

# Undocumented migration from Mexico to the U.S.

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**U**ndocumented migration from Mexico to the United States has been a subject of much controversy and debate fueled more by emotion, prejudice and myth than by fact and scientific research. An illustration of this is the contrast between notions predominant in Mexico and in the United States about the same phenomenon. A fact considered positive in one country and negative in the other makes it difficult to conclude that the truth about the phenomenon is equally distributed on both sides.

The predominant notion in Mexico is that undocumented migration to the United States is basically a bilateral economic phenomenon created by a demand for cheap labor in the United States. Migrants are commonly called labor migrants. They are viewed positively as hard working people who are trying their best to improve their lot and have to cross the border without benefit of a migratory document because that is how the US really wants them, their undocumented status depriving them of their rights and therefore rendering their labor cheaper. In the US, the same phenomenon involving the same people under the same circumstances, is viewed basically as crime-related therefore requiring domestic solutions (under US legislation) of a police nature. Migrants are commonly called "illegal aliens" and are generally viewed negatively, as a threat, a sort of disease or plague caused by factors outside the US, of which the US is a victim.

The result of this contrast in perspective of the same phenomenon is miscommunication between the governments and the peoples concerned. They are at cross purposes on the subject of undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States.

Even when the two governments decide to negotiate a free trade agreement, the US decides unilaterally to exclude the migrant labor question from the discussion. However, there is a remarkable degree of consensus in the scientific community on both sides of the border, borne out by quotes in this paper.

*This paper presents recent data on the effects of the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA).*

The following analysis is based on empirical research conducted at *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*. The Zapata Canyon Project has sought to document the flow of illegal migration from Mexico to the United States since 1986.

## Reform of U.S. immigration laws

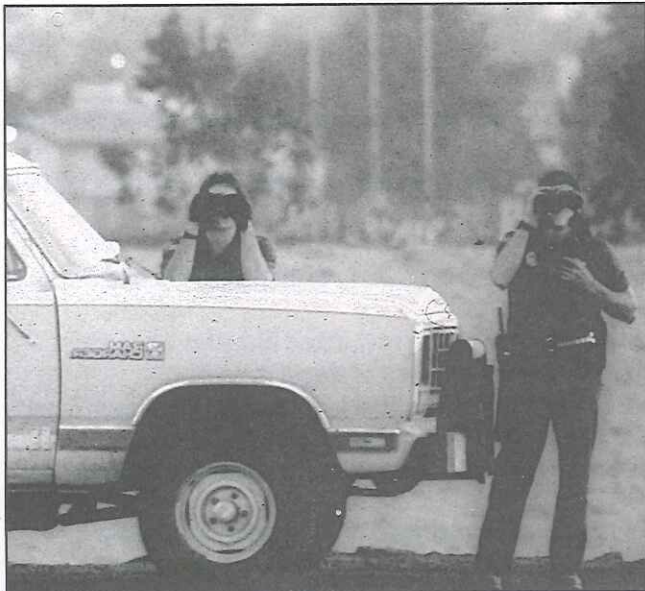
The passage of IRCA in November 1986 was fueled primarily by the contention that the US had "lost control of its borders"<sup>1</sup>. Diverse ideological factions worked to maintain fear in the American public that the presence of undocumented immigrants was a "serious danger"<sup>2</sup>. The power of these ideological factions drowned out the voice of the experts who maintained that undocumented immigration did more good than harm to the US economy<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The phrase "We have lost control of our borders" was coined on the eve of the presidential contest between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. Through a dramatic campaign on U.S. national television, the Republicans were trying to show President Carter's weakness in dealing with the more than 200,000 Cubans entering Florida. When the furor of the "Mariel invasion" died down, the phrase, which had captured the imagination of television watchers, was used by the proponents of IRCA to refer to the Mexican border situation.

<sup>2</sup> In a public opinion poll conducted in California in 1985, 87 percent of those interviewed felt that undocumented immigration from Mexico was at that time a "serious thing" or "very serious" (see Muller and Espenshade, 1985, p. 201). This book, one of the few that casts doubt on the negative effects of undocumented migration for the United States economy, was written shortly before the passage of IRCA.

<sup>3</sup> Shortly before the passage of IRCA, the U.S. Council of Economic Advisors released its annual report entitled *Economic Report to the President*, Washington, D.C., 1986. Chapter seven of this report is dedicated to the impact of undocumented immigration on the United States. It concludes, on page 233, that the overall impact is positive. It is amazing how little attention this report has received in the United States.

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Roberto Córdoba.

*Border patrol at El Bordo, Tijuana, B.C., 1989.*

The principal objective of the reform was to eliminate illegal entry of foreigners into the United States. To achieve this goal, the new legislation included various provisions, the best-known and most controversial of which was the imposition of sanctions on employers who hired undocumented immigrants.

This provision abolished the 1952 reforms, or the Walter-MacArran Act, which, with the Texas proviso, had made the US the only country that expressly authorized employers to hire foreigners entering the country in violation of its own immigration laws<sup>4</sup>.

In 1987, a provision of IRCA, known in the United States as "amnesty", allowed undocumented immigrants to legalize their immigration status. The new legislation offered two main routes to legalization. One was "regular legalization", which was open to those undocumented immigrants who could prove continuous residence in the United States since January 1, 1982. At the end of the application period, which lasted from May 5, 1987 to May 4, 1988, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reported that it had received 1.8 million applications, of which it estimated 90 percent would be approved (Espenshade et al., 1990). This figure was lower

than the 2 million applications the INS had estimated it would receive at the beginning of the program.

The other route for legalization was for "special agricultural worker" (SAW). This was open to foreigners who could prove that they had worked in perishable agricultural products in the United States for a minimum of 90 days during the 12 months preceding May 12, 1986.

A sub-category was opened in this route that granted temporary work authorization for one year, with the option to legalize permanently, so long as the work was exclusively in agriculture. After this period, qualifying individuals could apply for legalization as special agricultural workers. At the end of the last extension of the application period, on November 30, 1988, the INS reported that it had received more than 1 million applications.

Since undocumented immigrants who came to the United States after January 1982 were not eligible for the "regular legalization" program, the majority of undocumented Mexicans could not qualify, because their migration pattern included entering the US and returning to Mexico to visit relatives. This meant that the majority of undocumented Mexicans would try to qualify as special agricultural workers.

The INS reported that many of the applicants in this category presented fraudulent documents, so it was expected that in contrast to regular legalization, there would be a high percentage of applications refused in the special agricultural worker category (see Martin and Taylor, 1988).

