

Hispanics in Rural America

The Influence of Immigration and Language on Economic Well-Being

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Of all minority groups in the 1980's, Hispanics had the greatest numerical growth in rural¹ areas and in the United States as a whole. Although only a small percentage (8.5 percent) of all Hispanics lived in rural counties, those who did were concentrated in the Southwest. Such concentration made them an important minority, and in some cases a majority, in rural counties of that region. The poverty rate among rural Hispanics rose from 27.2 percent in 1980 to 32.1 percent in 1990, the largest increase for any rural group and larger than for urban Hispanics. Part of the increase in poverty for rural Hispanics appears to have been related to the effects of continuing immigration, lack of proficiency in speaking English, and concentrated employment in agriculture.

Identifying Rural Hispanics

The term "Hispanic" represents an extraordinarily diverse category of people. The 1990 census counted respondents of any race as Hispanics if they identified themselves as part of any of the following groups: Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Argentinean, Colombian, Costa Rican,

¹ Rural people are defined here to be those who live in counties outside the boundaries of metropolitan areas, as defined by the office of Management and Budget at the time of the census, and urban refers to people within metropolitan counties. See appendix for a complete definition. An additional 4 percent of the rural Hispanic population live in open country and nonsuburban towns of less than 2,500 people within urban counties. The largest concentration of these Hispanics live in the agricultural valleys of California, where the large size of counties leads to the inclusion of sizable amounts of low-density territory within some counties with large urban centers. Our discussion of the rural *colonias* of California touches on some of the problems of rural Hispanics in urban counties, but we have not included them in most of our analysis in the interest of consistency with other chapters in this report.

Dominican, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Peruvian, Salvadoran; from other Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean or Central or South America; or from Spain (Schick and Schick, 1991).

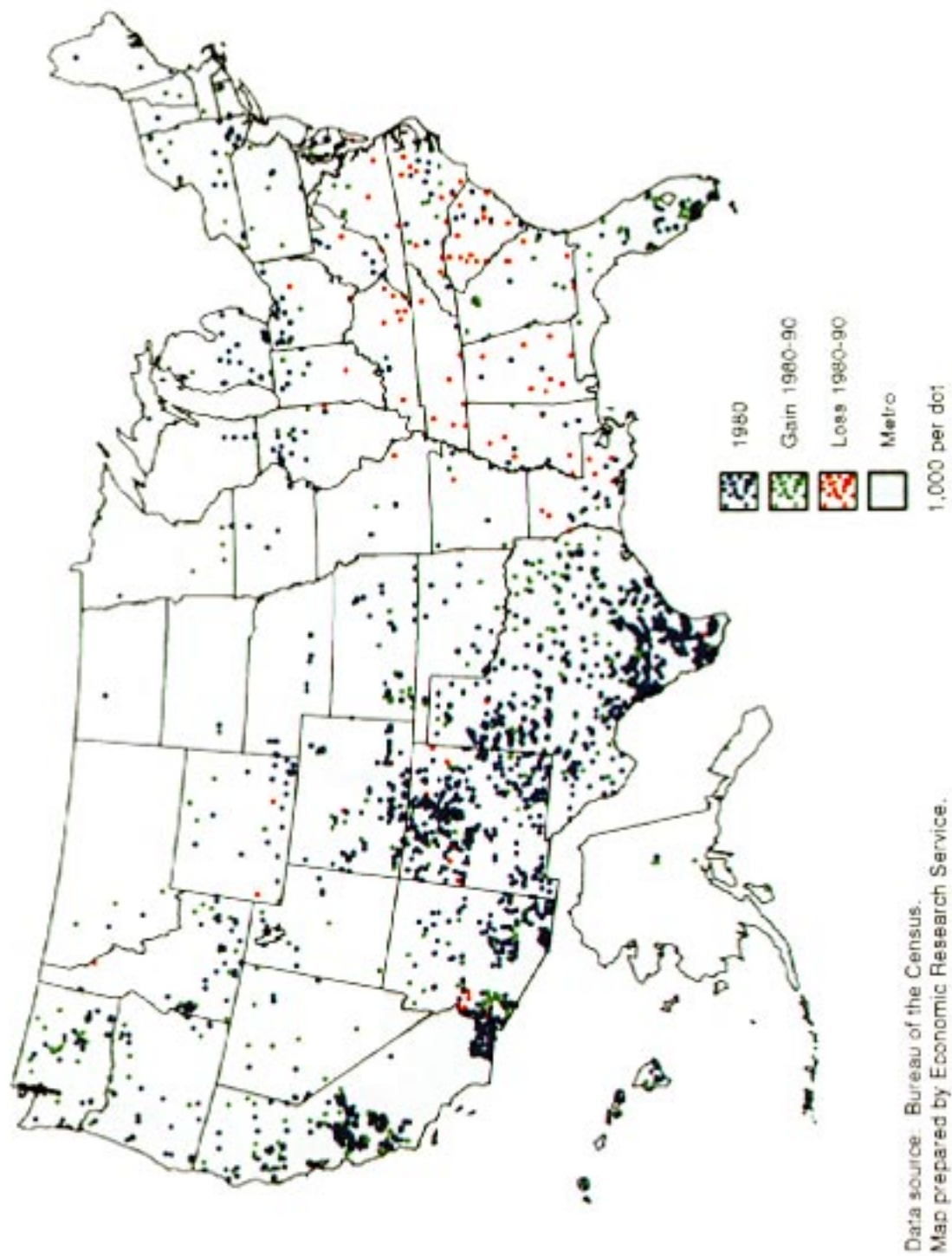
According to census results, the Hispanic population in the United States increased 50 percent between 1980 and 1990, compared with an increase of only 7 percent in the rest of the population. Immigration and relatively high rates of childbearing accounted for much of that increase, as well as improved methods to avoid and compensate for chronic undercounting of the Hispanic population (Schick and Schick, 1991). The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 may also have improved counting by legalizing large numbers of Hispanics who, as undocumented immigrants, would have been difficult to reach in earlier censuses.

