexicans owned livestock, but nearly all of the ranchers were Anglo or European. Consequently, this district was not so visibly Mexicano as the Lower Valley.¹⁰

Away from the Río Grande, San Antonio and Victoria were the most important cities, and Mexicans persisted in rural enclaves at Goliad, Refugio, and San Patricio. These settlers traced their roots primarily to Spanish settlements and to Mexican Texas, when it was a joint state with Coahuila (1824-1835).¹¹ Unfortunately, the events of the Texas Revolt in 1835 and 1836 had triggered antagonisms between the Mexican natives and the Anglo and European settlers whom the Mexican Government had allowed to populate Texas. Consequently, Mexican rancheros experienced considerable land loss and a temporary depopulation took place. By the 1860s social stability was restored and the Mexicans returned to Victoria and Goliad, where the greatest conflict had occurred.¹² Their number was not very large during this period, and there was some migration from Mexico in the late nineteenth century.¹³ In effect, this historically Mexicano district was not as dynamic as the Lower Valley.

Social Consequences

An 1878 memorial to the U.S. Congress urging the construction of a railroad from Galveston to South Texas for the defense of the coast claimed that the region was 90 percent Mexican. In 1895, Colonel Anson Mills, U.S. Commissioner to the International Water and

Boundary Commission, described the population of the Lower Valley in a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State as “almost exclusively Mexican, perhaps not one in a hundred of any other race, Spanish being almost exclusively spoken, the habits, sympathies, and general character being entirely Mexican.” The Merchant’s Association of New York acknowledged, in 1901, the continuity of the region’s Mexicano character, saying that “nearly everyone speaks both English and Spanish, preferring the latter, as a large element of the old settlers and their descendants are of Mexican origin.”¹⁴

Emilia Schunior Ramírez, an educator of Hispanic and Anglo ancestry in the Lower Valley, wrote that “the majority of the pioneers . . . were Mexican.” As Mrs. Ramírez noted, “up to the last quarter of the [nineteenth] century, there was little or no [Anglo] culture in [Hidalgo] county. As recently as 1915, there was hardly any difference in the way of life between the people on the Mexican side of the Río Grande and the native inhabitants of Hidalgo, Starr, and Cameron counties.” In Starr and Webb County intermarriage and business ties had also Hispanicized the few Anglos who had settled there. The coming of the railroads to Laredo facilitated greater Anglo migration, as opportunities in trade, business, and industry increased. According to local tradition, Anglos and Europeans in Webb County acculturated to a significant degree without the clash of cultures, as in other parts of the Southwest.¹⁵

PART II 1900-1930

Social and Demographic History of Mexicans in The Lower Valley

In the early twentieth century, Mexican immigrants played a key role in the economic history of the Lower Valley. While many left Mexico because of the attractions found in Texas’s growing economy, others left because of the effects of the depressions of the 1890s and

the subsequent impact of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). In the case of the Lower Valley, three critical factors stimulated Mexican migrations. First, the building of the international railroads from Texas into Mexico through Laredo and Eagle Pass in the early 1880s took place in conjunction with economic development in Northern Mexico during the Porfiriato. Second, the decline of the ranching economy in the 1890s led to experimental commercial farming in the delta lands in Hidalgo and Cameron counties and a call for building a railroad to the Lower Valley. Third, the completion of the St. Louis, Brownsville, Mexican Railway Co. in 1904 from near Corpus Christi to Brownsville propelled the delta counties into a period of rapid expansion. All three factors are relevant to understanding the development of the region. The last two were directly responsible for the rise of a “new” Lower Valley.¹⁶

The conversion of ranchland to farmland in the Lower Valley ushered in an era of town development and commercial farming at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1910, two brothers, in San Diego, Rosendo and Eliseo Martinez had started a cotton gin business that continued for two generations. The Martinezes were first-generation settlers whose parents had been born in Mier, Tamaulipas and then moved to Roma.¹⁷ The availability of employment in the Lower Valley stimulated “a coming and a going” as immigrants left Mexico to find work in Texas and periodically returned to their home.¹⁸