In theory, the undocumented immigrants who did not legalize via one of the routes created by the new legislation would have to return to their country of origin. In reality, this does not appear to be occurring, the principal reason being that US employers have not stopped hiring undocumented workers<sup>5</sup>.

This has resulted not only in the continued presence of undocumented immigrants who did not qualify for legalization but also in the increased entry of new undocumented immigrants as shown in graph 1. The graph shows yearly changes after the passage of IRCA. The decline shown for 1989 was caused primarily by the number of undocumented immigrants who, after obtaining temporary work permits, caused undocumented migratory figures to drop once their applications for legalization of migratory status had been accepted.

<sup>4</sup> Section 1342 of Immigration and Nationality Act or Public Law 414, in 1952 and reformed in 1986, read as follows: "Any person who willfully or knowingly conceals, harbors or shields from detection, in any place including any building or by any means of transportation, or who encourages or induces, or attempts to encourage or induce, either directly, the entry into the United States of any alien shall be guilty of a felony. Upon conviction he shall be punished by a fine not exceeding five thousand dollars or prison not exceeding five years, or both, for each alien in respect to whom the violation occurs. Provided, however, that for the purpose of this section, employment, shall not be deemed to constitute harboring (emphasis added)".

<sup>5</sup> Ned Sullivan, director of the Los Angeles office of the U.S. Department of Labor, confirmed that the number of employers who pay less than minimum wage has increased since the passage of IRCA (in Weinstein, 1989). Anthony Mischel, a lawyer in the office of Legal Aid in Los Angeles, said that the number of cases (violations of the minimum wage law) formally opened, has tripled between 1986 and 1988 (in Weinstein, 1989). According to these observers, the majority of cases pertain to undocumented immigrants, for which specific examples are given.

## The process of migration

- Migration pressures are the result of differentials in job creation levels, job openings, and wage levels from one side of the U.S.-Mexican border to the other.
- The flow of legal and undocumented migrants from Mexico to the United States responds to both push and pull factors.
- It is strongly resistant to government intervention.
- While the migrant workforce provides benefits to U.S. producers, there is growing evidence of the fiscal impact of the migrant workforce on social services and health care costs.
- Mexican policymakers would prefer to have migrant workers employed in a revitalized Mexican economy, thereby eliminating the human trauma and risks that characterize the process of illegal migration.
- Massive and unregulated flows of migrants are problematic for both nations, but legal and agreed-upon levels of migration are advisable—and should be the subject of continuing bilateral discussion.
- The social and political tension that immigration sometimes creates can be ameliorated through a continuing bilateral policy dialogue.

As a general principle, we believe that the ultimate key to reasonable policies on migration lies in the achievement of solid and sustained economic growth in Mexico. Successful resolution of the problems of debt, trade, and investment constitutes a prerequisite for coping with the phenomenon of migration. We do not recommend efforts to seal off the border between Mexico and the United States, which would not succeed in any case. Measures necessary to achieve this goal would probably require the militarization of the border, the adoption of national identity cards, the imposition of severe penalties on employers of undocumented workers and widespread deportation of undocumented migrants—measures not likely to be accepted by the American public.

For the United States government, the Commission recommends:

1. Create a new application period for immigrants who might qualify for amnesty under the provisions of the current IRCA legislation.
2. Consider the creation of a special “temporary amnesty” for those who entered the United States between January 1982 and November 1986 (when Simpson-Rodino was signed into law).
3. Issue regular public reports on the full range of effects of the Simpson-Rodino legislation, and make these reports available to the binational interparliamentary meetings of U.S. and Mexican legislators.
4. In keeping with national traditions, promptly and publicly endorse the forthcoming United Nations resolution on the human rights of migratory workers—and extend its provisions to all Mexican and other immigrants within the United States.
5. Insure that public officers adhere to standards of civilized behavior toward migrants, and avoid physical or verbal abuse.

### A paradox

It is paradoxical that legislation as restrictive as IRCA could pass in the same year that, because of changes in U.S. demographic patterns, the demand for foreign labor increased. In effect, in 1986, the year IRCA was passed, there was a turnabout in the population dynamic of the US labor force, marking the beginning of a drop in the entry of young male workers into the labor market.

The U.S. Department of Labor has estimated that by the year 2000 there will be a 6 percent decrease in the number of young men between the ages of 16 and 24 entering the labor market and a 15 percent decrease in those between the ages of 24 and 34 entering the labor market.

Young men constituted 23 percent of the labor force in 1972, whereas in 1986 they comprised 20 percent. By the

year 2000 it is estimated that this percentage will decrease to 16. In the meantime, the proportion of workers over age 35 will increase from 51 percent in 1986 to 61 percent by the year 2000 (Fullerton, 1987).

If the preceding data are not sufficiently demonstrative of the relationship between these demographic changes and increases in the demand for undocumented immigrant labor, recent projections of the composition of the United States labor force are even more convincing<sup>6</sup>.

Silvestri and Lukasiewics (1987), of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Labor Statistics, found

<sup>6</sup> See George T. Silvestri and John M. Lukasiewics, “A look at Occupational Employment Trends to the Year 2000”, *Monthly Labor Review* 110 (9) 1987, pp. 49-63.

**For the Mexican government, the Commission recommends:**

1. Forge a clear definition of the Mexican national interest regarding migration.
2. Stimulate the creation of employment in the major sending areas, particularly those where outmigration is seen as contrary to the national interest.
3. Cooperate with U.S. authorities in assuring faithful U.S. compliance with the U.N. convention on the human rights of migrant workers.
4. Actively collaborate with the U.S. government in the construction of a bilateral approach to immigration questions.

**For both the U.S. and Mexican governments, the Commission recommends:**

1. Work together to obtain an accurate quantitative count of the migrant population.
2. Undertake to reach a formal bilateral agreement on migration.

And with or without a formal agreement, the two governments should adopt an explicitly bilateral approach to migration issues. The purposes of this agreement should include:

- Consideration of a possible increase in the legal quotas for Mexican migration to the United States, in accordance with a clear understanding of the national interests of the two countries.
- Agreement on the flow and treatment of "seasonal agricultural workers", a group that has received special (but not fully defined) status under the IRCA legislation.
- Agreement on measures to protect the basic human and labor rights of the migrant population, including undocumented workers, and to assure reasonable working and living conditions.
- Consideration of a long-run temporary worker program.

