

## **THE IMPACT OF THE 2008-2009 ECONOMIC CRISIS ON LATINOS AND LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. LABOR MARKET**

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The recession that officially began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009 is the most severe that the United States economy has experienced since the 1930s. The post-recession recovery has been exceptionally weak and unemployment remains unusually high. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) recognized that “the employment decline experienced during the December 2007-June 2009 recession was greater than that of any recession of recent decades,” and 47 months after it started, in November 2011, “employment was still over 4 percent lower than when the recession began.” In February 2012, the BLS pointed out “that many of the statistics that describe the U.S. economy have yet to return to their pre-recession values” and that the proportion of long-term unemployed (those unemployed for 27 weeks or longer) remained notably high (USDOL 2012b).

As of July 2012, three years after the recession had officially ended, the unemployment rate stood at 8.3 percent. There were 12.8 million people unemployed and 40.7 percent of these, or 5.2 million, were long-term unemployed; and 8.2 million persons involuntarily worked part time, because they had not been able to find full-time work. Another 2.5 million were considered only marginally attached to the labor force because although they were available for work and wanted to work, and had looked for a job sometime in the previous 12 months, they had not looked for a job in the 4 weeks prior to being surveyed. Over one-third (34 percent or 852 000) of those counted as marginally attached to the labor force are listed as discouraged workers, persons not currently looking for work because they believe no jobs are available for them. In other words, three years after the recession ended, 23.5 million people, or 15 percent of the labor force, were either unemployed or underemployed (USDOL 2012c). Furthermore, since the recession began, the labor force participation rate has declined from an annual average of 66.0 percent in 2007 to 63.7 percent in July 2012. The number of persons 16 years old and over counted as not in the labor force rose from an annual average of 78.7 million in 2007 to 88.3 million as of July 2012 (USDOL 2008; 2012c).

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Over the past two decades, Latino immigrants have been an important component of labor force growth in the United States. They were responsible for 54 percent of the increase in the labor force between 2000 and 2010 (Kochhar 2012), and in 2010 slightly more than half the Latinos in the labor force (51.1 percent) were immigrants (Motel 2012). Before the 2008-2009 recession, Mexican and other Latin American immigrants easily found work in several labor market niches where their participation had grown rapidly during the 1990s and the first part of the 2000s: construction, meat packing, poultry processing, crop production, various branches of food processing, plant nurseries and landscaping services, building cleaning and maintenance, and personal care for children or the elderly, among others. The recession brought high levels of unemployment for all. Throughout the economic decline, from the beginning of 2008 until the middle of 2009 and the weak recovery thereafter, unemployment for Latinos was consistently higher than the rate for non-Hispanic whites and lower than the rate for blacks, just as it has been since the 1970s or earlier.

In this chapter, I analyze labor market outcomes for Latinos and Latino immigrants in the United States today, with special attention to Mexicans and those of Mexican origin, who constitute approximately two-thirds of the Latino population. I begin with some very brief comments on the history of labor migration to the U.S. and then analyze U.S. Department of Labor statistics to show how certain industries and occupations have become labor market niches for Latino workers. I examine job losses after 2007 and the evolution of employment between 2007 and 2010 in those industries and occupations with the highest numbers and percentages of Latino workers. I discuss the increasing difficulties for Latino workers in the U.S. labor market since the onset of the 2008-2009 recession. I conclude with some references to the state of Georgia, where I conducted field work in 2009 and 2010, interviewing Mexican immigrants about their living and working conditions. The situation in Georgia illustrates some of the more far-reaching social and political consequences of the economic crisis, which may prove to be even more detrimental to immigrant workers, particularly the undocumented, than lost jobs and lower wages.