Hispanics made up only 3.7 percent of the U.S. rural population in 1990 and only 8.5 percent (1,864,353) of Hispanics in the United States lived in rural counties. Hispanics, in fact, were more heavily concentrated in urban counties than were non-Hispanics and were particularly clustered in central cities. Rural Hispanics, however, were heavily concentrated in the Southwest, making them an important rural minority group in that region.

Geographical Distribution

Rural Hispanics were scattered across the United States, but were most concentrated in the Southwestern States of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Colorado (fig. 1). That region's 19th-century Mexican antecedents, and the long, relatively ungarded border with Mexico, have perpetuated settlement. The agricultural character of the Southwest and the agricultural backgrounds of many immigrants have added to the concentration of

Figure 1
Hispanics in nonmetro counties, 1980-90



rural Hispanics in this region, although agriculture no longer employs most of them.

Hispanic settlement in rural Florida and the Northeast largely reflects historical immigration patterns of Cubans and Puerto Ricans, although many Mexicans have also settled in Florida, drawn by agricultural employment. Settlement in the West, Midwest, Great Lakes region, and Southeast is generally related to agricultural employment patterns, although Hispanics permanently settled in those areas may no longer be employed on farms.

The number of rural counties with more than 50 percent Hispanic population rose from 32 in 1980 to 38 in 1990 (fig. 2). Texas contained the largest number of these counties and gained the greatest number (21 in 1980 to 26 in 1990). Texas also contained the rural county with the largest percentage Hispanic population, Starr County (96.9 percent in 1980 and 97.5 percent in 1990). Two other Texas counties, Maverick and Jim Hogg, had Hispanic populations over 90 percent in both 1980 and 1990.

Recent growth of the rural Hispanic population has not altered settlement patterns appreciably, although settlement has expanded into counties surrounding previous areas of concentration, particularly in California and Oregon (fig. 1). The widespread legalization of undocumented Hispanic immigrants following passage of IRCA in 1986 may be adding to the effect by encouraging new settlement away from border areas (Mines and others, 1992; Cross and others, 1993).

Colonias

Following the 19th-century annexation of Mexican territory, non-Hispanic or Anglo farmers acquired large amounts of ranchland from Mexican owners, often by contesting Mexican land titles. As a result, many Mexicans became agricultural laborers rather than landholders, particularly in California and Texas. Former Mexicans in New Mexico and Colorado retained their land to a much greater extent and have sustained more independent, self-sufficient communities. A concentration of landless Mexican-Americans in California and Texas, however, in economically dependent, unincorporated settlements known as *colonias* has sustained poverty through lack of access to government services, poor educational facilities, and limited employment. Those conditions are aggravated through continual new immigration to these settlements (Rochin and de la Torre, 1991; Saenz and Ballejos, 1993; Rural Sociological Society, 1993).

Although border *colonias* have existed in the Southwest since the early 20th century, new *colonias* have come into being as increasing Hispanic settlement transforms older rural towns. Unlike barrios, in which Hispanics live as ethnic minorities, *colonias* are rural towns in which Hispanics have become the majority. But rather than becoming enclaves of opportunity for Hispanics to control their own businesses and government, they have become increasingly dependent on outside resources for supplies and employment. In California, these settlements are characterized by their dependence on seasonal farmwork for income and their consequent community poverty. Without internal community resources, education and infrastructure have suffered, further impoverishing the communities and limiting the opportunities for their residents (Rochin, 1995; Rochin and Castillo, 1995; Allensworth and Rochin, 1995).

