Undocumented Central Americans in Houston: Diverse Populations[1]

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Fleeing political conflict and/or economic decline, large numbers of undocumented Central Americans have been coming to the United States since the late 1970s. Many of these migrants have settled in urban areas of the country that have large Hispanic concentrations. It is estimated that about 100,000 have settled in Houston. Interviews and observations indicate that this Central American population, composed principally of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans, constitutes a new diverse Latino immigrant experience in the city.

Following political and economic instability in Central America in the late 1970s, large waves of migrations have characterized the region. Millions of Central Americans have migrated internally or to Mexico (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1984; Aguayo, 1985; Jamail and Stolp, 1985). Several hundred thousand have also migrated, "without papers", to the United States (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1984; Ruggles and Fix, 1985; Penalosa, 1986), especially to urban centers with large Hispanic populations. In Houston, a city with over 300,000 native Hispanics, and an undocumented Mexican population estimated at over 80,000 for the early 1980s (Bean, *et al.*, 1982), immigrant-aid agency directors, social workers and other observers familiar with Latino immigration estimated the number of undocumented Central Americans at over 100,000 in 1986.[2]

This article describes preliminary findings of an on-going study, launched in the summer of 1985, that has sought to identify the different undocumented Central American populations in Houston and to explore their aspects of settlement, work, and motivations for emigrating.

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[2] Other estimates for the 1985 Central American population in Houston are 80,000 Salvadorans, by Ruggles and Fix (1985); 80,000 Salvadorans and 5,000-10,000 Guatemalans, by the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy and the Commission on U.S.-Central American Relations (1985); and 100,000, by Jamail and Stolp (1985). In a report originally published in 1984, Fernando Penalosa states that the Salvadoran community in Houston "may have already reached 100,000" (1986:29).

To help introduce the relatively new topic of undocumented Central American immigration, the following section points out the significance of undocumented Central Americans as a new Latino immigrant experience, especially *vis-à-vis* Mexican migrants.

UNDOCUMENTED CENTRAL AMERICANS AS "NEW IMMIGRANTS" [3]

In comparison to past Mexican immigration in Houston, several factors distinguished undocumented Central Americans as new immigrants. First, though the undocumented Central American population shares an Hispanic cultural heritage (Spanish language, Catholicism, *etc.*) with Mexican immigrants, the population's diverse national and ethnic composition (*See,* Table 1) introduces new cultural elements to the city. These cultural transfers include cuisine (*pupusas* from El Salvador, *tamales de maiz* from Guatemala, *etc.*), language (Mayan languages from Guatemala and Garifuna from Honduras), and even cognitive categories of political understanding (*"el pueblo", movimiento popular", etc.*) germane to the exceptional politics of Central America.

Second, and no doubt related to the cognitive dimension, the undocumented Central American population has drawn different attention and response from law-enforcement agencies of the U.S. government, *vis-à-vis* undocumented Mexican migrants. The surveillance and interrogations of undocumented Salvadorans in Houston, in 1985, by U.S. government agents demonstrate that the U.S. government perceives these migrants with a special political concern (*See,* Theis, 1986). Prosecution of sanctuary movement workers by the U.S. government is seen as another indication of the government's special political concern with undocumented Central American immigrants (*See,* MacEoin, 1985; Golden and McConnell, 1986).

Third, some undocumented Central Americans bring a level of community organizational experience not typically found among undocumented Mexicans. This is especially true of Salvadorans who were involved in *comunidades de base* (often Christian base communities, but not always), originated by adherents of Liberation Theology and maintained by popular Catholicism (*See,* Lernoux, 1980). Prior experience with community work can be an important resource for constructing, or participating in, small organizations that help the migrants' incorporation into the host society by providing temporary housing, job information, English classes, *etc.*

Fourth, undocumented Central Americans have given a new direction to the Hispanic residential configuration in Houston. A large segment of undocumented Central Americans have settled in the old Mexican/Chicano

[3] In this article, the term "immigrant" refers to all categories of migrants that enter the country; the term is not meant to imply a desire for permanent residence, nor is it meant to contrast with the term "refugee".

TABLE 1

THE MAJOR UNDOCUMENTED CENTRAL AMERICAN POPULATIONS IN HOUSTON

Population	Background Characteristics
Guatemalan	
Hispanics	Spanish language; urban origin (Guatemala City)
Indigenas	Bilingual (Spanish, Quiche, Mam, and Cakchikel); heavily rural (hamlet) origin, urban origin are from small towns
Honduran	
Hispanics	Spanish language; urban origin (Tegucigalpa, San Perdo Sula)
Garifunas	Bilingual (Spanish and Garifuna); heavily small-urban origin from coastal areas
Salvadorans	Spanish language; urban and rural origin (especially from San Salvador and eastern provinces)

barrios where Mexican immigrants are concentrated; but large numbers of undocumented Central Americans have also settled in areas of the city with little or no prior Hispanic presence. Perhaps one-third to one-half of undocumented Central Americans in Houston reside in neighborhoods that form zones of Hispanic transition or zones of new Hispanic settlement (which are described below)[4].

A fifth factor that distinguishes undocumented Central Americans as a new immigrant experience in Houston is their time of arrival, from the standpoint of the area's economic development. Whereas undocumented Mexicans, and even Indochinese refugees, migrated to Houston heavily in pre-1980 days of record-setting growth in the area's petrochemical and construction industries, Central Americans have migrated, and are migrating, to Houston in a time of severe downturn in these industries. Consequently, as the discussion below will describe, undocumented Central American workers have not followed the heavy-industry employment patterns of earlier migrants to the city.