And as a basis for bilateral negotiation, it is essential that Mexico and the United States reach a common understanding of the causes and consequences of the problem. It is also essential for both governments to have a clear idea of national interests —of their own and of each other's. Any program for regulated labor migration must include satisfactory provisions for access to health and social services.

We realize that this is an imposing agenda, but we believe that a common agreement on such questions is desirable and necessary for both countries. An understanding on this issue would also remove a major obstacle to the long-term betterment of U.S.-Mexican relations.

**Bilateral Commission on the Future  
of U.S.-Mexican Relations.**

that the occupations for which the greatest demand will exist between 1986 and 2000 are: waiters and waitresses; grocery store clerks; cleaners of homes, offices and public places; restaurant cooks and their assistants; bartenders; service employees in private clubs; and security guards. These are the occupations in which more than half the undocumented population is employed, as shown below.

Silvestri and Lukasiewics (1987) also reported that the service sector, which includes the preceding occupations, will be the fastest growing sector between now and the end of the century, expanding from 17.5 million workers in 1986 to nearly 30 million in the year 2000.

Given the growth patterns of the age groups that will be working between now and the end of the century, the

population of working age in the US cannot possibly meet the demand for more than 5 million employees in jobs with low level salaries and qualifications.

Unless new labor-saving technologies enable such jobs to be performed less expensively in the near future than they are at present by undocumented workers, the U.S. economy will be threatened by an economic slowdown. Such a slowdown can be avoided only by "importing" the foreign work force necessary to fill the shortages inherent in the aging of the US working population.

**Measurement of migrant flows across the border**

The previous discussion underscores the need to address scientifically the question of whether IRCA reforms have produced the effects intended. At *El Colegio de la*

**Table 1**  
**PROVINCES WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF UNDOCUMENTED**  
**IMMIGRANTS FROM MEXICO BY BORDER CITIES**  
**WHERE THEY CROSSED (SEPT. 1988-DEC. 1990)**

PROVINCE OF ORIGIN	CITY OF CROSSING	ABSOLUTES	(%)
CIUDAD JUAREZ	CD. JUAREZ	3886	14.0
DISTRITO FEDERAL	TIJUANA	2079	7.5
MICHOACAN	TIJUANA	1782	6.4
JALISCO	TIJUANA	1634	5.9
GUANAJUATO	MATAMOROS/ NVO. LAREDO	1539	5.5
TAMAULIPAS	"	1426	5.1
SAN LUIS POTOSI	"	1375	4.9
NUEVO LEON	"	1058	3.8
VERACRUZ	"	1057	3.8
ZACATECAS	TIJUANA	957	3.4
OAXACA	TIJUANA	913	3.3
TOTAL		17706	64.0
OTHER		9926	36.0
TOTAL		27632	100

Source: Zapata Canyon Project. Continuous monitoring survey. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.*

*Frontera Norte*, we responded to this question by using two methods to observe the northward flow of undocumented immigrants.

The first was based on a short questionnaire administered to a select sample of about 25 persons a day, three days a week, in cities where *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte* has permanent research offices along the border (Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros).

These questionnaires were designed to be completed in less than three minutes by undocumented immigrants in the parts of each city that show the most crossings of such immigrants into the US. These questionnaires have been administered, with interruptions, since September 1987.

The other method of observation is the source of data presented in graph 1. This was derived from the use of photographic techniques to measure the flow of undocumented immigrants who cross through Zapata Canyon at the US-Mexico border between Tijuana and San Diego. Migrants gather on an esplanade at the foot of Mesa de Otoy, inside US territory. They wait there until dark, then walk north seeking to reach the urban area of San Diego County undetected.

Measurement consists of taking three photographs covering the same geographical space of the esplanade, at one hour intervals. The third picture is taken 10 minutes before sunset, the second picture is taken one hour earlier and the first picture two hours earlier.

It has been empirically detected that the peak number of people concentrated on the esplanade is systematically

reached within this two hour period. The numbers taken from each picture are then fed into a computer and a data base organized chronologically.

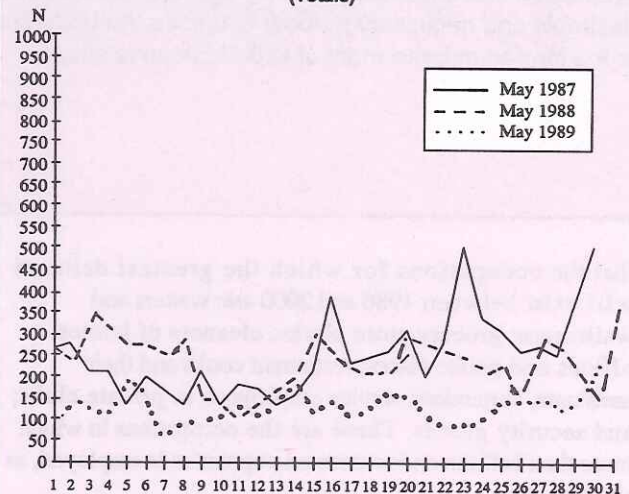
The crossings of undocumented immigrants through Zapata Canyon account for 75 percent of the undocumented crossings through the city of Tijuana. Crossings through this northernmost city of Mexico account for 55 percent of all undocumented crossings of the entire US-Mexico border<sup>7</sup>.

The photographs were taken daily in one of two places in Tijuana, Zapata Canyon and at the Tijuana river levee or *el bordo*. The photographs vary in the number of people sighted at various times. The area known in Tijuana as *el bordo* parallels the Mexican-U.S. border along part of the road leading to the scenic highway that stretches from

Tijuana to Ensenada. This site joins the four areas of *el bordo*.

On the south side of the road is the old part of Tijuana known as the "northern zone". The proximity of

**GRAPH 1**  
**FLOW OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS FROM MEXICO**  
**Highest number recorded per day in the months of May 1987-1989**  
**(Totals)**



Source: Zapata Canyon Project. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.*

<sup>7</sup> In addition to our own continuous survey described above, the same finding was reported by the National Population Council. See CONAPO, *Survey on the Northern Border of Undocumented Workers Deported by the U.S. Immigration Authorities. Statistical Results.* Mexico, D.F., Consejo Nacional de Población, 1986.

*el bordo* to where undocumented immigrants gather before leaving on their clandestine journey to the United States means that they remain there for a shorter time waiting for it to get dark than those who cross by the Zapata Canyon. For this reason, only two pictures were taken there daily, also at one-hour intervals.