The second wave of Mexican immigrants, arriving at the time of the 1910 Revolution, added a new dimension to the rapidly growing population of the region. Whether they were pushed out of Mexico by dire economic and political conditions, Mexican immigrants from all walks of life sought either refuge or employment opportunities in the relatively tranquil setting of South Texas. Incidents involving personal danger, economic deprivation, and general hard

times forced Mexicans to flee their homes. With the passing of time, some facts have faded, but many mentioned the disappearances, shootings, and hangings of family members by roving bands of revolutionaries and bandits.¹⁹

While Mexican immigration in the early twentieth century had a measure of continuity to the ranching era (1848-1900), several elements in the post-1900 history stand out. For instance, the quantitative data shows just how significant the 1910 Revolution was in stimulating migration to Mexicans. Table 1 shows that the largest number of permanent settlers, 42% of the total, arrived in the period from 1911 to 1920, the decade of the Revolution.

TABLE 1
IMMIGRANT LANDOWNERS' ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES BY
DECADE AND SEX

Decade	Male	Female	Total (Male &Female)	Percent
Pre-1900	423	205	628	23
1901-1910	504	231	736	27
1911-1920	900	234	1,134	42
1921-1930	148	72	220	8

Source: Hidalgo County, *Record of Alien Owners*, vols. A, 1 & 2; Cameron County, *Record of Alien Owners*, vols. 1&2; Starr County, *Record of Alien Owners*, vol. 1; Zapata County *Record of Alien Owners*, vol 1; Webb County, *Record of Alien Owners*, vols. 1, 2, & 3; Brooks County *Record of Alien Owners*, vol. 1; Jim Hogg County, *Record of Alien Owners*, vols. 1 & 2; Nueces County, *Record of Alien Owners*, vol. 1. These records were kept by the county clerk in each county pursuant to state law.

Another key feature of these migrations to the Lower Valley was the role that geographic proximity played in facilitating the movement of settlers. Table 2 shows the sources of

immigrants based on their origin by states in Mexico. Four states in Mexico's Northeast, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, and Coahuila contributed 94% of all permanent immigrants. Except for San Luis Potosí, these states border on Texas. Only 4% of the immigrant settlers originated in the central states of Mexico. The predominance of a migration from the Northeast is significant because since the colonial period that region had furnished the settlers who had ventured to the *frontera* of Texas and Nuevo Santander.²⁰ Thus, in contrast Manuel Gamio's earlier studies and George Sánchez's study of Los Angeles that showed a general migration from westcentral Mexico, the migration of Mexicans to the Lower Valley consisted of the *norteño*, a Mexicano who was at base a *mestizo*, or *criollo* (white), rather than Indian.²¹ This factor strongly shaped the cultural life of these settlers well into the twentieth century.

TABLE 2
SOURCES OF IMMIGRANTS, BY STATES OF MEXICO

State	Number	Percent
Tamaulipas	1289	47
Nuevo León	854	31
San Luis Potosi	237	9
Coahuila	179	7
Central States	107	4
Other States	51	2
Totals	2717	100

Source: See Table 4, *Supra*

The availability of a large number of official and unofficial ports along the length of the Río Grande not only facilitated migration over a large territory but also served to funnel the immigrants to selected locations in Texas. Key features of this migration can be identified

because of the dominant nature of the various patterns. Thus, for example, Coahuilan immigrants entered at Laredo and tended to settle in that city, but so did significant numbers of the immigrants from Nuevo León and Tamaulipas because of the proximity of those states to Laredo.²²

Geographical proximity had several important implications in shaping the social and economic characteristics of the population of the Lower Valley. First, the arrival of the earlier immigrants, those that entered the U.S. prior to 1900, easily assimilated the local milieu and merged with the native-born Mexicanos. At this time large numbers of both native-born and Mexican immigrant settlers were ranchers and farmers—nearly 1,000 are identified in the U.S. Census of Agriculture for the Lower Valley counties in 1880. Second, geography was a major factor in the actual pattern of settlement with the vast majority of the settlers coming from the Mexican Northeast. Third, the presence of an international railroad network and key urban centers in the region facilitated this migration. For example, immigrant settlers to Laredo overwhelmingly entered through the port of Laredo, as well as those who occupied outlying rural districts near Laredo, such as Hebbronville in Jim Hogg County. Brownsville served the same purpose for Cameron and Hidalgo counties. It also served as a port of entry for immigrants who settled in Corpus Christi. Fourth, the presence of towns and other communities directly across from older Mexican cities, towns, and ranchos, facilitated entry into the region by merely crossing the Río Grande. This was typical in Texas towns like Zapata and Río Grande City, towns that had Mexican counterparts directly across the Río Grande or very close by. This way of gaining entry into Texas repeated the older nineteenth century migratory pattern in which settlers in Mexico moved from towns that dated to the colonial era to the new towns founded in