As this review of factors indicates, undocumented Central Americans in Houston differ in several ways from previous undocumented Mexican migrants. Just as important, however, undocumented Central Americans also differ internally by nationality, and, in the cases of Guatemalans and Hondurans, by ethnicity and race. The sections below demonstrate how this diversity leads to significant differences in the undocumented Central Americans' adaptation in Houston.

[4] According to Penalosa (1986), Central Americans have also significantly affected the development of the Latino section of Los Angeles. Many of the estimated 500,000 Central Americans in Los Angeles arrived into the intensely Latino section of the central city, especially the Pico-Union district, and, after adapting, moved to other surrounding areas.

THE FIELD INVESTIGATION

To identify the undocumented Central American populations in Houston and to compare their conditions of work and settlement in different areas of the city, the study evolved a multifaceted methodology of interviewing undocumented immigrants, employers and organizations, collecting life histories, and observing community life in areas with concentrations of undocumented Central Americans. With a special concern for processes of community development, the study's investigation has focused on a variety of social activities. These include church-sponsored events, community meetings, English classes, fund raisers, household and community fiestas, soccer games, teacher-parent meetings, union organizing activities, and weddings. Researchers collect information as invited guests or participants in these events. A daily journal is also kept of all contacts in the field.

Conducted by an eight-member crew of Mexican Americans and undocumented Central Americans, equally divided by gender, open-ended interviews constitute the core of the study's information gathering activity. In addition to addressing individual sociodemographic conditions, the 90 open-ended questions of the interview schedule focus on ten areas: housing, work, workplace and community intergroup interaction, organizational participation in the community, health, employment in the country of origin, reasons for emigrating, experiences with political conflict, conditions during the journey to the United States, and U.S. education of the children. Open-ended interview schedules are especially valuable for the study's explorative nature because they allow respondents from different countries to use their own cognitive and experiental categories, enhancing the ability to analyze behavior that undocumented migrant populations sometimes perceive differently among themselves, or differently from members of U.S. society.

Of the 280 interviews planned, 162 have been conducted, and 150 are sufficiently complete to form the basis for this article's presentation. The completed interviews consist of three major national categories, i.e., 80 Salvadorans (40 males), 31 Hondurans (14 males), and 28 Guatemalans (24 males), and of 8 Nicaraguans, 1 Belizian, 1 Costa Rican, and 1 Panamanian. Because of the concern for informed consent, only migrants age 18 or older have been interviewed. Thus far, tape-recorded interviews, not counting life histories, have yielded 732 pages of transcription.

While the clandestine and vulnerable conditions of undocumented migrants preclude systematic random sampling, the study has maintained efforts to stratify the sample by population and area of the city. The interviewers find migrants to interview partially through snowball procedures and partially by going to places frequented by Central Americans, places ranging from street corner labor pools to community organizations. Given their cohesion,

members of a Guatemalan *indigena*[5] population from the province of Totonicapan have been interviewed by one of their own, a 24 year-old male who migrated to Houston after receiving a teaching certificate. Honduran Garifunas, a group of Afro-Caribbean descent, have been interviewed by a Mexican American female, but always accompanied by a Garifuna friend who introduces the study. Salvadorans and Hispanic Guatemalans [6] have been interviewed by Mexican Americans and Salvadorans.

Undocumented Central Americans have given mixed responses to interview requests. Some have cooperated fully and enthusiastically, sometimes sitting for hours recounting their experiences back home, the perils of their journey, and their arrival and settlement in Houston. Others, after being read the informed-consent statement, quickly decline the interview, suspicious of its purpose or viewing it as *politica.* Some who refused to be interviewed are Salvadorans who have lost family members in their country's political violence.

The level of openness and, hence, of detail in an interview is usually dependent on the immigrant's level of confidence with the interviewer. In some cases, the level is quite high, and, thus, migrants casually call in to report new experiences or describe their journeys from Houston to places outside the state. Often, the Mexican American interviewers gain the migrants' confidence by performing needed favors for them. For example, in one case, an interviewer obtained an indigena's life-history during trips to a charity hospital where the interviewer acted as an interpreter between the migrant and his doctor.

The absence of systematic random-sampling in the study precludes the offering of social statistics with definite levels of sampling error and degree of confidence. Thus, the reader should approach the paper's statistical tables cautiously. Nevertheless, as the following sections attempt to demonstrate, the study's ethnography should give interesting insights into the sociology of undocumented Central American migration to Houston. Firmer conclusions must await the completion of the study.

THE POPULATIONS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The study has found undocumented Central American migrants in Houston from all seven Central American countries. The major migrant populations

[5] In regard to the Guatemalan population, I use the term "indigenas" (indigenous) to refer to people of Mayan descent. English literature commonly uses the term "Indians" for this population. I prefer "indigenas" because it is used by Mayan-descent migrants in Houston and because they view "Indians" ("Indios") as an incorrect, improper, and denigrating term. Both male and female indigenas have lectured me quite firmly on this point.

[6] I use the phrase "Hispanic Guatemalans" to refer to Guatemalans who have a Spanish cultural heritage and are not of Mayan descent. In Houston, indigenas classify themselves as "Hispanic" on offical forms (medical, employment, *etc.*) but only because they see it as a residual category. Mindful of the Spanish-Mayan heritage differentiation, indigenas find it curious when other

(*See,* Table 1) vary considerably in size and, perhaps related to this factor, in the level of adaptation to their new environment, especially in the degree to which they undergo community development, *i.e.,* form localities with major functions of social reproduction.

Salvadorans

Salvadorans constitute the largest population of undocumented Central Americans in the Houston area. Migrating to Houston since the late 1970s, they became the first undocumented Central Americans to establish a noticeable presence in the city. Judging from a comparative visibility with undocumented Mexicans, undocumented Salvadorans in Houston probably number over 50,000.