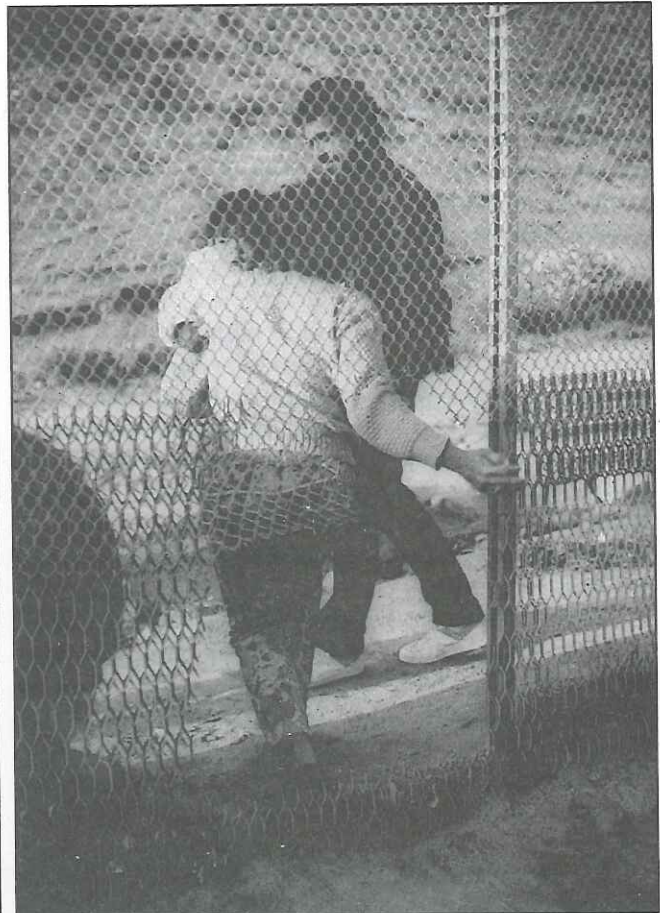
Taken together, the daily photographs in both Zapata Canyon and in *el bordo* cover 90 percent of the entire border over which undocumented immigrants cross between Tijuana and San Diego. This is important in light of the fact that more than 50 percent of all undocumented crossings between Mexico and the United States take place in this area.

To count and classify migrants, transparencies are back-projected on a screen provided with a grid that facilitates electronic recording in terms of spatial coordinates.

Each month three types of graphs are produced: one for the total number of people, one for men and one for women. These graphs represent the greatest number of undocumented immigrants appearing in the three daily shots of Zapata Canyon and the two daily shots of *el bordo*.

Both sets of statistics comprise data for the Zapata Canyon Project, so named in honor of the place where our systematic measures began. These measurements now cover five border cities through which 93 percent of all undocumented immigrants cross into the United States.

Some of the most important findings of this project have been published bimonthly since the end of 1987 in *El Correo Fronterizo*, the official publication of *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*.



Roberto Córdoba.

A hole in the fence.

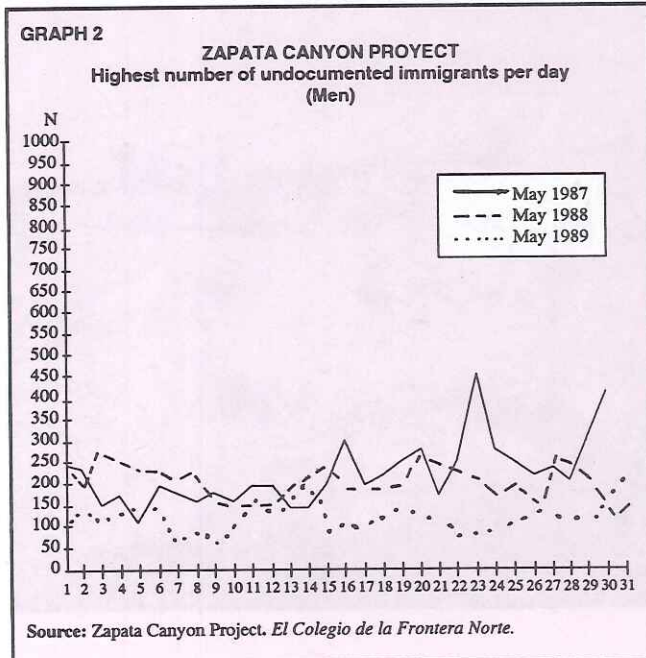
**Preliminary findings**

Our continuous survey of undocumented immigrants, interviewed in five Mexican cities as they surreptitiously cross the international border, has produced 27,632 personal interviews from September 1988 to December 1990.

Table 1 shows the area of origin of the highest numbers of these undocumented immigrants, by the border city where they were interviewed. The number corresponding to Mexico City illustrates one of the most important changes in the socio-economic profile of undocumented immigrants over the years, i.e. the predominance of urban over rural origin of these migrants. They are no longer the illiterate peasants who used to go to the United States in search of jobs in agriculture.

When I began research on undocumented immigrants as a graduate student working for Dr. Julian Samora of the University of Notre Dame in 1968, more than 85 percent of the total number I interviewed for the book *Los Mojados* (The Wetback Story) were migrants coming from rural communities. More than 90 percent of the total were looking for farm work in the United States.

In 1991, less than one third came from Mexican rural communities and less than one fourth sought jobs in US agriculture.



Both Ciudad Juárez and Mexico City are new in the list of the most predominant places of origin of undocumented immigrants from Mexico.

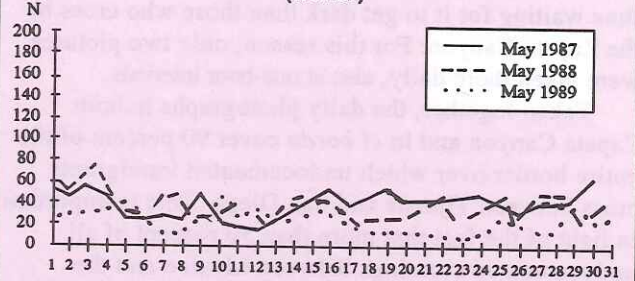
Another newcomer in these lists is Oaxaca. This is an exception to the rule. Oaxaqueños are among Mexico's poorest. Most of them are Mixtec Indians. They demonstrate a unique level of solidarity, thanks to which an increasing number of Oaxaqueños are able to finance their long journey to the United States with the dollars sent by earlier migrants already working there.