Texas shortly after the War with Mexico. While the evidence in the Alien Records is imprecise, it does suggest that social or economic ties, usually landholding in Texas, were critical factors in this kind of migration. For instance, many Mexicans who left Guerrero, Tamaulipas moved to Laredo, Zapata, and Hebbronville, districts in which they already owned land. Some rural estates were quite considerable in acreage and others small ranchos.²³

The data on occupational background of the Mexican immigrant settlers who stayed permanently in the Lower Valley attests to their diversity. Out of 1,825 immigrants for whom an occupation was listed, 26% were merchants, grocers, storekeepers, and other proprietors. In addition to this prosperous class, there were 416 farmers and ranchers, which represents 22% of the total workforce in the Alien Records. A total of 282 artisans or skilled workers constituted 15% of these settlers. The commercial agricultural economy that gained strength with the introduction of irrigation technology also required a considerable manpower of farm and general laborers. Of those who settled permanently, 638 or 34% of the total made up the unskilled laborers.²⁴ Interestingly, this data shows that Mexicano immigrants constituted an middle and working class. In fact, they were not all laborers; many had brought valuable skills and a strong entrepreneurial spirit to that contributed the development of the Lower Valley.

The significance of the occupational distribution of Mexican settlers to the Lower Valley is that, in contrast to other regions of the country, such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, and locales in the Midwest, for which we have similar data on settlers, those who stayed in the Lower Valley represented a greater diversity in occupations, with sizable percentages in the middle class.²⁵ This raises the question why the Lower Valley appears to be an exception to the patterns found elsewhere in the U.S. The evidence suggest that since 1848 unique historical and geographical

factors have made the Lower Valley attractive to permanent Mexican immigrant settlement, and that many of those settlers in the early twentieth century came from the traditional sources in Mexico's Northeast.

Economic History of the Lower Valley, 1900-1930

Mexican economic activities during the years 1900-1930 reveal commonalities and differences among the region's three districts. Of these, the most complex was the Lower Valley, where Mexicans worked on the railroads, land development, farming and ranching, and trade and commerce. No exact figures are available for the number of Mexicans who worked in the construction and later maintenance of the track. Some men continued to work on the international railroads that crossed Texas through Laredo and Eagle Pass.²⁶ Also, Mexican workers helped to build the St. Louis, Brownsville, Mexican Railway Co. in 1904, with men clearing brush, unloading ties, grading and preparing the road bed, and laying track.²⁷

Thousands of Mexicans worked in all aspects of land development. Most of the Lower Valley lands were developed in the 1905-1929 period. Every community had local labor contractors or *contratistas*, some of whom may have been subcontractors to larger operators. Enrique Guerra, the son of a prominent merchant and rancher, Don Deodoro Guerra of McAllen, employed 60 subcontractors who in turn hired 150 to 250 men.²⁸ In one large project involving more than 35,000 acres of land in northeast Hidalgo County, near present-day Hargill, about 2,000 to 3,000 men worked for nearly two years, although the project was not completed due to financial difficulties.²⁹ Contractors like Don Deodoro Guerra and Don Alejandro Saénz of McAllen not only made good profits in land clearing, but also in other businesses, such as wholesale and retail stores, and taverns which they set up to serve the laborers. Guerra made a

fortune, investing in ranching, farming, and the ginning business in the San Manuel and La Reforma communities in the drylands north of Edinburg.³⁰

A large *campo de desenraiz* or land clearing camp included contractors, mayordomos, surveyors, paymasters, commissary personnel, cooks, guards, and hundreds of grubbers. Wages for general laborers ranged from twenty-five cents to one dollar per day, paid in Mexican silver in the early years of land development. Skilled workers, such as equipment operators, earned about \$1.25 to \$1.50 daily. Grubbers earnings were based on the condition of the land they cleared. *Montes pesados* or heavy brushland required more work. The rate for those tracts was from ten to sixteen dollars per acre, while lightly timbered lands were paid at the rate of six to ten dollars per acre.³¹