The presence of females, persons in their thirties and older, and a segment with primary and post-primary educational experience (*See,* Table 2) no doubt have been important resources for the Salvadorans' formation of an active community. Females fuel the development of families and, hence, of family-related activities, such as weddings and baptisms, that trigger community social participation. The mere presence of teenage females causes male members of the population reflectively and/or behaviorally to acknowledge traditional community norms of intergender relations. Females play an especially important role in the daily reproduction of community life through their practice of ethnic cuisine. Several times during the study's observations, Salvadoran women also prepared Salvadoran foods for community festivals. Using ethnic products more often than males do, Salvadoran women promote the development of ethnic stores in their immigrant community. As the study observed, females are more likely than males to shop in ethnic food stores.

The presence of a relatively large segment of persons in their thirties or older serves as an important resource for the development of a community normative structure among the Salvadorans. In contrast to younger cohorts, persons in their thirties or older have completed most of their sociocultural socialization and are often themselves socializing agents. Indeed, in the study's observations, criticisms of perceived community deviance, *e.g.,* Salvadoran women taking jobs in bars or in dance halls, invariably came from older members of the sample.

Finally, the presence of a significant number of males and females with more than a primary education provides an important resource for the construction of formal organizations which, regardless of their specific objectives, always keep the goal of community development in mind, seeing it as a means to counteract the institutional disadvantages of un-

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undocumented workers address them as "raza", a term used in Latino working classes to express a common peoplehood and unity.

TABLE 2

AGE, EDUCATION, AND MARITAL STATUS

	Guatemalan	Honduran	Salvadoran	Other	Total	%
Age						
18-29	18	14	47	3	82	54.7
30-39	9	14	23	6	52	34.7
40-above	1	3	10	2	16	10.7
Education					150	100.1
Primary	16	22	54	5	97	64.7
Secondary	12	7	18	6	43	28.7
Post-Secondary	–	2	8	–	10	6.7
					150	100.1
Marital Status						
Single	14	12	32	5	63	42.0
Married	13	17	40	6	76	50.7
Divorced or Widow	1	2	8	–	11	7.3
					150	100.0

documented status. Undocumented Salvadorans with secondary or post-secondary education participate in formal and quasi-formal organizations that offer low-priced or free community services ranging from immigration legal aid (especially for Salvadorans and Guatemalans) to community meals.

Guatemalans

The undocumented Guatemalan population in Houston is substantially smaller than its Salvadoran counterpart. Judging from their comparative visibility with Salvadorans and from their lower frequency of encounter in the interviews, the Guatemalans probably number fewer than half of the Salvadoran population, perhaps 10,000 to 15,000. Interviews indicate that the undocumented Guatemalan population, which consists of both Hispanics and Mayas (indigenas), started forming in Houston around 1982-1983, a few years after the undocumented Salvadorans began arriving.

With the exception of sports activity, the study has not found any significant signs that the general undocumented Guatemalan population is evolving its own community. If the Salvadoran case can serve as a model, Guatemalans will have to develop sizeable residential localities for a Guatemalan migrant

community to emerge. Presently, undocumented Hispanic Guatemalan migrants, heavily male, generally are found living next to, or with, Salvadorans.

If, however, undocumented Hispanic Guatemalans are slow to develop, or may never develop, a community, the opposite is true of the Guatemalan indigenas in Houston. Some indigenas have developed and used community networks to achieve a remarkable adaptation in Houston's modern setting, resulting in the ironic situation that these migrants from traditional, rural backgrounds fare substantially better than other undocumented migrants from industrial cities. As will be demonstrated below, this contrast in adaptation indicates the impact of the migrants' cultural diversity.

The study has encountered two populations of Guatemalan indigenas, one from the province of Totonicapan and the other from El Quiche. Interviews and general observations indicate that the two populations total over one-thousand members, mainly young, single males. Interviewers have maintained close contact with the Totonicapan group. Lengthy discussions and in-depth interviews indicate that Totonicapan indigenas undergo complex transitions when migrating from Guatemala to the United States: the transition from Gemeinschaft-like environments to modern urban-industrial (or post-industrial) cities, the transition from cottage industry to a wage-labor system, and the transition from ethnic-economic (indigena-ladino) stratification[7] to socioeconomic class differentiation.

Clearly influenced by their cultural background, the indigenas from Totonicapan take measures to maintain group cohesion and identity, in sharp contrast with undocumented Hispanic Guatemalans. The indigenas reside in areas separated from other Latinos, and, outside the workplace, they interact mainly among themselves. Even when participating in community events, *e.g.*, church meetings and sports, that involve other Latinos, they tend to maintain a group boundary. In a conscious effort to preserve group solidarity, the indigenas avoid playing each other in sports tournaments, fearing that friendly competition may lapse into conflict, as has occurred in past games with indigenas from El Quiche.

The women's long hair and use of traditional garments (the *huipil* and the *corte*) indicate the Totonicapan indigenas' conscious efforts to maintain their traditional culture in Houston. Social forces of U.S. society weigh upon these efforts. Though indigena parents prefer a bicultural (Spanish and English) socialization of their children, the children's participation in monolingual schools and, hence, increasing use of English makes this goal problematic. Two divorces and two "living-together" arrangments also evidence a decline in traditional culture.

[7] I do not mean to imply that indigenas constitute a class; but that indigena ethnic status has, generally and historically, been related to lower social, economic, and political status, *vis-a-vis* the ladino category. The discussion in this area is substantial, *e.g., See,* Adams (1970) and Smith (1984).

Further observations are needed to determine how representative the Totonicapan indigenas are of other Guatemalan indigenas in Houston. Carol A. Smith's 1977-1978 investigations in the western highlands of Guatemala indicate that the province of Totonicapan "is far from a 'traditional' Indian community in either cultural features or material conditions" (1984:20).