Nationalities Within Rural Hispanic Population

A substantial majority of rural Hispanics were of Mexican origin (76.9 percent) in 1990. Four percent were Puerto Rican, 1.2 percent Cuban, and the remaining 17.9 percent “other Hispanics.” While “other Hispanics” in urban counties were largely Central and South American immigrants, in rural areas they were primarily “Hispanos,” who are descendants of the original Spanish settlers of the Southwest. They are a population of fourth- and fifth-generation Mexican-Americans who “entered” the United States by virtue of an international treaty and continue to live on ancestral lands or in long-settled Hispanic communities (Marin and Marin, 1991; Bean and Tienda, 1987).

Important differences in measures of economic and social well-being appear among these groups, making generalizations about rural Hispanics problematic. Moreover, small counts and questions about the way in which Hispanics identify themselves within census categories complicate the interpretation of these differences. Historical immigration and migration patterns among Cubans and Puerto Ricans have led few to settle in rural areas. Aggregate data drawn from such small numbers may give an unreliable description of the characteristics of these two nationality groups. Data on rural “other Hispanics” may be affected by younger Hispanos choosing to identify themselves as Mexican-American because of the Chicano civil rights movement, leaving the “other Hispanic” category to an older generation (Tienda, 1981). Because of these difficulties, and because these groups make up less than 25 percent of the total rural Hispanic population, most of the analysis in this