## **Historical Tendencies in Labor Migration To the United States**

Attracting immigrant labor has been fundamental for economic growth in the United States throughout the nation's history. Furthermore, the influx of migrants has more or less adapted to the ups and downs in economic activity and demographic tendencies within the country. The industrial boom at the end of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a period of rapid growth, both absolute and relative, in the arrival of new immigrants. By 1910, the 13.5 million foreign-born in the

U.S. made up 14.7 percent of the population, almost equivalent to the historical high of 14.8 percent reached in 1890, when the number was 9.2 million (Gibson and Lennon 1999).

In the late nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants and later some other groups of Asians had been prohibited entry to the United States. For most other national origins, the first quantitative restrictions placed on the number of newly arrived immigrants admitted were established in 1921. At that time, it was decided that the number of persons admitted from any one country could not exceed three percent of the total number of persons of that nationality residing in the U.S. in 1910. Exceptions were made for professionals, servants, and persons already living in the Western Hemisphere for more than a year. Lower percentages and a numerical limit, to be implemented over the next few years, were stipulated in the Immigration Act of 1924. Nevertheless, the total number of immigrants continued to grow, reaching 14.2 million in 1930 (11.6 percent of the population), until the economic crisis reversed the tendency. From that point on, due to the combined effects of declining inflows, deaths, mass deportations of Mexicans, and voluntary return to their countries of origin by other groups, the number of immigrants residing in the U.S. dropped to 9.6 million in 1970. This was only 4.7 percent of the total population, which had grown from 122.8 million in 1930 to 203.2 million (Gibson and Lennon 1999).

The 1970s marked a new inflection point. From then on the number of immigrants began to rise rapidly and stood at over 38 million in 2007. At that point the foreign-born were 12.6 percent of the population and 15.7 percent of the labor force. In addition to these changes, which to a certain extent responded to the economic and demographic changes taking place in the U.S. at the time, significant shifts occurred in immigrants' countries of origin. Since colonial times and the subsequent establishment of the United States as an independent nation, the country had been increasingly populated by European immigrants and their descendants. The indigenous groups, or Native Americans, had been pushed ever further westward and to a large degree exterminated by the European settlers. During the first half of the twentieth century, Europeans continued to dominate the migratory flows, until the 1960s, when new trends began to emerge, not only in the case of immigration to the U.S., but worldwide as well.

Among other things, the post-World War II reconstruction and the later consolidation and expansion of the European Union brought growing prosperity to the region and converted several of the countries there into destinations for immigrants from other parts of the world. The increasingly unfavorable terms of trade for the primary goods exported by many Latin American countries, as well as generally unfavorable economic conditions there and significant population growth, turned many of them into immigrant-sending rather than immigrant-receiving countries. There were also political changes, and even armed conflicts, in parts of

Central America, Asia, and Eastern Europe, that have spurred emigration since the late twentieth century.

Therefore, in the early years of the twenty-first century, Latin America became the most important region of origin for immigrants entering the U.S., followed by Asia, and then Europe to a much lesser degree. In 2007, 31 percent of all immigrants in the U.S. were from Mexico. The Philippines, India, and China followed in importance, with 4 percent each, and then came El Salvador, Vietnam, Korea, and Cuba, with 3 percent each. By that time, Canada accounted for only 2 percent. According to Migration Policy Institute (MPI) data, no European country figured in the top 10 countries of origin for immigrants to the U.S., and Europeans as a whole made up only 13 percent of the foreign-born population (Migration Policy Institute 2009; U.S. Census Bureau 2008, 44).<sup>1</sup> Approximately 27 percent of all immigrants in the U.S. were from Asia, and about 54 percent were from Latin America (including Mexico).