Hondurans

The undocumented Honduran population in Houston has demographic and social conditions similar to the ones of its Guatemalan counterpart. Forming in the mid-1980s, later than the Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations, this population, divided into Hispanics and blacks, is relatively small, perhaps numbering about 5,000-10,000 members. In the interviews, Hondurans are mainly in their twenties and early thirties, are as likely to be single as married, and have mainly a primary educational experience. Like Hispanic Guatemalans, Hispanic Hondurans have no identifiable residential localities; those not in Honduran family units generally reside with Salvadorans. The study has not encountered any organization directed at undocumented Hondurans.

Like the Guatemalans, the undocumented Honduran population is divided into Hispanics and a racial-ethnic component, Garifunas, who migrate from Honduras' northern coast. Though this black subpopulation numbers only about 300 to 400, its social and cultural dynamism provides intriguing insights as to how the cultural diversity of undocumented Central Americans impacts their adaptation in their new environment.

Field observations and in-depth interviews of ten Garifunas indicate that these migrants of Afro-Caribbean origin are unique among the undocumented Latino population in Houston in at least five ways. First, Garifunas settle predominantly in black neighborhoods. Speaking mainly Spanish and Garifuna, they have little interaction with their black neighbors. Second, the Garifunas maintain an active cultural and mutual-aid organization almost completely through internal resources. In contrast to other Central American organizations in Houston, this organization is very internally oriented, not seeking publicity nor to educate the U.S. public. Third, partly through the organization, the Garifunas maintain close contact with other Garifuna communities (*See,* Gonzalez, 1979) in the United States, sometimes coming together for reunions. Fourth, in striking contrast to other undocumented Central Americans in Houston, Garifunas usually send their children (even the U.S.-born) back home to be raised by relatives; this frees Garifuna women to enter the labor force. Finally, the Garifuna have a social-cultural ability to interact with, and sometimes identify with, other Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the United States. Reggae music serves as a medium for this exchange in Houston.

The survey has not observed undocumented migrants from the other four countries in Central America at length. Their sample sizes are presently too small to determine any population patterns. None of these populations approaches the size of even the relatively small undocumented Honduran population. Only the Nicaraguans, who started making an undocumented population presence in 1985, appear to have an immigration force that can result in a sizeable concentration.

SETTLEMENT: ZONES AND HOUSEHOLD RESOURCES

The study's interviews and observations indicate that undocumented Central Americans in Houston have a multidimensional pattern of residential location. In addition, households function as the central organizing unit in the settlement process.

Hispanic Zones

Undocumented Central Americans in Houston settle in mainly three types of Hispanic zones: traditional Hispanic zones, transitional Hispanic zones, and zones of new Hispanic settlement. Traditional Hispanic zones consist of old barrios formed by Mexican and Mexican American immigration since the 1910s and 1920s (*See,* Melville, 1984). Three large traditional Hispanic zones exist in the eastern half of Houston, and, according to the 1980 census, census tracts in these zones have the highest levels of Spanish language usage and Spanish-origin foreign stock in Houston. As established settlement areas, the traditional Hispanic zones contain the most intense Hispanic communities and the most developed Hispanic business districts in Houston.

Perhaps as many as half the undocumented Central Americans in Houston reside in the traditional Hispanic zones. Tortillerias, Catholic and evangelical churches, cantinas, *etc.,* provide a community environment in these zones that comes close to the one left behind by the Central Americans. Naming a neighborhood bar after a Salvadoran province ("La Union") and the opening of Salvadoran restaurants demonstrate that the migrants are also affecting the zones, whose character has been influenced by over half a century of legal and undocumented Mexican immigration.

The study has also detected a small number of undocumented Central Americans in a 132-block area, in the city's northwest quadrant, that has definite patterns of a transition into an Hispanic section. An increasing Hispanic population, a growing number of Hispanic-oriented retail and service businesses, and a high usage of bilingual advertising vividly mark the zone's Hispanicization. The presence of Mexican American home buyers gives the zone a sense of becoming at least a bi-ethnic community of Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites.

In this zone of Hispanic transition, a few undocumented Central Americans, mainly young, single males, are scattered throughout in run-down apartments and small frame houses. Several Mexican immigrant residential clusters exist in the zone, but none are found of Central Americans. The zone's biggest operation involving Central Americans is a medium-sized factory that uses Salvadoran workers. If the zone is indicative of immigrant conditions in other zones of Hispanic transition that may exist, it is likely that these zones contain only a small segment of the undocumented Central American population in Houston.

Since the early 1980s, undocumented Central Americans themselves have formed new Hispanic settlement zones in the city's southwest sector and in areas near its northwestern and western boundaries, in heavily non-Hispanic white areas. These new zones are residential pockets ranging from a block to block clusters. The Central American concentrations in rows of apartment complexes produce a striking contrast with the areas' original commercial design of pizza parlors, McDonalds, Chinese restaurants, and so on.[8]

Because of their high level of Central American concentration, heavily Salvadoran, and their rapid rate of development, the new zones provide the most dramatic signs of a Central American presence in Houston. Groups of undocumented Central American men form street-corner labor pools in neighborhoods where the 1980 census found no Hispanic presence. Throughout, Central American women carry bundles on their heads (or in the ever present grocery cart) as they walk to and from laundromats and stores, usually accompanied by small children. In the apartment complexes, vendors make the rounds with the week's fresh supply of Salvadoran cheese, or with tickets to a raffle to finance a church fiesta or to help a local refugee center. Occasionally, the presence of INS agents, sometimes with drawn guns, breaks the normal rhythm of the community, as people caught in the open freeze or run for cover, and mothers scoop up their small children and head away from the danger.[9]

Interviews indicate that a small number of undocumented Salvadoran households that settled in 1975-1977 a few miles southwest from the downtown district initially attracted large numbers of Central American migrants to Houston's west side during the post-1980 immigration surge. As vacancies increased with Houston's economic downturns, apartment complexes a few miles farther west and southwest from downtown stimulated Central American

[8] The study has sought to learn how Central American migrants identify the different Hispanic settlements in Houston. While Mexican residents call the two traditional zones in the east side "el Segundo barrio" and "el barrio de Magnolia", Central American migrants refer to these settlements as "los barrios mexicanos". Central American migrants usually identify their settlement areas outside traditional zones by borrowing the name of a nearby avenue.