Figure 2
Hispanics in nonmetro counties, 1990

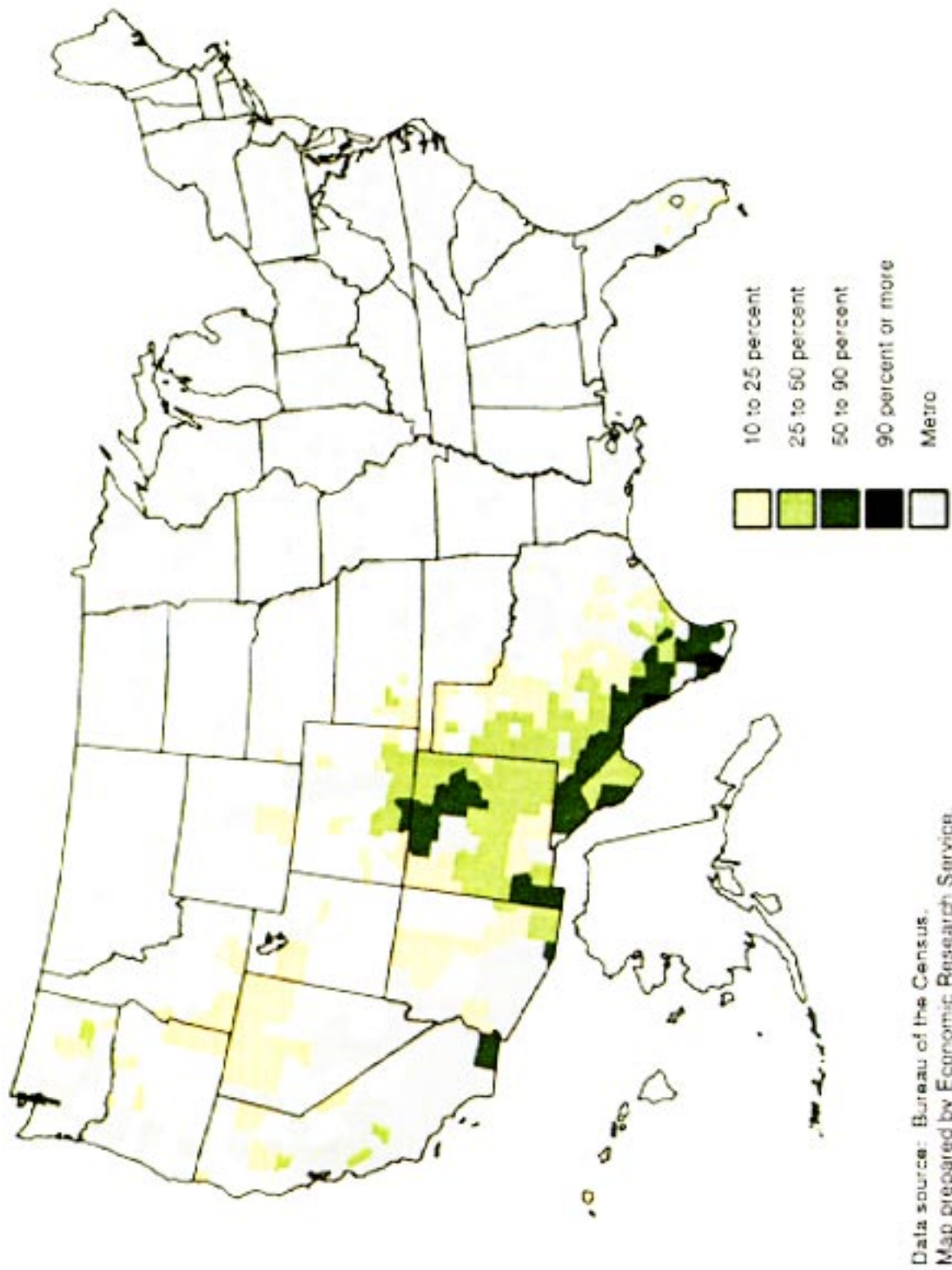


Table 1—Poverty rates by race/ethnicity, 1980-90

Item	1990	1980
<i>Percent</i>		
Rural ¹		
Hispanic	32.1	27.2
Mexican-American	34.1	28.6
Non-Hispanic White	13.2	12.5
Black	40.1	38.6
Native American	37.7	33.9
Urban		
Hispanic	24.1	22.8
Mexican-American	24.9	22.2

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

chapter will consider only the rural Mexican and Mexican-American population. We will refer to this group as Mexican-American, although a number of Hispanics in this category are not American citizens.²

Factors Affecting the Economic Well-Being of Rural Mexican-Americans

As for other rural minorities, poverty is a pervasive problem for rural Hispanics. The poverty rate among rural Mexican-Americans rose nearly 5 percentage points from 28.6 percent in 1980 to 34.1 percent in

² It could be argued that at 17.9 percent of the rural Hispanic population, “other Hispanics” should be included in this chapter’s analysis. Compared with rural Mexican-Americans, rural “other Hispanics” are better educated, more likely to speak English as a first language, less likely to be employed in agriculture, have fewer children, live in smaller households, and are less likely to live in poverty. Most of these measures, including higher median age (28 compared with 23), higher median household income (\$18,692 compared with \$17,328), lower mean persons per household (3.2 compared with 3.7), lower mean number of children per female age 35-44 (2.4 compared with 2.9), higher per capita income (\$7,632 compared with \$5,840), greater high school completion rate (63.5 percent compared with 34.1 percent), may be related to the generational difference noted in the text. In any case, when viewed in light of the lower percentage of recent immigrants (7.2 percent compared with 11.3 percent) and the higher percentage speaking English as a first language (47.1 percent compared with 23.4 percent) among “other Hispanics,” these data support the thesis of this chapter—that immigration and English language ability affect the economic well-being of rural Hispanics. Therefore, in order to avoid potential errors in interpreting this data and to simplify our presentation, we have chosen to concentrate on Mexican-origin Hispanics.

Table 2—Rural¹ Mexican-American immigration, language ability, and employment in agriculture, 1980-90

Item	1990	1980
<i>Percent</i>		
Immigrant	11.3	8.6
Speak English (age 5+)		
At home	23.4	22.1
Well, very well	60.2	61.1
Not well, not at all	16.5	16.8
Employed in agriculture (age 16-64)	16.1	15.7

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

1990, the largest percentage increase for any rural race/ethnicity group and larger than for urban Mexican-Americans (table 1).

Immigration, English Language Proficiency, and Concentration in Agriculture

Three characteristics of rural Mexican-Americans distinguish this minority from most other rural minorities and affect their economic well-being: continuing new immigration, use of Spanish as a first language, and concentrated employment in agriculture (table 2). The percentage of rural Mexican-Americans who were recent immigrants (those who have been in the United States less than 10 years) rose from 8.6 percent in 1980 to 11.3 percent by 1990. Employment of rural Mexican-American men in agriculture increased from 19.5 percent in 1980 to 21.5 percent in 1990.

The effects of these distinguishing characteristics on the economic well-being of rural Mexican-Americans were interrelated. Immigration and English language ability seemed the most important factors, but their effects were related to such economic disadvantages as poor education, concentration in low-paying industries (particularly agriculture), and low per capita income resulting from extended family households and low female labor force participation.