The rule is that, as the cost of migration (transportation, lodging, payment to *polleros* or *coyotes* who take them across the border with lesser risks, police extortions, etc.) increases, the poorest Mexicans are left out of the flow. This is one reason why the modern undocumented immigrant from Mexico is more urban in origin, more skilful in his talents and with higher than national averages of formal education (years of school attended).

Table 2 shows the US cities highest on the list of preferred destinations of undocumented immigrants in our survey. Noteworthy are the courageous 26 who gave Canada as the destination of their undocumented migratory journey. The rest are shown preferring the great cities of the U.S. Southwest, with Los Angeles as the virtual Mecca (table 3).

GRAPH 3

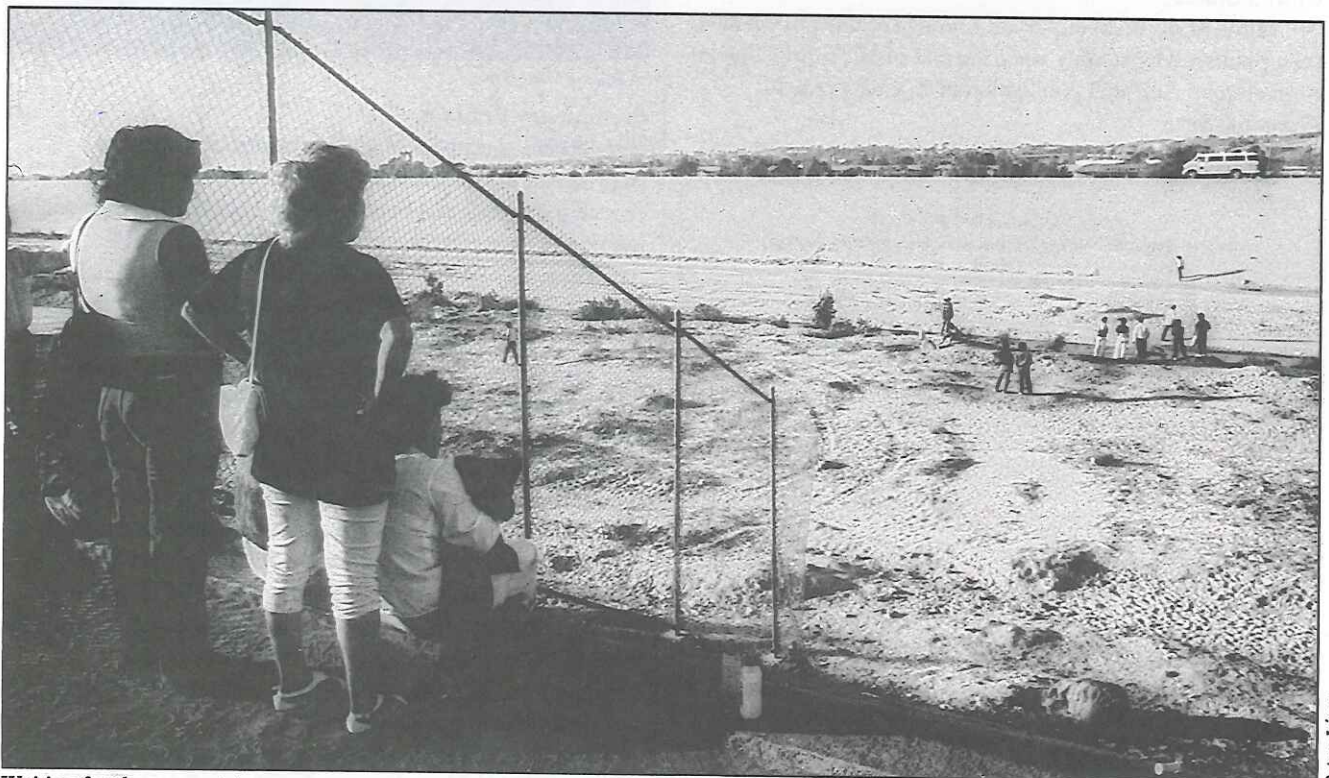
ZAPATA CANYON PROYECT  
Highest number of undocumented immigrants per day  
(Women)



Source: Zapata Canyon Project. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*.

Graphs 2 and 3 provide a comparison of the greatest number of undocumented immigrants found in the three photographs taken daily in May in Zapata Canyon in the years 1987, 1988 and 1989. The peaks correspond to weekends. It is important to note the difference in the daily flow of male and female migrants. The proportion of women migrants varies between one third and one fifth of the total.

These proportions are among the largest observed along the Mexico-US border, due to the larger market for women in the service sector and textile industry in the state of California. Gender fluctuation is as important as proportional



Waiting for the moment to cross.

Arturo López.

Table 2  
CITY OF MIGRATORY DESTINATION OF MEXICAN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS  
BY BORDER CITY WHERE THEY CROSSED (SEPT. 1988-DEC. 1990)

U.S. CITY OF DESTINATION	TIJUANA	MEXICALI	CD. JUAREZ	MATAMOROS/ NVO. LAREDO	TOTAL
LOS ANGELES	3311	1285	114	115	4825
SAN DIEGO	816	98	1	13	928
SAN FRANCISCO	240	362	7	26	635
LAS VEGAS	8	31	9	1	49
TUCSON	1	10	4		15
ALBUQUERQUE	1	4	48	4	57
DALLAS FT.W.	4	4	40	834	882
HOUSTON		2	10	2011	2023
CALEXICO	1	2	1		4
SAN ANTONIO	1	3	5	1011	1020
McALLEN		10	1	5	16
EL PASO	1	11	4032	5	4049
NEW YORK	87	2	4	69	162
MIAMI	6	2	7	628	643
CORPUS CHRISTI			2	86	88
CHICAGO	193	35	25	365	618
WASHINGTON	103	61	1	34	199
SAN CLEMENTE	8	96	1		105
FRESNO	476	473	2	1	952
OTHERS IN CA.	1314	1342	40	8	2704
PHOENIX	1	34	10		45
OTHERS IN AZ.	3	94	50		147
LAS CRUCES			90	1	91
SANTA FE		7	7		14
OTHERS IN N.M.		18	199		217
EL VALLE		11		716	727
AUSTIN		6	2	356	364
SEATTLE	8	3			11
BAKERSFIELD	81	23			104
SACRAMENTO	33	218			251
EL CENTRO		5			5
LAREDO		23		24	47
RENO	2	24			26
LUBBOCK			5	15	20
OTHERS IN TEXAS	4	40	33	43	120
OTHERS IN NEVADA	4	44	4		52
CITIES IN UTAH		5	2		7
DENVER		4	29	10	43
COLORADO		1		1	2
OTHERS IN COL.		11	35		46
KANSAS CITY	1	3	7	82	93
OTHERS IN KANSAS			14	4	18
OTHERS IN OKLA.	2		8	23	33
OTHERS IN N.C.			5	64	69
OTHERS IN OREGON	126	9	1	1	137
OTHERS IN IDAHO				1	1
OTHERS IN ILL.	2	1	2		5
MILWAUKEE		1		2	3
OTHERS IN WISC.			3		3
OTHERS IN N.J.				4	4
OTHERS IN CANADA	2	1	2	21	26
DON'T KNOW	1469	88	291	2529	4377
OTHER US CITIES	104	31	17	233	385
UNSPECIFIED	26	20	71	48	165
TOTAL	8439	4558	5241	9394	27632