[9] With pistols in their hands, INS agents can be quite dramatic. Several agents raided a street-corner labor pool as a researcher of the study was interviewing the workers. The researcher was overcome by the event and seriously affected for several days.

immigration to the area by advertising vigorously for Latino tenants, with low rents and offers such as *"No Deposito!"* and "Free English Classes". In addition, the evolving Central American community structure of the new zones attracts migrants who settled originally in a transitional zone (described above) or in traditional zones.

The indigenas from Totonicapan and the Garifunas – the two most culturally different subpopulations in the study – are major exceptions, besides live-in servants, to the pattern of undocumented Central American settlement in Hispanic zones.

With the presence of many similar age relatives and friends from the same hometown or adjacent *cantones* (hamlets), the indigenas have been able to form settlement households independently of an Hispanic zone. Instead of developing a single colony in an Hispanic zone, the indigenas opted for the formation of small household clusters close to their workplaces. As a latent function of this settlement pattern, many indigenas have been able to obtain a higher quality of housing. Maintaining residences outside Hispanic zones fits the indigenas' general pattern of social separation from other Central American populations in Houston.

As mentioned above, Garifunas have settled mainly in black areas of the city. Three reasons have surfaced in the interviews for this settlement preference: black areas have lower rents, black areas are safe against racist behavior, and black areas have more Garifunas. At $140 to $200, the monthly rent of Garifunas in black areas is certainly lower than the $250 to $400 commonly paid by other Central Americans. The Garifunas' fear of a racial prejudice in Hispanic zones no doubt has some validity. Yet this is not a universal perception, as two Garifuna households have been found, along with other black immigrants, in a new Hispanic zone; in another case, a Garifuna woman lives with a Salvadoran family.

Settlement Stages

Observations of the study indicate that the migrants' ability to assemble social and economic resources at the household level primarily determines whether they settle in the city or not, notwithstanding an encounter with the INS. Thus, the settlement process is a series of household phases characterized by different degrees of these resources.

The study has detected four settlement stages. In the initial stage the undocumented migrant arrives in the city and looks for a place to stay. The level of difficulty in this stage is directly proportional to the arriving migrant's level of social resources in the city. Undocumented migrants who have many relatives or hometown friends in the city easily find a place to stay and orient themselves to their new setting; on the other hand, arriving migrants who have no social resources in the city may end up migrating to another area.

Presently, the indigenas from Totonicapan demonstrate the most successful accomplishment of the initial stage. Migrating from the same town and nearby cantones, this population of over 80 households is a rich source of social and economic resources for arriving indigenas from Totonicapan. The case of a recent arrival to the group illustrates its supportive function. Soon after arriving in Houston, Luis Navarro[10] broke a leg playing ball. His friends, all indigenas, immediately took up a collection to pay for his emergency medical fees. In crutches, and thus unable to work, Luis was completely cared for by his sponsoring household for three months. When he became despondent over his inability to contribute financially to the household, his friends again took up a collection for him to help pay the household's food and rent bills.

Hispanic Hondurans and Hispanic Guatemalans experience the most difficulty in the initial settlement stage. Being the most recent undocumented Central American populations in the city, they lack sizeable numbers of households to sponsor newly arrived migrants. In fact, all of the 37 Hispanic Hondurans and Guatemalans interviewed lived in multinational households or in immigrant/refugee centers.

Weekly interviews of an Honduran family indicated that problems in the first stage of settlement can lead to psychological stages among family members. In the family the mother manifested a series of psychological phases: high expectations of prosperous work and schooling for the children (weeks 1-1 1/2); anxiety and frustration, accompanied by headaches, over the husband's unemployment and having to deal with the children's school (weeks 1 1/2-3); questioning the decision to migrate to the United States and thoughts of returning home (week 4); reduction of stress and resurfacing of initial expectations, with the decision to migrate to another city (weeks 5-6).

Observation of a second undocumented family that failed to settle in Houston indicated that it was again the wife who experienced the higher level of frustration and doubt about the decision to emigrate. It is likely that, in the initial stage of settlement, women in families may be especially susceptible to stress because they stay behind in apartments or other shelter for long hours tending to worry about their husbands' job searches and their children's situations at school. The husbands and children, on the other hand, become actively involved with their new world.

A second settlement stage characterizes immigrants with an initially low level of resources. This stage involves moving into a household that provides the immigrant a higher level of social resources, especially for improving his or her employment status. The household, found in the orientation of the initial stage, may consist of relatives, friends, or acquaintances with access to employers. Interestingly, as eight cases demonstrated, through phone calls and letters, migrants may locate a second-stage household in another city.

[10] The names of migrants used in this article are fictious, for the interviewees' protection.

Migrants may enter a third settlement stage in which change of one's economic situation is the principle motivation for moving to another household. In cases where both husband and wife find employment, a family may move out of a multiple-family household to form a separate household; or finding employment, a single migrant may locate in a less crowded household.