Educational Achievement

Rural residents with low educational attainment faced a particularly difficult employment picture in the 1980’s, since most new jobs in rural areas for those

Table 3—Highest education level completed by sex and race/ethnicity, 1990

Age/ education	Men				Women			
	Rural			Urban	Rural			Urban
	Mexican- American	Non- Hispanic White	Black	Mexican- American	Mexican- American	Non- Hispanic White	Black	Mexican- American
<i>Percent</i>								
1990								
Age 25-34:								
Less than high school	50.3	17.4	32.1	50.8	41.5	14.3	27.7	45.9
High school diploma	45.7	68.8	63.3	41.9	53.0	70.8	65.4	46.6
BA/BS degree or more	3.9	13.8	4.6	7.2	5.5	14.8	6.9	7.5
Age 35-44:								
Less than high school	50.7	14.8	39.6	51.1	48.8	13.3	35.5	48.5
High school diploma	41.4	63.4	53.3	39.3	44.6	67.9	55.9	44.6
BA/BS degree or more	7.8	21.8	7.1	9.6	6.6	18.8	8.7	6.9
Age 45-54:								
Less than high school	65.0	24.7	59.2	59.0	67.6	22.8	53.5	61.2
High school diploma	29.4	57.9	35.4	33.0	29.3	65.0	39.7	34.4
BA/BS degree or more	5.5	17.5	5.4	8.0	3.1	12.1	6.9	4.4
1980								
Age 25-34:								
Less than high school	48.6	16.2	39.4	48.7	50.9	16.6	33.4	48.2
High school diploma	44.1	63.6	52.9	43.0	45.1	67.5	58.5	46.2
BA/BS degree or more	7.3	20.3	7.7	8.4	4.0	15.9	8.1	5.6
Age 35-44:								
Less than high school	66.7	25.8	57.8	58.0	68.3	25.3	56.8	61.6
High school diploma	29.4	57.0	36.8	35.1	29.7	63.7	37.4	34.7
BA/BS degree or more	3.9	17.2	5.4	7.0	1.9	10.9	5.8	3.8
Age 45-54:								
Less than high school	78.8	40.0	76.1	67.9	79.1	35.8	70.6	73.4
High school diploma	16.9	47.1	19.8	27.1	19.6	56.5	22.5	24.0
BA/BS degree or more	4.3	12.9	4.1	5.0	1.3	7.7	6.9	2.6

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

with low education levels were in lower paid industries (McGranahan and Ghelfi, 1991; Jensen, 1991; McGranahan, 1988; see also "Education and Rural Minority Job Opportunities," by McGranahan and Kassel in this volume). Education levels for rural Mexicans were quite low in 1990 compared with rural non-Hispanic Whites and rural Blacks, particularly for men and especially for high school completion among the youngest adults (table 3). Only urban Mexicans showed lower high school completion rates in the youngest adult age group. Moreover, high school and college completion rates for Mexican men, both urban

and rural, have not improved since 1980 and for some age groups have fallen lower than in 1980. Increasing immigration, which is disproportionately composed of younger, poorly educated men, may account for these falling levels of education.

Although high school completion rates improved for Mexican-American women, rural Mexican-American women's educational levels remained well behind those for both rural Black and rural non-Hispanic White women.

Table 4—Distribution of employed persons age 16-64 by industry, sex, and race/ethnicity, 1980-90

Industry	Men				Women			
	Rural ¹			Urban	Rural			Urban
	Mexican-American	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Mexican-American	Mexican-American	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Mexican-American
<i>Percent</i>								
1990								
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	21.5	9.0	7.8	9.3	8.7	2.8	2.5	4.0
Mining	5.4	2.7	1.2	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.1
Construction	12.6	12.6	11.8	14.4	0.8	1.4	0.6	1.0
Manufacturing	18.4	24.3	34.6	22.5	13.1	16.0	30.6	19.2
Food and kindred products	6.0	2.0	4.1	2.8	5.3	1.3	3.6	2.6
Other nondurable goods	2.8	6.5	11.2	5.4	4.1	7.6	17.7	7.6
Durable goods	9.7	15.8	19.3	14.3	3.7	7.2	9.3	9.1
Services	13.5	19.7	16.0	19.6	42.8	46.9	42.0	43.2
Other industries	28.6	31.7	28.7	33.6	34.3	32.6	24.1	32.5
<i>Thousand</i>								
Total	414	12,730	922	3,374	302	11,380	1,032	2,488
<i>Percent</i>								
1980								
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	19.5	10.5	10.1	7.5	10.4	3.1	4.3	4.7
Mining	8.2	4.0	1.7	1.0	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.2
Construction	12.8	12.4	11.9	12.5	0.7	1.2	0.7	0.7
Manufacturing	19.9	25.8	37.0	29.6	19.2	20.1	31.2	26.5
Food and kindred products	4.5	2.3	4.0	3.6	5.8	1.7	3.7	3.3
Other nondurable goods	4.1	6.8	13.1	6.2	8.2	10.1	18.7	10.5
Durable goods	11.3	16.7	19.9	19.8	5.2	8.4	8.8	12.7
Services	13.0	16.8	15.2	17.4	38.5	42.4	43.8	38.6
Other industries	26.4	30.5	24.2	32.1	30.6	32.7	19.8	29.3
<i>Thousand</i>								
Total	321	13,402	974	1,944	229	10,975	994	1,460