Given the fact that the native-born population has been aging rapidly over the past few decades, immigrants in general, and Latin American immigrants in particular, constitute an increasingly important component of the U.S. labor force. At the end of the twentieth century the contribution of new immigrants to labor force growth was the highest it had been over the previous 60 years. The eight million new immigrants who joined the labor force between 1990 and 2001 accounted for 50 percent of the growth during that period (Sum, Fogg, and Harrington 2002).<sup>2</sup>

In general, growth in the U.S. labor force has slowed down after the 1970s. Over that decade it rose by 29.9 percent due to the incorporation of those born during the post war “baby boom” and increasing participation by women. During the 1990s, the labor force only grew by 11.5 percent, but without the newly arrived immigrants who entered the job market, growth would have been only 5 percent. The tendency has been much the same for the beginning of the twenty-first century; in other words, at least half or more of the growth in the labor force has been the result of immigration. There is a more or less generalized consensus among economists that the absence of new immigrant workers would have significantly limited both employment and economic growth in general in the U.S. at that time (Sum, Fogg, and Harrington 2002; Council of Economic Advisers 2007).

<sup>1</sup> The data presented in the World Bank’s *Migration and Remittances Fact Book* (2011) included Germany in fourth place, and the United Kingdom in tenth place, on their list of the main countries of origin for immigrants to the U.S. in 2005, but did not give figures. The MPI data (2009) does give percentages, and therefore I have used this data in the text since it seems more precise. In the 2000 census data, Germany was listed in ninth place as a country of origin for immigrants to the U.S. and the United Kingdom in tenth.

<sup>2</sup> Those considered “new immigrants” in the text by Sum and coauthors are those who arrived after 1990.

After the mild 2001 recession, and despite the greater difficulties in crossing the border after 9/11, Mexican migration grew significantly from then until mid-2006. Furthermore, the number of undocumented immigrants entering the U.S. at that time was much higher than the number of authorized entries for Mexicans (Passel and Cohn 2009b). However the arrival of undocumented Mexicans declined significantly as of 2007, not because living and working conditions have improved in Mexico, but rather because possibilities for employment in the U.S. have declined. The 2008-2009 recession and the persistently high unemployment rates thereafter have discouraged many potential migrants. These fluctuations in migration flows are evidence of the growing complementarity and a certain degree of *de facto* integration between the two labor markets. The flow of migrant workers from Mexico adapts, in general, to the demand for labor in the U.S.

In addition to the more or less normal cyclical fluctuations, the U.S. labor market has undergone some radical changes over the past few decades in response to the challenges posed by globalization and increased international competition. Employment in general for both skilled and unskilled workers has become less stable and many jobs are quite precarious. Technological innovations have made it possible for companies to eliminate jobs and contain wage increases. Manufacturing jobs have declined steadily from their peak level of 19.4 million in 1979 to just under 14.1 million in 2010. However, as manufacturing jobs disappear, new opportunities have opened in the service sector, which now employs over 75 percent of the labor force. Patterns in the supply and demand for labor have changed considerably. The male labor force participation rate declined more or less steadily from 79.1 percent in 1971 to 70.5 percent in 2011. Meanwhile the participation rate for women rose from 43.4 percent in 1971 to 60 percent in 1999 and has declined slightly since then to 58.1 percent in 2011 (USDOL 2012a). Many male workers displaced from relatively well-paying manufacturing jobs over the past few decades consider the wages prevalent in many of the new service sector jobs unacceptable and have preferred to leave the labor force. However, the supply of Mexican immigrants willing to accept those jobs grew considerably as long as companies in the U.S. were willing to hire them.

The sustained economic growth achieved in the 1980s and 1990s generated a rise in the demand for labor at both ends of the skills spectrum, in other words both very high and very low-skilled jobs. The U.S. attracted a wide range of professionals from all over the world. Most recently Asia stands out as the main source of highly skilled immigrants. Less skilled labor comes primarily from Mexico and also some parts of Central America and includes a high proportion of undocumented workers (Passel and Cohn 2009a, 2011). The question of how to deal with the over 11 million undocumented persons currently in the U.S. remains at the center of the unresolved debates over immigration reform. In spite of all the negative rhetoric and the large number of deportations since 2008, the number of undocumented persons in

the labor force —estimated to stand at around 8 million in 2010 or 5.2 percent of the labor force (Passel and Cohn 2011)— indicates a continued practice of hiring undocumented workers whenever and wherever it is considered profitable and convenient.