INS raids can also cause this third type of settlement adjustment, as the removal of one employed household member can mean the economic collapse of the household. In one new Hispanic zone, INS raids led to a resettlement pattern among the undocumented Central Americans. The manager of an apartment complex in the area reported that in three months the occupancy level had dropped from 95 to 65 percent.

The study detected only two cases of a fourth settlement stage, *i.e.*, the buying of a home. In both cases the home buyers were families from the Totonicapan group. The families sold their small farms in Guatemala to help make the down payment of their new homes. One family bought a $30,000 frame house in a traditional Hispanic zone; the other family bought a $70,000 house in a suburb.

The arrival of newcomers, locating a household of relatives or friends, employment changes – all keep the undocumented Central American households in Houston in almost constant change. Yet, there is significant variation of household change between the different Central American populations. Of the migrants in the sample who had been in Houston for over 2 months, the mean household change per migrant ranged from 1.89 for the Totonicapan indigenas to 2.94 for Hispanic Hondurans, the least established in Houston. In between these figures were the Garifunas with 2.22, Hispanic Guatemalans with 2.42 and Salvadorans with 2.86.

The indigenas' lower household change value is instructive. While it is probably affected by smaller population size (which reduces opportunity for change), undoubtedly, it is also affected by the situation that many of these immigrants planned their migration with households in Totonicapan and, through letters and phone calls, with households in Houston. This planning activity indicates an important relation between household change and the level of social network used for organizing undocumented migration.

Observations of the study suggest the level of household change is inversely related to the level of the social-network base used for migrating. Stated differently, the larger the social network that serves for organizing undocumented migration, the greater are the social and economic resources that can be mustered for settlement, leading to greater household stability. A central condition in this relationship is the extent to which the social-network base is international. While in the short run, the advantage is in having social-network security in the United States, in the long run, a social network extending between this country and the place of origin can lead to

greater stability for facilitating the immigration of others who can become social resources and who can increase the economic status of the household. Of course, an international social network can facilitate several other things, *e.g.*, the transfer of funds and the implementation of family decisions made in one country to be carried out in another.[11]

The indigenas of Totonicapan have organized their migration at an integrated town and canton level, making their households in Houston extensions of these communities.[12] The group constitutes a single social network: there are few strangers among its over 300 members.

Furthermore, the settlement support enjoyed among the Totonicapan indigenas and among the Garifunas, is another illustration of how cultural diversity influences the migrants' adaptation in their new environment. While the case of the Salvadoran migrants suggests that a certain critical mass is necessary for the emergence of a community structure to sustain the settlement of migrants at an adequate level, the cases of the indigenas and the Garifunas suggest that small immigrant enclaves with a traditional orientation can also provide strong support for migrant settlement.

WORK CONDITIONS

Social networks furnish migrants with substantial support for settling in the United States, but it is work conditions that largely determine their final settlement outcome, assuming that the immigrant or family is not removed by the INS. The study encountered a variety of employment conditions and a striking workplace pattern among the undocumented Central Americans in Houston.

Employment Characteristics

Of the 150 undocumented Central Americans interviewed, 122 (81.3%) were employed. The unemployed segment consists of twelve who were looking for work, seven mothers with small children, three transmigrants, two who were recuperating from work injuries, two who had been in Houston for less than a week, a community worker, and a Salvadoran minister who comes twice a year to the United States to visit Salvadoran communities. If the day laborers (11) interviewed are placed in the looking-for-work category, which is a more realistic description of their employment situation, then the proportion of those in the sample unable to secure work is 17.2 percent. This rate is particularly severe for undocumented Central Americans, as, given

[11] Nothing has been more instructive in this regard than to observe undocumented parents meticulously plan through social networks the bringing of their children across two or three countries, by two or three different *coyotes* (smugglers).

[12] Two divorces among the indigenas illustrate that community norms in Guatemala influence the group's social behavior in Houston. In both cases the couples returned to Totonicapan to ask a council of family principals for permission to dissolve their marriage.

their exclusion from most social-service programs, they have to maximize income opportunities in order to maintain household cost-sharing strategies.

Using the Browning and Singlemann (1975) sectoral typology, the industrial distribution of the interviewed Central Americans is as follows: transformative, 23.4 percent; distributive services, 14.4 percent; producer services, 18.9 percent; social services, 1.8 percent; and personal services, 41.4 percent. Construction laborers make up half of the transformative category; the remainder worked in five different manufacturing businesses. In distributive services the majority worked as maintenance or stock workers in retail businesses; the remainder were divided into transportation and wholesale industries. All but one of the workers in producer services were employed in companies providing maintenance services to businesses. The exception was a secretary in an accounting firm. The community worker and the minister make up the social services category. Almost half of the workers in the personal services sector were domestic workers. The remainder in the category were employed in a wide assortment of personal-service businesses.

Given the study's urban setting, workers were not found in the extractive sector of agriculture and mining. There are indications, however, that Houston does provide undocumented Central American labor for this sector. A few weeks after being interviewed, a day laborer phoned in to report that he and twelve other undocumented Central American and Mexican workers had been recruited in Houston by an out-of-state agricultural employer. Two other interviewees reported knowing of similar recruitment cases.

In the sample, only the indigenas of Totonicapan and female Garifunas displayed a definite pattern of industrial involvement. According to the interviews and observations of the indigenas, over 90 percent of the population's male workers are employed by the same retail business. With the exception of two women who also work for the same retail business, all of the group's women who work outside the home are domestic workers. Garifuna women also have a similar pattern of domestic employment (*See,* Gonzalez, 1979, for a sharp contrast with the New York setting). Moreover, the finding that two Garifuna women worked for black families indicates that these workers have a wider market of domestic jobs than other undocumented Central American women.