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

Concentration in Agriculture

Mexican-Americans in rural areas are more heavily concentrated in farm and related agricultural industries than are non-Hispanics (table 4). That concentration increased for rural Mexican-American men from 19.5 percent in 1980 to 21.5 percent in 1990. Reasons for concentration in agriculture include poor English language skills and family/community connections with other agricultural workers, both situations compounded by rising immigration. Such concentration often leads to pockets of widespread poverty, since farm and agricultural jobs are generally seasonal and are among the lowest paid (table 5).

Employment in Other Industries

Agricultural employment, however, cannot account for the full measure of rural Mexican-American poverty. Although the largest concentration of rural Mexican-American men remained in agriculture in 1990 (21.5 percent), manufacturing (18.4 percent), services (13.5 percent), and construction (12.6 percent) also employed sizable percentages (table 4). Manufacturing employment, however, among the higher paying occupations, decreased slightly for Mexican-Americans, from 19.9 percent in 1980 to 18.5 percent in 1990. At the same time, although employment rates in services and construction remained stable or increased, the poverty rate among

Table 5—Poverty rates by industry for employed persons age 16-64 by sex and race/ethnicity, 1980-90

Industry	Men				Women			
	Rural ¹			Urban	Rural			Urban
	Mexican-American	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Mexican-American	Mexican-American	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Mexican-American
<i>Percent</i>								
1990								
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	35.2	15.0	37.2	29.5	42.4	15.7	53.7	34.3
Mining	23.3	8.5	15.3	14.2	28.6	5.1	6.7	2.7
Construction	27.4	11.2	24.5	21.2	21.7	10.1	20.9	15.6
Manufacturing	19.8	6.0	15.2	13.5	24.6	9.3	24.9	17.2
Food and kindred products	27.5	6.0	19.9	15.9	23.0	11.8	32.6	20.3
Other nondurable goods	13.0	5.0	12.3	13.9	29.3	10.5	24.4	21.0
Durable goods	17.0	6.4	16.0	12.9	21.6	7.7	22.8	13.2
Services	25.0	8.9	22.7	17.7	23.8	9.1	32.8	17.7
Other industries	19.9	7.8	21.7	14.8	24.7	13.5	33.1	19.0
Total employed	28.6	10.1	26.3	20.4	29.0	12.2	38.4	22.0
1980								
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	34.1	17.6	43.1	25.4	36.0	16.9	51.6	26.7
Mining	11.3	6.6	12.0	9.2	0.0	5.0	22.2	12.1
Construction	22.8	9.3	24.8	16.4	12.5	9.4	38.0	16.7
Manufacturing	15.6	5.5	16.6	12.5	19.1	8.5	23.0	15.8
Food and kindred products	23.4	6.4	18.6	14.1	17.2	11.6	33.3	20.3
Other nondurable goods	15.9	4.5	13.3	13.7	21.9	9.1	21.1	19.4
Durable goods	12.4	5.7	18.4	11.9	16.8	7.2	22.7	11.6
Services	19.3	7.5	21.4	15.5	18.7	8.4	29.5	15.9
Other industries	13.9	6.6	21.0	12.7	17.9	10.5	29.7	15.5
Total employed	22.9	9.4	28.1	18.2	23.9	11.1	35.7	20.5

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

Mexican-Americans employed in those industries rose much more than among Mexican-Americans in agriculture. The increases in poverty rates among those employed in these occupations rose at much greater rates, in most cases, than for rural non-Hispanic Whites, rural Blacks, and urban Mexican-Americans (table 5).

While labor force participation rates remained stable for rural Mexican-American men, unemployment increased from 7.9 percent in 1980 to 10.9 percent in 1990 (table 6). Unemployment decreased for rural non-Hispanic White men and increased less than 1 percent for urban Mexican-Americans.

Unemployment also increased among women of all race/ethnicity and residence groups except rural non-Hispanic Whites. Women of all groups experienced an increase in labor force participation (table 6). Rural Mexican-American women increased participation in the labor force, but also were increasingly unemployed. Urban Mexican-Americans and rural Blacks increased labor force participation by a similar percentage and saw equal increases in unemployment, both very close to the increase for rural Mexican-American women.