Some immigrant groups are clearly consolidating specific labor market niches for themselves. While most of the Asians are concentrated in certain technical and professional areas, Mexicans and some of the other Latin Americans tend to be employed in construction, light manufacturing, and some services. Given the proliferation of Mexican and Mexican-origin workers in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, it is somewhat surprising to note that in 2006, Mexico was the second most important provider of highly skilled immigrants in the U.S., with 462 409, after India's 599 361 (Giorguli and Gaspar 2008). However, taking into account the total number of immigrants from each country changes the perspective somewhat, since there are almost eight times more immigrants from Mexico in the U.S. than from any other country of origin.

Data on occupational distribution from the 2000 census clearly illustrate these proportional differences. At that time, the highest numbers of immigrants employed in management and professional occupations were from India (408 000), Mexico (358 000), China (320 000), and the Philippines (317 000). However, in relative terms the contrasts were quite clear. For Mexico those employed in management and professional positions were only 8.1 percent of all the Mexican immigrants working in the US, whereas for India, China, and the Philippines, they were 64.5 percent, 49.3 percent, and 38.8 percent respectively (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

There are clear tendencies with respect to immigrants' countries of origin, their human capital, and their income levels in the United States. European and Asian immigrants' high income levels are generally proportional to their high levels of educational attainment, which in many cases surpass that of the native-born population, and hence their highly favorable insertion in the U.S. labor market. In contrast, the high numbers of undocumented workers and the generally low levels of educational attainment characteristic of most recent Mexican immigrants leave them extremely vulnerable in terms of working conditions and salary levels. Nevertheless, wages deemed insufficient by many native-born workers are enough to attract Mexican immigrants as long as there is a demand for their labor.

## **Hispanics/Latinos in the United States**

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Hispanics (or Latinos) emerged as the largest minority group in the United States, slightly surpassing the African-American population in the 2000 census count.<sup>3</sup> Between 1966 and 2000 the U.S. population

<sup>3</sup> The term "Hispanic" was first used by the Census Bureau in the 1970s to designate persons born in Latin America or Spain and all persons born in the U.S. who are descendants of someone born in Latin

grew from 200 million to 300 million. The Latino component contributed with 36 percent of the overall growth while the non-Hispanic white component only accounted for 34 percent of the total population increase (Pew Hispanic Center, 2006). Currently the approximately 50.7 million Latinos constitute 16.4 percent of the total population (Motel 2012). According to Census Bureau projections, the number of Latinos will reach approximately 133 million by mid-century, equivalent to 30 percent of the total projected population of 439 million (Roberts 2008).

The Latino population's rapid growth is closely tied to the intense migratory flows experienced in recent decades. Out-migration from Mexico and other Latin American countries and Latino settlement in the U.S. are two sides of a single coin. They are part of a single process that is simultaneously exit and entry, departure and arrival, and the causes of which are inextricably tied to contemporary globalization. This is evident in both receiving and sending countries alike, with different and specific manifestations in each case. While departure frequently separates families and leaves social voids—often evidenced in villages and towns inhabited only by children and the elderly—, new Mexican and Latino neighborhoods are springing up in many parts of the U.S. previously unaffected by migration flows (see, for example, Massey 2008; Odem and Lacy 2009).

According to the official 2010 census, there were 50.5 million Latinos in the U.S. distributed as follows: Mexicans, 63 percent; Puerto Ricans, 9.2 percent; Cubans, 3.5 percent; Central Americans,<sup>4</sup> 7.9 percent; South Americans, 5.5 percent; Dominicans, 2.8 percent; Spaniards, 1.3 percent; and 6.8 percent of unspecified origin (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011). About 37 percent of all Latinos are immigrants, which is very close to the proportion among those of Mexican origin (35.6 percent in 2010). The percentage of immigrants is much lower among Spanish-origin Latinos (12.9 percent). In contrast, most of the South and Central Americans residing in the U.S. now are first-generation immigrants (Motel 2012).