The figures in Table 3 reflect the undocumented Central Americans' low earnings. After calculating the hourly wage of the day laborers who are paid $20 to $30 a day, and of the live-in servants, whose weekly pav ranges from $100 to $120, the sample's median hourly wage is $3.35, the minimum wage. Of the three highest paid workers in the sample, one was paid $7 an hour in a retail business where he cleaned floors for seven years; the other two, exceptional in their ability to find employment in their prior skilled occupations, were a bricklaying supervisor making $14 an hour and an electrician making $12 an hour.

TABLE 3

HOURLY WAGES

Hourly Wages ($)	No.	%	Cummulative %
Below 3.35	13	10.6	10.6
3.35 - 3.99	45	36.9	47.5
4.00 - 4.99	37	30.3	77.8
5.00 - 6.99	24	19.7	97.5
7.00 - above	3	2.5	100.0
Total	122	100.0	

The high proportion of low wages indicated in Table 3 reflect several conditions: *e.g.*, low levels of what is considered to be human capital (*See*, the educational category in Table 2), especially in regards to the lack of English proficiency; poor social resources for job information and introductions during settlement; and restraints of Houston's current 12.6 percent unemployment rate. The high proportion of low wages also reflects a leveling-function of undocumented status. Regardless of the undocumented worker's prior occupation, undocumented status almost invariably leads to low-status employment, especially during the early settlement phases. Among the workers making $4 an hour or earning $20 a day were some who came from skilled backgrounds, *e.g.*, welders, mechanics, and school teachers.

Employers' greed for profit is usually seen as the linkage between undocumented status and low wages. This perspective alone is superficial. It tells nothing of how undocumented labor is organized, or how it reacts to its organization, for its often special treatment in the workplace.

Undocumented Labor in the Workplace

Interviews and observations of the migrant workers revealed a striking characteristic of undocumented labor: within the broader context of the urban labor force, undocumented workers tend to form *enclaves*. A high percentage of Central Americans interviewed reported working in crews that had other undocumented workers, either exclusively or mixed with U.S. workers, especially Mexican Americans ("Chicanos"). The percentage ranged from 84.6 percent for Hondurans to 90.2 percent for Salvadorans.

One reason why undocumented workers, with the exception of live-in servants, tend to labor in a social form is that employers hire undocumented workers in groups. This practice ranges from the large employer that amasses several subcontracted crews of undocumented workers to the casual employer who hires two or three workers for a day from a street-corner labor pool.

An in-depth interview of a restaurant manager with experience in several restaurants in Houston revealed advantages that employers gain from employing a group of undocumented workers: an undocumented work group serves as recruiting means when additional workers are needed, as workers are anxious to find jobs for relatives, friends, or other household members; the social relations in the undocumented work group increase the efficiency of the labor process, as workers informally share tasks (this advantage increases with the homogeneity of the group, which reduces competition or conflict between workers); a work group with high national homogeneity performs the socialization of new workers.

The interviews of the restaurant manager and of the manager of a 62-worker maintenance crew indicate that some large employers of undocumented labor prefer to hire Central Americans to Mexicans. Both managers specifically pointed out that Central American workers are less likely than Mexicans to quit their jobs, or ask for weeks off, to make a trip home. The case of an office-cleaning crew with a large number of undocumented Central American and Mexican workers demonstrates that employer preferences can change easily. When Central American members of the 69-worker crew started union organizing activities, the employer switched to a preference for U.S. workers. A few weeks after a majority of the crew voted to form a union, the employer called the INS to remove the undocumented workers (conveniently at the end of the workday).

Another reason for the formation of undocumented labor enclaves is that undocumented workers frequently find work by obtaining information or introductions from other undocumented workers. This usually keeps the undocumented immigrant within the undocumented labor market, resulting in employment alongside other undocumented workers. The study's findings indicate that undocumented workers can, and do, derive advantages from their labor enclaves. These formations provide undocumented workers with a familiar (Spanish-language) labor setting, help in socializing into the new workplace, and information about other job opportunities. The socialization benefit is striking in the work crews of the Totonicapan indigenas as these workers instruct newcomers, coming from a handicraft background, how to operate complicated equipment and how to advance in the company's job hierarchy. To the extent that co-workers compare experiences, labor enclaves also serve to further the undocumented migrants' survival in the larger community.

REASONS FOR EMIGRATING

The interview schedule contains three questions to determine the undocumented Central Americans' reasons for emigrating: "Why did you emigrate?" "Did political conflict affect your family?", and "Did political conflict affect your job?". An interrelation of economic and political reasons for emigrating

TABLE 4

REASONS FOR EMIGRATING

	Guatemalan		Honduran		Salvadoran[a]		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Economic	17	60.7	25	80.6	24	30.4	4	36.4
Political Conflict	4	14.3	3	9.7	29	36.7	7	63.6
Economic & Political Conflict	2	7.1	–	–	5	6.3	–	–
Family Unification	4	14.3	1	3.2	13	16.5	–	–
Adventure	–	–	2	6.5	3	3.8	–	–
No Response	1	3.6	–	–	5	6.3	–	–
Total	28	100.0	31	100.0	79	100.0	11	100.0

Note: [a] The Salvadoran subtotal does not include a minister who comes to Houston twice a year.

constantly surfaced in the interviews. In Table 4 interviewees are classified in the economic category if they classified themselves as economic migrants, or if they mentioned economic incentives for migrating, and gave no emphasis to problems with political conflict. Interviewees are classified in the political-conflict category if they classified themselves as refugees, with a supporting account, or if they answered affirmatively to the questions concerning political conflict, with indications of substantial duress. Interviewees are classified in the economic and political-conflict category if they gave equal importance to both motivations.

As Table 4 indicates, in comparison to Guatemalans and Hondurans, Salvadorans gave economic reasons for emigrating at a markedly lower rate and political-conflict reasons at a markedly higher rate. In the residual category of 11 migrants, seven of the eight Nicaraguans gave political conflict as the motivating factor to emigrate. The remaining three migrants gave economic reasons.