Also increasing poverty among rural Mexican-Americans was the increasing poverty rate for rural Mexican-American women in the labor force (table 5). Although more of these women began

Table 6—Labor force participation and unemployment rates for civilian persons age 18-65 by sex and race/ethnicity, 1980-90

Item	Men				Women			
	Rural ¹			Urban	Rural ¹			Urban
	Mexican-American	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Mexican-American	Mexican-American	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Mexican-American
1990:	<i>Rates</i>							
Labor force participation	86.8	85.8	77.6	88.8	55.9	66.5	65.6	61.8
Unemployment	10.9	5.8	12.9	9.1	13.9	5.8	13.6	11.1
1980:								
Labor force participation	86.7	86.9	77.2	89.1	48.1	56.1	59.0	55.5
Unemployment	7.9	6.4	10.1	8.3	11.7	6.5	12.0	9.5

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

working over the decade, their poverty rates increased even more than for rural Mexican-American men. Poverty among working women increased in most industries for rural non-Hispanic Whites, rural Blacks, and urban Mexican-Americans as well.

Family and Household Patterns

Per capita income for rural Mexican-Americans in 1990 was little more than half that of rural non-Hispanic Whites, even though median household income was almost three-fourths that of rural non-Hispanic Whites (table 7). Continuing low labor force participation and high rates of childbearing among rural Mexican-American women combine to reduce the number of earners relative to household size, although labor force participation increased in the 1980's and the mean number of children for women age 35 to 44 fell.

Rural Mexican-American household size has remained high because of the prevalence of extended family households, which are often the result of immigration of adult siblings and cousins and their families. Sharing a household can be advantageous by applying pooled income from several earners to household costs. Poverty rates indicate extended family households fared much better than nonfamily households and single-parent households among rural Mexican-Americans, although not better than nuclear married-couple households. Nuclear married-couple households may not have become extended family households because their relatively high incomes made pooling resources unnecessary.

Poverty rates for all types of rural Mexican-American households increased over the 1980's, however, while average household size remained the same. Although larger households may account for greater poverty among rural Mexican-Americans compared with rural non-Hispanic Whites, they do not account for increasing poverty over the decade.

Interaction of Immigration and English Language Proficiency

Both continuing immigration and difficulty in speaking English sustain the economic disadvantages of poor education and low-paying jobs, which in turn lead to continued poverty among rural Mexican-Americans. English language ability seems the most important predictor for economic success, but immigration plays a role, apparently because of its effect on English language proficiency. Over 50 percent of immigrant Mexican-Americans were poor English speakers, compared with 11.6 percent of nonimmigrant Mexican-Americans.

A review of the measures describing conditions among rural Mexican-Americans in 1990 illustrates the effects of immigration and English language ability on poverty and suggests their interrelatedness (table 8). Many more immigrants than nonimmigrants lacked a high school diploma; poor English speakers were nearly twice as likely to have less than a high school education as those who spoke English well and more than three times as likely as those who spoke English as a first language. Both immigrant rural Mexican-Americans and rural

Table 7—Family and household characteristics by race/ethnicity, 1980-90

Item	Rural ¹			Urban
	Mexican-American	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Mexican-American
1990				
Median household income	\$17,328	\$24,200	\$12,927	\$24,700
Average household size	3.7	2.5	3.0	4.0
Per capita income	\$5,840	\$9,506	\$5,904	\$7,431
<i>Percent</i>				
Persons by household type				
In family households	94.1	87.7	90.0	94.1
In extended family households	10.7	3.3	18.1	14.6
In nonfamily households	5.9	12.3	10.0	5.9
Related children				
In two-parent family households	76.8	84.4	46.7	73.8
In female-headed family households	18.1	12.2	48.3	19.6
In extended family households	6.3	2.7	14.3	8.3
Mean number of children per woman age 35-44	2.9	2.1	2.7	2.8
Poverty rates by family and household structure				
In family households	33.7	11.2	38.7	24.7
In extended family households	31.7	14.7	46.8	23.7
In married-couple families	28.4	8.2	22.2	19.5
In female-headed families	57.5	34.0	60.4	45.3
In nonfamily households	40.3	28.2	52.2	28.0
1980				
Median household income ²	\$20,036	\$24,681	\$13,603	\$24,005
Average household size	3.9	2.7	3.4	3.9
Per capita income	\$5,895	\$10,683	\$5,414	\$7,140
<i>Percent</i>				
Persons by household type				
In family households	94.8	90.1	92.1	94.3
In extended family households	6.0	2.5	11.8	6.7
In nonfamily households	5.2	9.9	7.9	5.7
Related children				
In two-parent family households	84.6	88.3	59.4	80.0
In female-headed family households	12.5	9.7	36.9	16.9
In extended family households	3.0	1.6	7.2	3.2
Mean number of children per woman age 35-44	4.3	2.8	4.0	3.6
Poverty rates by family and household structure				
In family households	27.8	10.7	37.1	21.8
In extended family households	28.0	15.0	39.4	20.8
In married-couple families	24.2	8.9	26.7	17.4
In female-headed families	55.0	30.0	58.4	45.8
In nonfamily households	44.6	28.9	56.0	28.2

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.