By the time Anglo farmers arrived in the period after 1904, there was considerable number of Mexican agriculturalists. Some rancheros took advantage of the new developments and shifted part of their lands to farming enterprises. As a result of the Anglos' intensive development of the delta lands, the Mexicans were more successful in continuing both farming and ranching in the so-called drylands or *tierras de temporal*. Some rancheros became leading cotton farmers, planting between 1,000 and 3,000 acres of cotton and employing Mexican tenants and sharecroppers. During this era, these rancheros often produced the first cotton bale in the nation for which a monetary prize was awarded. As cotton production steadily increased in the 1920s, Mexican-owned cotton gins were constructed to serve the drylands. Small Mexicano farmers and sharecroppers did not reach the level of production of the larger rancheros. Consequently, when the Great Depression began in 1929, they moved to the towns and cities of the region to seek non-farm employment.³² Nonetheless, both small and large

rancheros and the new Anglo farmers were important to the expansion of the agricultural economy of the Lower Valley.

The number of farms and ranches from Cameron to Zapata County increased from 1,372 in 1900 to 8,606 in 1930, and agricultural production soared. By the 1920s, bonanza crops of vegetables and citrus in addition to cotton farming had made this section of the Lower Valley one of the most productive in the entire country, with the value of crops in the millions of dollars.³³

In contrast to the masses of laborers, Mexican men and women involved in trade and commerce had a better chance to do well in the Lower Valley. Case histories are illustrative of their success. Cleto Balderas, a native of General Terán, Nuevo León left Mexico in 1924. He was a master tailor who set up his own shop in McAllen, and hired two other tailors. Later, he closed his shop but continued to work with a major downtown clothing store until his death in 1952.³⁴ Of the six male children of Ygnacio Ballí Tijerina and his wife, Estefana Cortez de Ballí, three were artisans; Ygnacio was a carpenter, farmer, and storekeeper, and Fernando had a garage in which he and his brother Federico were mechanics.³⁵ Catarino Ybarra of Matamoros was a second-generation maker of coaches and a wheelwright. He helped build the international bridge at Brownsville and the courthouse of Hidalgo County. His son, Mariano Ybarra, a baby at the time his father moved to Hidalgo County in 1910, continued the artisan's tradition as a master carpenter nearly all of his long life, except for the years from 1948 to 1971 when he worked in agriculture.³⁶ Mariano Ybarra's father-in-law, Clemente Pompa, a native of Aguas Calientes, was also a master carpenter in San Diego, where he learned the trade from a German carpenter.³⁷ Born in Ramos Arizpe, Coahuila in 1890, Juan González arrived in Laredo at the

age of 11 and learned the baker's trade by memorizing recipes. He started his own business in 1928. During the Great Depression, his bakery stayed open and he started a delivery service in 1937. Two generations of Gonzalezes have continued the bakery business, which is still in operation at the same location where it has been since its opening.³⁸ In Corpus Christi, a few Mexicans worked in the cotton gins and cotton seed oil mills. They earned two dollars for a twelve-hour day in the early 1930s. The only good-paying jobs were in railroads but these were few in number and some positions had a dual wage system that favored Anglo workers.³⁹

Significant numbers of native-born and immigrant Mexicans participated in the growing trade and commerce of the region. Merchants, grocers, and shopkeepers were more common than professionals. Old settlers referred to them as the Mexicans “**que eran del comercio.**” For example, in Mercedes, the Mexican-owned businesses included several billiards and grocery stores, two funeral homes, two drug stores, a taxi service, and several restaurants and general merchandise stores. Of the latter, one of the most important belonged to Tamaulipas immigrants, Antonio Garcia and his brothers. In the 1920s, more than ten clerks assisted the Garcias, who had customers come to their store from as far as Brownsville, which was more than 30 miles away.⁴⁰ At Corpus Christi, there were forty or fifty Mexican-owned businesses in 1930 versus less than half a dozen in 1900.⁴¹ Vicente Lozano, who came with his family from Tamaulipas to Corpus Christi in 1891, was probably the most successful, although his case was atypical. Like other Mexicans, he worked for a time in the fishing business and then in a grocery store. He opened his own store in 1902 and became successful, acquiring a beer distributorship and rental properties.⁴²