According to interviews, the basis of the Salvadorans' economic motivations for emigrating is closely related to El Salvador's political conflict. Of the 30.4 percent who stated an economic motivation, one half reported that their job had been affected by the country's internal war. These cases ranged from vendors whose market places had been destroyed to factory workers dismissed because conflict prevented production. For example, Lucia Medrano, 36 years old and mother of three, migrated to Houston with three former co-workers when the textile factory where they worked, in the province of

San Miguel, closed because rural conflict prevented the transportation of raw materials to the factory. According to Lucia, about 300 workers were dismissed from the factory in 1982 when most of its trucks were destroyed on the roads.

Salvadorans who gave economic reasons for emigrating differ from similar migrants from other countries by their lack of return migration and their lack of plans to visit their homes. Only three of eighty Salvadorans interviewed had been back home, and only because they had been repatriated by the INS. Salvadorans who expressed desires to leave the United States planned to emigrate to Canada.[13]

Salvadorans who emigrate because of economic factors may also differ demographically from economic migrants coming from regions without conflict. The Salvadoran age-distribution figures in Table 2 suggest that economic decline spurred by war conditions produces an economic-migrant population older than one produced by economic stagnation alone. In the former situation all age cohorts risk economic affliction, and thus are potentially migratory; in the latter case, the youth, because they cannot be absorbed by the stagnate or slowly growing economy, are more prone to migration.

The specific categories of Salvadorans who cited political conflict as the reason or a partial reason for emigrating are the following: (1) persons who received direct threats of death or injury, (2) persons who belonged to an organization or family that is being persecuted, (3) persons who lived in areas of high random killings, (4) young men afraid of being recruited by either side,[14] (5) persons misidentified as political protagonists, (6) persons whose property was seized by a military group and were warned not to return, (7) families whose children were being psychologically and physiologically injured by war (such as hysterical crying and uncontrollable urination when sighting or hearing helicopters), (8) families with daughters in schools raided by armed groups, (9) families with sons approaching an age susceptible to military recruitment by either side. The finding that 46.8 percent of the Salvadoran sample reported political conflict had affected their families indicates the extensiveness of the war in El Salvador.

For methodological conditions explained above, the 43.0 percent of the Salvadoran migrants that gave political conflict as the reason, or a partial reason, for emigrating cannot be regarded as a fixed proportion. As mentioned above, some El Salvadorans known by others to have lost family members to political violence in El Salvador refused to be interviewed. In

[13] Working with a local immigrant legal assistance agency, the Canadian government grants political asylum to undocumented Central Americans in Houston. In the first half of 1986, 120 Central Americans in Houston were granted Canadian asylum.

[14] Though the study did not interview migrants younger than 18 years of age, several boy migrants, about 14 and 15 years old, were detected. Without being questioned, they indicated that they left San Salvador because they feared being recruited into "an endless war".

other cases, Salvadorans shied from questions concerning political conflict, cautioning about the presence of *orejas* ("ears", referring to informers).

The responses of several Guatemalan indigenas demonstrate the conceptual problem of analytically separating economic and political motivations for emigrating. While all 13 indigenas interviewed identified themselves as economic migrants, seven viewed the economic distress that motivated their emigration as a political condition. According to these indigenas, the violence against indigenas communities and the "scarce political station" of these communities led to the downfall of industry, rise in prices, and the inability to continue artisanal production. When asked if political conflict had affected their families or jobs, the seven indigenas answered "yes" and gave economic explanations for their response.

DISCUSSION

As indicated in the preceding sections, the diversity of the undocumented Central American population influences the migrants patterns of adaptation in Houston. With the advantage of a large size, the Salvadoran migrant population has been able to evolve formal and grass-roots organizations to provide resources for its adaptation in the City. Yet, given the many social and economic disadvantages of the migrants, the need for organizational services, *e.g.*, educational, health, and legal, exceeds the available supply.

The impact of cultural diversity on the immigrants' adaptation is readily evident among the Totonicapan indigenas and the Garifunas from Honduras' northern coastal towns. For both of these subpopulations, ethnic culture has been the source of a strong, cohesive social organization, which provides a level of adaptational support not found among the Hispanic Guatemalans or Hispanic Hondurans. Settling apart from the larger undocumented Latino enclaves, the indigenas and Garifunas effectively maintain their culture and support fellow migrants. Moreover, among the indigenas, social networks act as strong conduits to jobs for newcomers.

The diversity of undocumented Central American migration to the United States is influenced by the complex interrelation of political and economic conditions in Central America. For example, the undocumented Central Americans who claim to have emigrated for economic reasons vary from the usual patterns of undocumented economic migrants. In some cases, political circumstances back home affect the economic migrants' plans. Two Garifuna women demonstrated this well with their intention to bring their children to the United States if conflict in the Honduran-Nicaraguan border escalated.

CONCLUSION

Preliminary findings of the present study indicate that undocumented Central Americans represent a new immigrant experience in Houston. These

migrants differ significantly from other Latino immigrants in the city in social and cultural characteristics, political and organizational experience, settlement configuration, timing of immigration, and motivations for emigrating. Affected by these differences, undocumented Central Americans have evolved some community characteristics not found among other Latinos in the city.

The recent passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act adds to the uncertain future of the undocumented Central Americans in Houston, who already exist in a precarious state given the city's industrial depression and continuing instability in Central America. Yet, immigrants have never been passive actors in history. The different organizational and individual actions that some undocumented Central Americans are taking, and others plan to take, in response to the new law demonstrate the creativity that has fueled international migrations across the history of the modern world economy.

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