During the 1990s, the Latino population rose by 12.9 million. More than half of this growth, 56 percent, was due to immigration, and the remaining 44 percent was from the natural increase of those already living in the U.S. This tendency was reversed in the first decade of the twenty-first century as the natural increase surpassed the number of newly arrived immigrants. The change was particularly evident for Mexicans. Their numbers rose by 11.4 million, of which 7.2 million

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America or Spain. Subsequently, and to a certain extent in rejection of a term viewed as imposed by the U.S. government, some of these persons began to refer to themselves as Latinos. The use or acceptance of either term may vary by region within the U.S. Currently in many academic and political circles both terms are used as synonymous and interchangeable, as will be the case in this text.

<sup>4</sup> According to the definition used in the report by Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert (2011), the category "Central American" excludes Mexicans and includes persons who reported themselves as Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Panamanian, Salvadoran, from the Canal Zone, belonging to a Central American indigenous group, or simply as Central Americans.

(63 percent) can be attributed to births in the U.S. and only 4.2 million (37 percent) to the arrival of new immigrants (Pew Hispanic Center 2011).

Furthermore, for a variety of reasons, approximately 75 percent of all Latino immigrants have not yet become citizens of the United States. According to current legislation, legal permanent residents can become citizens after five years if they meet certain requirements. It is somewhat difficult to determine exactly how many Latino immigrants are legal residents and how many are undocumented. According to recent estimates, 58 percent of the approximately 11.2 million undocumented immigrants now living in the U.S. are Mexican, and another 23 percent come from other Latin American countries (Passel and Cohn 2011).

Due mainly to different levels of educational attainment, other types of training, and occupational distribution, considerable variations in socioeconomic levels exist among U.S.-born Latinos, as well as among Latino immigrants, and within each of the different groups that make up the Latino population as a whole. Some national-origin groups may contain political asylum seekers, people from different socioeconomic strata, as well as professional and international business migrants. Nevertheless, the majority of Latino immigrants in the U.S. today are “labor migrants” seeking employment opportunities and wage rates that they could not expect to find in their home countries.

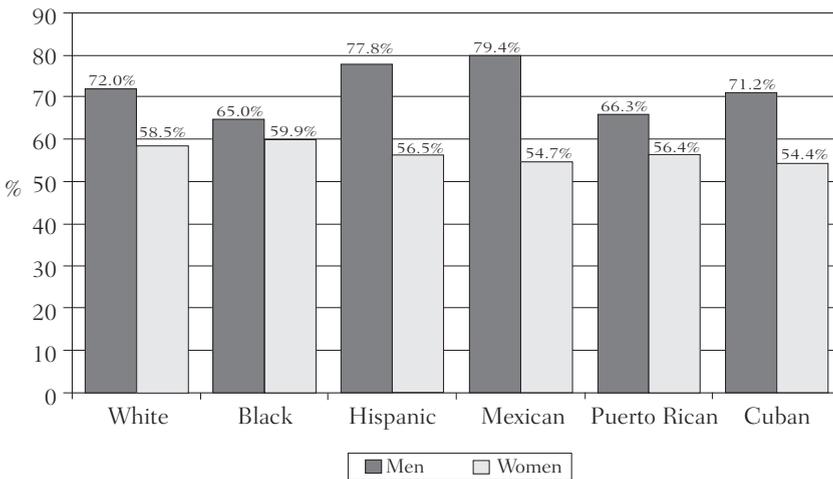
Often statistics and data on Latinos are presented globally, without differentiating among the various groups that constitute the Latino population as a whole. Therefore, some groups’ high levels of educational attainment and incomes are lost from sight in the aggregate figures because of the much lower levels of schooling and incomes characteristic of most Mexican and many Central American migrants. Furthermore, where distinctions are made, data will usually be presented for Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans with a catchall category for other Latinos, or at best a distinction between Central Americans and South Americans. In these latter cases, it is sometimes quite difficult to obtain information by national origin given the relatively small numbers from each country.