Economic History of the Eagle Pass, Del Río, Uvalde Districts, 1900-1930

This subregion was home to thousands of Mexicans, most of whom were immigrants. Largely from working class origins, they engaged in farm and ranch work. Farm work became more readily available with the introduction of irrigation in the Uvalde area in 1910. This was made possible when local farmers and ranchers tapped into a large underground stream, the so-called Edwards Aquifer.⁴³ Rail links with Mexico at the border also facilitated this migration and encouraged others in the 1880s to move further to points in the interior of Texas, especially to San Antonio and the blacklands or prairie lands of Texas that were being developed as cotton farms.⁴⁴ For example, D'Hanis, a farming community in Medina County located southwest of San Antonio, was originally settled in the early nineteenth century by immigrants from Alsace-Lorraine. The number of Mexicans rose from 112 persons or 13% in 1900 to 848 persons or 52% in 1920. The vast majority of the Mexicans were employed as farm laborers, with small numbers working as ranch hands, brick makers, and railroad workers.⁴⁵ Eventually, many of the Mexican immigrants found their way to farming communities north of Austin and some settled in Temple, Waco, Dallas, and Houston.⁴⁶

Economic History of the San Antonio District, 1900-1930

San Antonio and the surrounding counties did not have a very large native-born nor Mexican immigrant population until after 1900, or more precisely until the coming of the 1910 Revolution. San Antonio, the largest city in the district, only had 13,722 Mexicans in 1900 or 25.7% of the city's population.⁴⁷ Few Mexicans seem to have been attracted to settle there until the end of the nineteenth century, when land development and cotton farming gained momentum. Mexican grubbers assisted in clearing the brush from the rangeland. Thousands of cotton pickers were also employed seasonally, moving from one area to another as the cotton

was ready to be harvested.⁴⁸

In the early twentieth century, this district saw considerable economic growth primarily due to cotton farming. This created a strong stimulus for Mexican immigration and significant numbers of Mexican laborers, tenants, and sharecroppers settled on what had formerly been ranching land. The seasonal nature of cotton harvests led to a rapid rise in the number of migratory Mexican workers, which peaked at about 300,000 in 1939. Local and migratory Mexicans benefited producers because mechanization was prohibitive.⁴⁹

Others came to the district, primarily attracted by the rise in urban employment, especially in San Antonio, as the city began to widen its commercial links to the hinterlands of northern Mexico and western Texas and to foster incipient industrialization. A large force of working class Mexican immigrants populated the city. The one exception to this was a small group of proprietors, politicians, and intellectuals who settled in San Antonio during the duration of the Mexican Revolution. By the 1920s, there was also a small middle class consisting of proprietors and professionals. Still the vast majority of the Mexicans were poor, unskilled and semiskilled workers. By 1930, the proportion of Mexicans in the population had risen to 40%, with about 100,000 persons congregating in the **barrios** of the city.⁵⁰

Conclusion

This study has attempted to delineate the growth of a binational frontier along the border between Texas and Mexico. More specifically, I have sought to examine the impact of Mexico on the social and economic development of South Texas, which has a strong historical nexus with Mexico since the eighteenth century. I employed a long-view approach in order to see continuity and change from the second half of the nineteenth to the first third of the twentieth

century.

The key elements in Mexico that had an impact on South Texas were primarily economic and political. That is, the demand for consumer goods in Mexico fueled the so-called Mexican trade that was vital for the development of the Lower Valley, particularly in the period prior to and after the U.S. Civil War. Mexico had plenty of silver with which to entice this trade, and Mexican and non-Mexican merchants participated in this activity on both sides of the international border. In this way, there was a broadening of the Atlantic trade, which had started in 1820. Wars in Mexico as well as the U.S. Civil War also engaged merchants on both sides, resulting in a resurgence of the Atlantic trade. An important byproduct of this trade was a parallel growth in the labor force that was necessary to transport, store, and distribute the merchandise. In addition, Mexican migration to Texas began in 1848 as part and parcel of the emerging international economy. Much of the population of South Texas was Mexican-born, and the development of the region was dependent on Mexicans. This is true not only for trade but also in the ranching economy that was so critical to Texas after the end of the Civil War.