Source: Zapata Canyon Project. Continuous monitoring survey. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.*

data, indicating a certain independence in migratory patterns of women as compared to men, corresponding to differing labor markets for each gender.

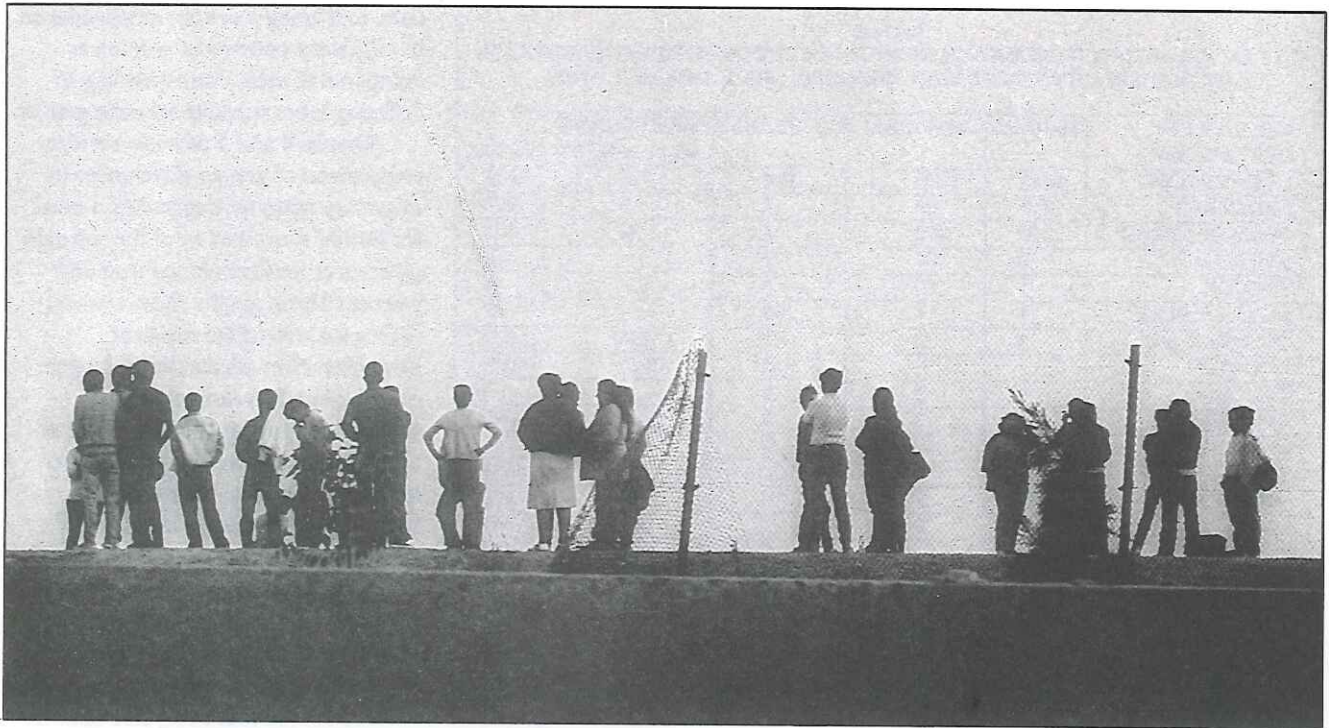
Graphs 4 and 5 provide a wider comparison of gender differences in migratory patterns, suggesting a need for further examination of the separate patterns of undocumented men and women. These graphs show cyclical decreases toward the month of December. Notwithstanding changes over the last 10 years in the socio-economic profile from rural to urban origin and from agriculture to service sector jobs, the pattern of returning to Mexico in December persists.

Contrary to contentions of US INS officials, sanctions against employers established by IRCA failed to curb the flow of undocumented immigrants from Mexico for the first two years after its passage, as indicated by data in graphs 4 and 5. The decrease shown for 1988 turned out to be temporary. Preliminary findings of our own survey show a new increase in 1990, close to the levels for years before IRCA.

The main reason for this new increase is associated with the fact that US employers have paid more attention to the law of supply and demand than to the immigration laws of their country. A loophole in the text of IRCA has helped their economic interest in continuing to hire undocumented immigrants. IRCA provides that employers must require the job applicant to demonstrate his or her eligibility to be employed in the US by presenting proper documents. In addition, the employer must fill out form 9A1 indicating the document shown by the job applicant to demonstrate such eligibility.

The loophole consists in leaving it expressly up to the employer to keep or not to keep copies of the document shown by the job applicant. In the absence of any procedure established by the authorities to verify the





Roberto Córdoba.

*Migrants at El Bordo, 1991.*

authenticity of the job applicant's documents, compliance is left to the word of the employer.

This has resulted in a mushrooming counterfeit industry facilitated by readiness on the part of US employers to laxly accept job applicants' documents. The persistence of US labor demands is the best explanation for continuing supply.

Our monitoring research has revealed that factors, other than U.S. legislation may be inhibiting Mexican migration to

the United States, for example, the financial cost of leaving one's place of origin to reach the US-Mexican border.

Graph 6 illustrates the importance of considering the cost of migration in explaining migration to the north by regions of origin<sup>8</sup>. The data in these graphs present the sum of all principal expenses (food, tickets, lodging, a *coyote* or *pollero* and police extortion or robbery) reported by emigrants who were interviewed. The number of individuals interviewed per month in the cities on each graph varied by city.