² Income items converted to 1989 dollars using the Personal Consumption Expenditure index.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

Table 8—Effects of English language ability and immigration on Mexican-American employment in agriculture, educational attainment, and poverty rates, 1980-90

Item	Immigrant status		Speak English (age 5+)		
	In last 10 years	Over 10 years ago	Only	Very well/ Well	Not well/ Not at all
<i>Percent</i>					
1990					
Rural ¹ total	11.3	88.7	23.4	60.2	16.5
Employed in agriculture (age 16-64)	39.1	12.2	5.9	12.8	39.8
Poverty rate (age 18+)	39.0	28.3	21.5	27.3	43.8
Education (age 25-64)					
Less than high school	80.4	51.2	28.8	49.9	90.1
High school diploma	17.3	43.3	62.0	44.7	8.7
BA/BS degree or more	2.3	5.5	9.2	5.4	1.2
Urban total	18.4	81.6	22.9	54.5	22.6
Employed in agriculture (age 16-64)	13.4	5.3	2.8	5.0	15.1
Poverty rate (age 18+)	30.9	18.4	14.1	18.5	31.1
Education (age 25-64)					
Less than high school	75.1	47.9	25.1	46.4	84.9
High school diploma	20.0	44.5	62.3	45.8	13.2
BA/BS degree or more	4.9	7.6	12.7	7.8	1.9
1980					
Rural total	8.6	91.4	22.1	61.1	16.8
Employed in agriculture (age 16-64)	37.9	13.1	7.4	12.5	39.3
Poverty rate (age 18+)	25.6	16.7	23.6	20.5	39.1
Education (age 25-64)					
Less than high school	89.0	62.3	53.2	58.6	93.3
High school diploma	8.4	33.6	42.2	36.7	5.6
BA/BS degree or more	2.5	4.1	4.6	4.7	1.1
Urban total	16	84	23.1	56.3	20.6
Employed in agriculture (age 16-64)	10.9	5.2	2.1	4.9	14.1
Poverty rate (age 18+)	25.6	16.7	13.4	15.9	27.6
Education (age 25-64)					
Less than high school	81.9	53.8	34.1	52.2	89.5
High school diploma	15.2	40.2	56.4	41.6	9.0
BA/BS degree or more	2.8	6.1	9.4	6.1	1.5

¹ Rural is defined as those areas outside metropolitan boundaries and is equivalent to nonmetropolitan; urban is equivalent to metropolitan.
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990 Census.

Mexican-Americans with poor English skills were much more heavily concentrated in agriculture than were nonimmigrants and rural Mexican-Americans with good English skills. The poverty rate for immigrants was much higher than for nonimmigrants, although the difference was only half as great as that

between poor English speakers and those with good English skills.

Continuing Poverty Among English Speakers

Rural Mexican-Americans who speak English as their first language had levels of education in 1990 much closer to rural non-Hispanic Whites and are even less

concentrated in agriculture than rural non-Hispanic Whites. Yet, although their poverty rate in 1990 was much lower than that of poor English speakers, it was still more than twice that of Whites. What perpetuates such continuing high rates of poverty is not certain, although larger household size and lower labor force participation rates for women may account for some of it. Historical discrimination in landownership, quality of education, employment opportunities, and access to government services, exacerbated by segregated settlement patterns and continual immigration, are also important, if difficult to address (Rochin and de la Torre, 1991; Rochin, 1995; Rural Sociological Society, 1993; Saenz and Ballejos, 1993; Jensen, 1991; Tienda, 1981; Kuvlesky and others, 1982).

Effects of Poor English Language Skills

The disadvantage poor English language skills present to rural Mexican-Americans is real. Moreover, the earnings differential between poor and fluent English speakers seems to increase in areas where the population of non-English speakers is high (Bloom and Grenier, 1993). If concentration of recent immigrant, non-English speaking Hispanics in isolated rural communities like *colonias* continues to increase, the disadvantage of poor English skills will become more pronounced. At the same time, the likelihood of overcoming that disadvantage will decrease, as such communities face greater need for local government services like education and fewer resources with which to provide them.

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