The arrival of the international railroads in northern Mexico in the late nineteenth century further served to promote economic expansion on both sides of the border. The Porfirato (1876-1910) brought about this important development. In the case of South Texas, the roads facilitated an increase in international commerce, with the orientation not the wider Atlantic world but to U.S. markets that received Mexican raw materials and agricultural products. The biggest beneficiaries in South Texas were San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Laredo. As noted above, Laredo replaced Brownsville as the most important city in the Lower Valley in the early 1880s, on account of the railroads and trade with Mexico. The rails also facilitated the

movement of workers from each side of the border, though more Mexicans always went north, rather than Americans going to Mexico.

In the twentieth century, political developments in Mexico, especially the long years of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and its immediate aftermath, increased the migratory movement of Mexican workers to the U.S. Coincidentally, commercial agriculture underwent intensive growth in the Lower Valley, and in Uvalde, and the rapid transformation of ranchland into farmland occurred across the entire region. Mexican workers filled the order for labor, and the region became totally dependent on them. Moreover, the impact of unstable conditions in Mexico forced not only workers but also skilled workmen, landowners, storekeepers, and merchants to leave their homeland. Demographically, the Mexican Northeast provided the bulk of the permanent settlers in South Texas, as it had traditionally done. Consequently, a second wave of social and economic growth unfolded as a result of the thousands of Mexicans who settled permanently in the period from 1900-1930. These included Mexican migratory workers who spread throughout the state, assisting in its rapid agricultural development. Such a large population of Mexicans in Texas, estimated to be about 700,000 in 1930, also raised social and political concerns, particularly as the U.S. entered the Great Depression in 1929. Those concerns would come to dominate much of the political conflict stimulated by the presence of Mexicans not only in Texas but throughout the U.S.

In terms of direct impact, all three subregions of South Texas benefited from the coming of the Mexicans. For historical reasons, the Mexicans probably adjusted better in the Lower Valley, where they participated in diverse work activities. Mexicans also settled in the Upper Río Grande district and in San Antonio as well as the rural counties surrounding that city.

Primarily a laboring class in these two districts, their fate was limited because of the residue of earlier Anglo-Mexican conflicts and continuing social and economic discrimination. Yet, the Mexicans shaped the Upper Río Grande and San Antonio district in ways that most observers did not understand.

In sum, the first third of the twentieth century brought continuity to the earlier era (1848-1900) in terms of continued Mexican migrations but change in terms of the social and economic activities that were central to their lives. Also, for a long while, in the early twentieth century international trade and commerce declined in importance, with each country focusing on the development of its own lands. The binational border shared by Northern Mexico and South Texas nurtured a symbiotic relationship involving people, economy, and governments in a complex way where discernable historical patterns could remain constant or change according to new exigencies in either Mexico or the U.S.

-
1. On western Texas, see Arnolde De León and Kenneth L. Stewart, **Tejanos and the Numbers Game: A Socio-Historical Interpretation from the Federal Censuses, 1850-1900**, Albuquerque, 1989.
 2. Manuel Gamio, **Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment**, 1930; rpt. New York, 1971; Gamio, **The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant**, 1931; rpt. New York, 1971; Mario T. García, **Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920**, 1981; George J. Sánchez, **Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945**, New York, 1993. On transnationalism, see the special issue, "Rethinking History and the Nation-State Mexico and the United States as a Case Study," **Journal of American History**, vol. 86, no. 2, September 1999.
 3. Emilio Zamora, **The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas**, College Station, 1993; Mario Cerutti and Miguel A. González Quiroga, **El Norte De Mexico y Texas (1948-1880): Comercio, capitales y trabajadores en una economía de frontera**, Mexico City, 1999, Part II. Also see David Montejano, **Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986**, Austin, 1987.
 4. **U.S. Census of Population, 1850, Lower Rio Grande Valley**. Armando C. Alonzo, **Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900**, Albuquerque, 1998, 96-97.
 5. For interborder trade and commerce, see Cerutti and González Quiroga, **El Norte de México**, Part I. The origin of the Mexican trade was the opening of the port of Matamoros in 1820 on the north side of the Rio Grande at the island of Brazos Santiago and Punta Isabel (renamed Port Isabel in the U.S. period). For a brief description of this early Atlantic trade, see Alonzo, *idem.*, 68-74.
 6. **U.S. Census of Population, Cameron County, Texas 1880**.
 7. Alonzo, **Tejano Legacy**, 102; Roberto R. Calderón, "Mexican Politics in the American Era, 1846-1900: Laredo, Texas," Ph.D., Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1993, Part III, 670-71.
 8. Christopher Long, "Corpus Christi," in **The New Handbook of Texas**, 2:332; "1880 Corpus Christians wore hats of many trades," **Corpus Christi Caller**, January 26, 1975, Sec. B1. Also see Alonzo, **Tejano Legacy**, 103-04.
 9. Alonzo, **Tejano Legacy**, 104.
 10. *Ibid.*, 104-05.