Among all the cities surveyed, Tijuana is located farthest from the usual places of origin of undocumented immigrants. The cost of getting to Tijuana is naturally the highest of all the border cities surveyed. The average inflation rate in the data for graph 6 (43 percent) was less than the official rate for Mexico in 1988 (55 percent).

My hypothesis is that these differences in cost are due to the proportion of migration expenses that are partially or totally financed by dollars sent by relatives or friends from the United States. In any case, the cost of migration rose in 1988 significantly less than it did in the two previous years.

**Table 3**  
**U.S. CITIES INDICATED BY UNDOCUMENTED**  
**MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS AS DESTINATION OF**  
**HIGHEST PREFERENCE**  
**(SEPT. 1988-DEC. 1990)**

U.S. CITY OF DESTINATION	ABSOLUTES	(%)
LOS ANGELES	4825	17.4
EL PASO	4049	14.6
HOUSTON	2023	7.3
SAN ANTONIO	1020	3.7
FRESNO	952	3.4
SAN DIEGO	928	3.3
DALLAS FT.W.	882	3.2
EL VALLE	727	2.6
MIAMI	643	2.3
SAN FRANCISCO	635	2.3
TOTAL	16684	60.3
OTHER US CITIES	10948	39.6
TOTALS	27632	100

Source: Zapata Canyon Project. Continuous monitoring survey.  
*El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.*

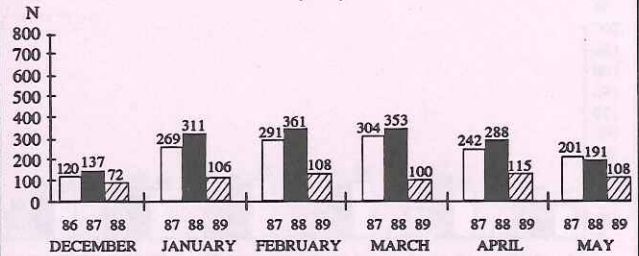
<sup>8</sup> Regions of origin referred to in graph 8 correspond to the following: Center-West includes the provinces of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Estado de México, Querétaro and Colima. Center-North includes the provinces of Zacatecas, Durango, Aguascalientes and San Luis Potosí. Northwest includes Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California. South includes Oaxaca, Chiapas, Yucatán and Guerrero. The number of individuals interviewed per month in the cities on each graph varied by city. The monthly average was 230 cases for Tijuana, 75 for Ciudad Juárez and 320 for Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros combined.

Graphs 7 and 8 illustrate the dynamic of the educational level of undocumented immigrants. The most important finding here is the higher level of education for female undocumented immigrants than for men. The hypothesis here is that this difference is part of the increasing phenomenon of urbanization in the migrants' region of origin. It is possible that job discrimination against women with higher education in the cities is associated with the difference shown in these graphs.

Another important finding is the significant difference between the educational level of the immigrants who crossed the border from Tijuana and those who crossed the border from Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros. There appears to be a correlation between educational level and the probability of reaching Tijuana. In any case, here we find evidence that the socio-economic level of undocumented immigrants varies in relation to the part of the border from which they cross into the United States.

Also interesting are the low levels of education in graph 7, in comparison with the data in graph 8, where there is a clear increase between October 1982 and

**GRAPH 4**  
FLOW OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS FROM MEXICO  
Monthly averages of the highest number recorded per day  
(Men)



Source: Zapata Canyon Project. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.*

September 1988 in the relative number of people with low levels of education, whereas in the case of Tijuana, the opposite is true, both for men and women immigrants. In this case, the flow of human capital through emigration seems to be greater through Tijuana than through the Northeast.

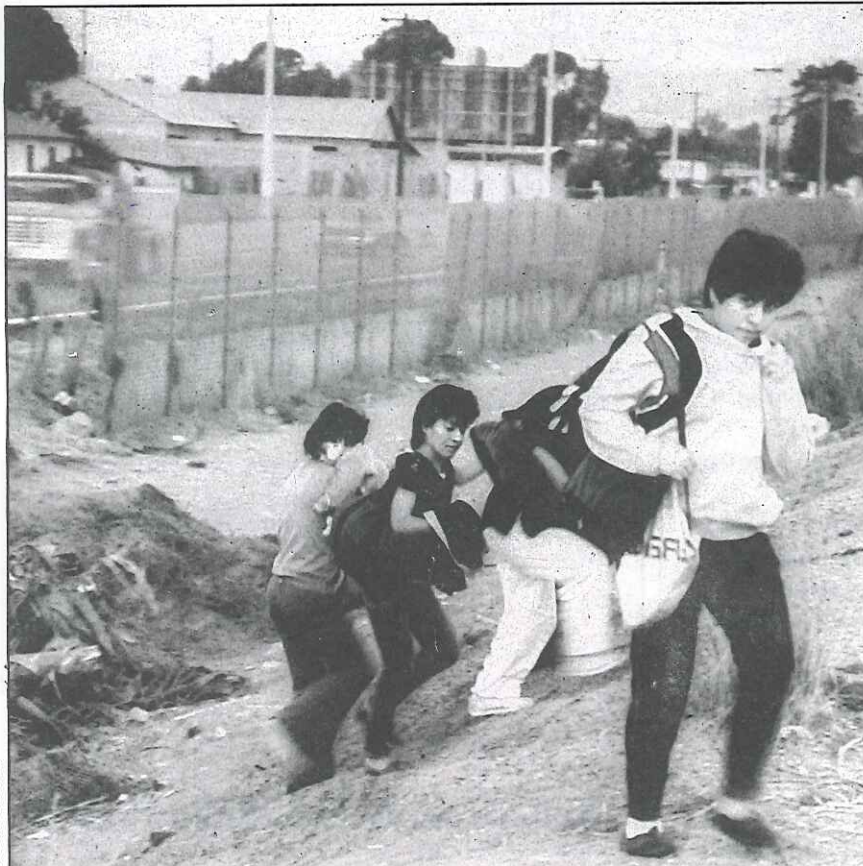
Certainly, these are not the immigrants of the past, who were predominantly poor and illiterate and of rural origin.

These are people with an average three to four more years of education than the national average.

### Conclusions

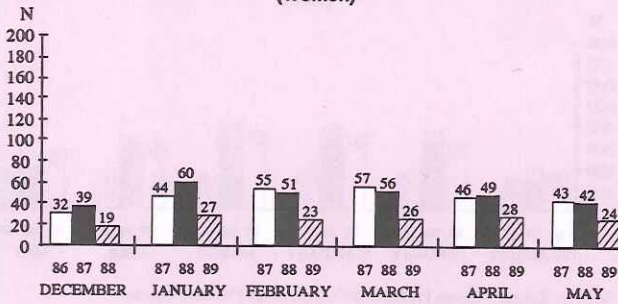
The following conclusions may be drawn based on Zapata Canyon Project findings through 1988:

1. The continued flow of undocumented immigrants to the United States confirms that IRCA is not altogether achieving its principal goal of stopping the entry of undocumented immigrants. IRCA was not created to end undocumented immigrations so much as to respond politically to the ideological reasons behind the most restrictive provisions, such as those reflected in the phrase, "We have lost control of our borders". A country that had truly lost control of its borders would be concerned enough to officially indicate the exact location of the border at the most important crossing point between the two countries, namely Zapata Canyon. There is no official marker of the international border in this area.



Migrants crossing at El Bordo, 1990.

**GRAPH 5**  
FLOW OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS FROM MEXICO  
Monthly averages of the highest number recorded per day  
(Women)



Source: Zapata Canyon Project. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*.

2. It appears that IRCA's legalization programs were designed to disproportionately favor non-Mexican undocumented immigrants, by creating a condition for

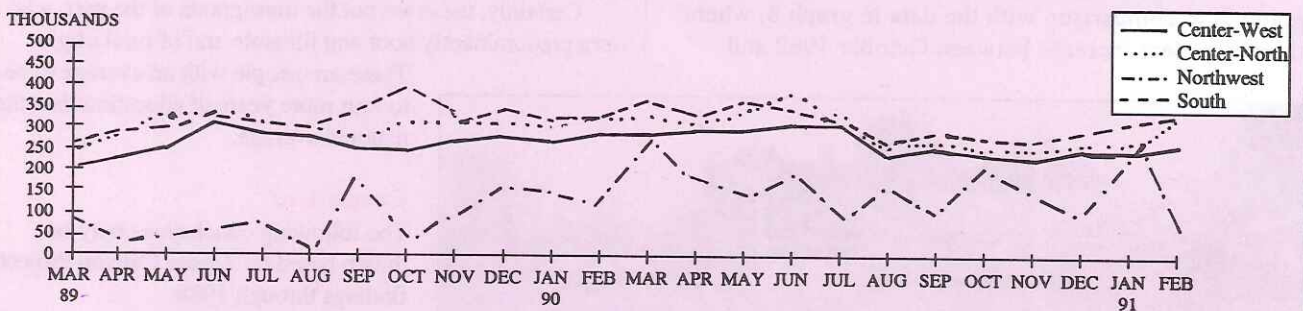
4. The data collected to date appear to reinforce the hypothesis that IRCA was designed as a precautionary instrument for times of economic recession, during which it would be necessary to take drastic measures to diminish the stock of undocumented immigrants, and that in times of economic expansion the law could be allowed to function with a maximum of flexibility, bordering on ineffectiveness.

5. Finally, the data strengthens the hypothesis that IRCA was a more convenient alternative to bilateral or multilateral negotiations, because negotiations would have raised the value of foreign labor.

A unilateral measure, as legislation is by definition, allows greater control over migrant flows and over the labor market in which undocumented immigrants participate.

In short, six factors contribute to IRCA's ineffectiveness: the law was not created to limit the

**GRAPH 6**  
IMMIGRANTS' TOTAL EXPENSES FROM THEIR REGIONS OF ORIGIN TO THE BORDER (TIJUANA)



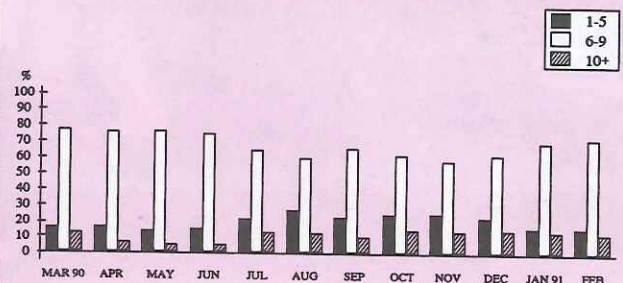
Source: Zapata Canyon Project. *El Colegio de la Frontera*.

permanent residency that is contrary to the practice of Mexican immigrants who come and go between Mexico and the United States every year. On the other hand, it appears that IRCA's legislators wanted Mexican migrants exclusively for agricultural labor, because they designed requirements most likely to be met by Mexicans rather than by other nationalities. This could be interpreted as an interesting twist in the design of categories selected for the legalization programs.

3. Data up to December 1988, more than two years after the passage of IRCA, suggests that the legislation was designed so as to maintain the flow of those undocumented immigrants who earned salaries lower than the immigrants who became legal. This hypothesis is reinforced by data indicating that the number of violations of the minimum wage law in California has tripled since IRCA was passed, according to information cited in Silvestri and Lukasiewics (1987).

flow of undocumented immigrants, but to respond to political pressure from ideological factions that demanded the legislation. IRCA was designed to

**GRAPH 7**  
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS WHO  
CROSSED AT TIJUANA FROM MARCH 1990 TO FEBRUARY 1991  
(MEN)



Source: Zapata Canyon Project. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*.

favor non-Mexican undocumented immigrants who immigrate in a more permanent manner. The law was designed to channel undocumented Mexicans into agriculture. It was designed to provide a cheap labor force in which the continued presence of undocumented immigrants is a necessary element to lower the overall cost of the labor force of legalized immigrants. It was designed to get rid of undocumented immigrants in case of an economic recession. It was designed as an alternative to bilateral negotiation that might have increased the value of the labor force and facilitated the organization of migrant workers **M**

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*Calm water, death in wait. Think about it... and think about your loved ones.*

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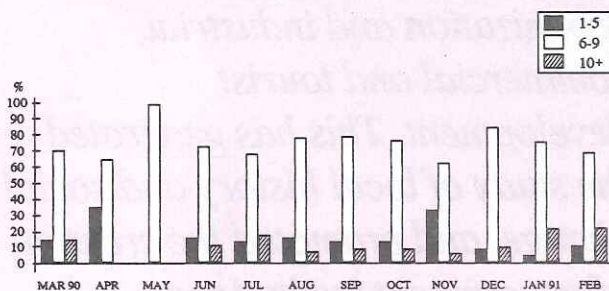
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**GRAPH 8**  
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS WHO  
CROSSED AT TIJUANA FROM MARCH 1990 TO FEBRUARY 1991  
(WOMEN)



Source: Zapata Canyon Project. *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*.