-
11. Lawrence Phillip Knight, "Becoming a City and Becoming American: San Antonio, Texas, 1848-1861, Ph.D. Diss., Texas A&M University, 1997, 8, 10-11. San Antonio consisted of three groups: Mexicans, Anglo Americans, and Germans. By 1860, the largest group were the Germans, who had started arriving in the region in the 1830s. Also see Montejano, **Anglos and Mexicans**, 29, 5:512-13; "San Patricio," **New Handbook**, 5:870-71.
 12. David J. Weber, **The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846**, Albuquerque, 1983, 242-55; Montejano, **Anglos and Mexicans**, 26-27; Paul D. Lack, "Occupied Texas: Bexar and Goliad, 1835-1836," in Emilio Zamora, Cynthia Orozco, and Rodolfo Rocha, eds., **Mexican Americans in Texas History**, Austin, 2000, 35-49.
 13. Luis G. Gomez, **Mis Memorias**, Rio Grande City, Texas, 1935; Refugio County, **Tax Rolls**, 1860-1900; San Patricio County, **Tax Rolls**, 1860-1900.
 14. Alonzo, **Tejano Legacy**, 110.
 15. *Ibid.*, 111.
 16. *Ibid.*, 255-56. The basic paradigm used to explain immigration to the U.S. is the "push" and "pull" factors in the migration process. For a brief description of U.S. policy with regards to Mexican immigration to the Lower Valley, see Armando C. Alonzo, "A History of the Mexicans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas: Their Role in Land Development and Commercial Agriculture, 1900-1930," M.A. Thesis, University of Texas At Pan American, Edinburg, Texas 1983, 58-62. Hubert J. Miller, "Mexican Migrations to the U.S., 1900-1920, With a Focus on the Texas Rio Grande Valley," **The Borderlands Journal**, Vol. 7, no. 2, Spring 1984, 165-205.
 17. Roberto Martinez, interview, San Diego, Texas, February 20, 1999 and August 5, 2000.
 18. For a good description of this coming-and-going pattern of migration involving Mexican migrants from Burgos, Tamaulipas, see Camilo Amado Martinez, Jr., "The Mexican and Mexican-American Laborers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, 1870-1930," Ph.D. Diss., Texas A&M University, 1987, 151-52.
 19. Alonzo, "Mexicans in the Lower Valley," 55. After one of his sons was hung towards the end of the Revolution, Lucas Maltos and two grown sons arrived in the Lower Valley from San Luis Potosi in 1920. Esther Vega Alonzo, interview, Edinburg, Texas, July 7, 26, 2000. Hiding from the revolutionaries in the sierra near Dr. Arroyo, Nuevo León was the strategy of the Morales Family. Blasa Morales Ovalle, interview, Edinburg, Texas, July 7, 2000. Camilo Briones also lived near Dr. Arroyo with his family. He was eight or nine when he came with his parents to La Lomita, near Mission, Texas. He recalled that at the end of the Revolution, conditions were still not safe. "Former solders returned to commit thefts and murder people." Camilo Briones, interview, Hargill, Texas, July 7, 2000.

-
20. Alonzo, **Tejano Legacy**, 42; Oakah L. Jones, Jr., **Los Paisanos: Spanish Settlers on the Northern Frontiers of New Spain**, Norman, 1979, 48-50.
21. Miguel León-Portilla, "The Norteño Variety of Mexican Culture: An Ethnohistorical Approach," Edward M. Spicer and Raymond H. Thompson, eds., **Plural Society in the Southwest**, Albuquerque, 1972, 77-114.
22. **Records of Alien Owners**, Webb County, Texas.
23. **Records of Alien Owners**, Cameron County, Texas; **Records of Alien Owners**, Webb County, Texas; **Records of Alien Owners**, Zapata County; **Records of Alien Owners**, Jim Hogg County; The Mexican side of the Lower Valley received the first railroad in the early 1880s. Daniel Cosío Villegas, **Historia Moderna de Mexico**. El Porfiriato Vida Economica, Mexico, 1965, 7:539-40, 566-67.
24. See Table 4 **supra** for a listing of all records used to compile the data on occupations.
25. In California for the period show that the percentages of Mexican blue collar workers range from 70 to 91 percent. Sánchez, **Becoming Mexican American**, 191-92. Sample data for El Paso found 81 percent of Mexicans to be blue collar workers. García, **Desert Immigrants**, Table 5.2, 89. Nearly all of the Mexicans in the Midwest were agricultural or industrial workers. See Dionnicio Nodiín Valdés, **Barrios Norteños: St Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century**, Austin, 2000, chs. 2 and 3. There are no reliable figures for San Antonio.
26. Zamora, **Mexican Worker**, 18-19, 21-22, 29, 44. According to Zamora, the Mexicans were excluded from the most important railway unions.
27. George O. Coalson, "The Building of the Railroad to Brownsville, 1903-1904," **South Texas Studies**, 1990, 43-44.
28. Alonzo, "Mexicans in the Lower Valley," 35-36.
29. Ramon P. Guerra, **Etapas De La Vida de Ramon Guerra**, copy available in John Shary Special Collection, University of Texas at Pan American, n.p., n.d., 5.
30. Alonzo, "Mexicans in the Lower Valley," 36.
31. Guerra, **Etapas De La Vida**, 1-5; Alonzo, "Mexicans in the Lower Valley," 36-38; Antonio García, 'People sold their land for 10 cents an acre if they had not use for it.' **Mercedes Enterprise**, July 25, 1974, 1. Fathers and sons worked in the **desmante**. Briones, interview.

-
32. Alonzo, "Mexicans in the Lower Valley," 39-44.
 33. Ibid., 44.
 34. Antonio Balderas, Sr., interview, McAllen, Texas, December 2, 2000.
 35. J. J. Ballí, interview, Weslaco, Texas, November 15, 1997.
 36. Mariano Ybarra, interview, Edinburg, Texas, November 15, 1997.
 37. Victoria Moreno, interview, Edinburg, Texas, March 19, 1998.
 38. Juan González III, interview, laredo, Texas, November 14, 1997
 39. Paul S. Taylor, **An American-Mexican Frontier, Nueces County, Texas**, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1934.
 40. Patricia Espinoza Cantú, interview, Mercedes, Texas, February 21, 1999. Abel García, Jr., interview, Mercedes, Texas, February 21, 1999. García, 'People sold their land for 10 cents an acre, 1.
 41. Taylor, **An American-Mexican Frontier**, 178; **Revista Mexicana de Comercio**, May 15, 1947, n.p., copy in Mireles Collection, Special Collections, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. Apparently, the Mexican Chamber of Commerce was in existence in Corpus Christi since 1939.
 42. "Vicente Lozano, Pioneer Merchant, Dies at Age 70," news clipping in William M. Nyland Collection, Box 21.9, copy in Special Collections, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi.
 43. "Uvalde," **New Handbook**, 6:658-86; "Winter Garden Region," *idem.*, 1026.
 44. San Antonio and El Paso, Texas served as primary labor markets for the distribution of Mexican immigrants throughout the U.S. Sánchez, **Becoming Mexican American**, 65-66. See Neil Foley, **The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture**, Berkeley, 1998, 30, 32.
 45. David Hudson, "D'Hanis, Texas: Immigration, Integration & Assimilation," M.A. Thesis, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, November, 1993, charts 6 and 7, 78-89.
 46. María Cristina García, "Agents of Americanization: Rusk Settlement and the Houston Mexicano Community, 1907-1950," in Zamora, ed., **Mexican Americans**, 124-25.

-
47. Richard A. García, **Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941**, College Station, 1991, 28 and Table 1, 29.
48. Ibid., 28; Zamora, **Mexican Worker**, 14-15.
49. Joe Motheral, "Recent Trends in Land Tenure in Texas," Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin no. 641, June, 1944, 5, 38-40. Also see Arnoldo De León, "Mexican Americans," in **New Handbook**, 4:666. Few questioned the dependency on cheap labor, see Montejano, **Anglos and Mexicans**, 185.
50. García, **Mexican American Middle Class**, 34-36.