Among Latinos in the U.S., Cubans and South Americans tend to have the highest income levels. In contrast, Mexicans and Central Americans have higher percentages of persons with low incomes and hence significant numbers of low-income households. Puerto Ricans also have a considerable proportion of low-income households even though their individual earnings may not be as low as those of the last two groups mentioned. This can be explained by the fact that Puerto Rican men have low labor force participation rates and high unemployment rates, and there are a considerable number of female-headed households. The figure was 27 percent in 2006, which was higher than that of any other group of Latinos. Furthermore, for all population groups in the U.S., women still tend to earn significantly less than men with similar education, skill levels, or training (Levine 2010).

Given the high percentage of immigrants, Latino men tend to have higher labor force participation rates than other groups, and the rates for Latina women are slightly lower than for others. As Graph 1 shows, differences also exist among the various Latino/a groups. Mexican men tend to have a considerably higher participation rate than Puerto Ricans or Cubans, and Puerto Rican women’s participation is slightly higher than that of other Latinas. As a result of the recession, male labor force participation fell between 2006 and 2010, while it rose somewhat for women, especially Cuban women, whose participation rate was only 49.9 percent in 2006 (USDOL 2007, 2011).

In 2010, unemployment rates (see Graph 2) reached their highest levels since the early 1980s, after having dropped to very low levels in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Between 2006 and 2010, unemployment rates increased by several percentage points for all population groups. Puerto Rican, African-American, and Cuban men experienced the greatest rise in unemployment, as did Cuban and Mexican women. The unemployment rate for Latinos as a whole generally falls between a higher rate for African-Americans and a lower rate for non-Hispanic whites.<sup>5</sup> These relative positions in unemployment rates have held for the last three decades or more.

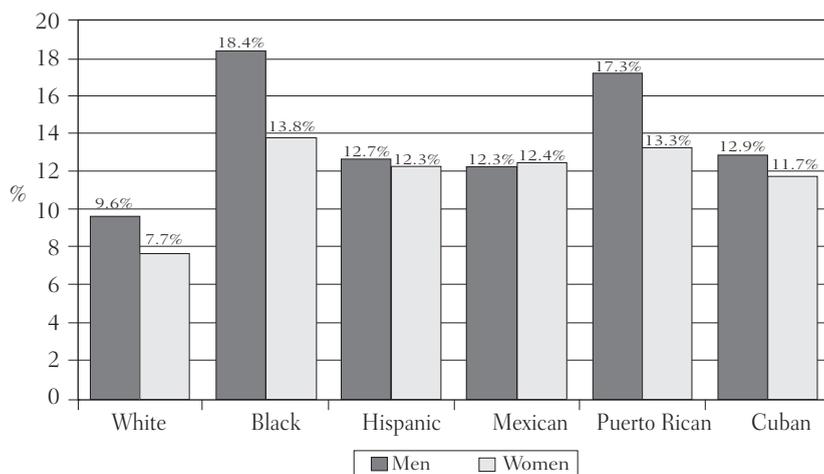
GRAPH 1  
U.S. LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES (2010)



SOURCE: Compiled by the author with data from the U.S. Department of Labor (2011).

<sup>5</sup> According to U.S. Census Bureau definitions, the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” are ethnic, not racial descriptions; therefore, racially, Latinos may be either white or black.

GRAPH 2  
U.S. UNEMPLOYMENT RATES (2010)



SOURCE: Compiled by the author with data from the U.S. Department of Labor (2011).

To a certain degree, the entire Latino population has been stigmatized because of the high percentage of immigrants, and more specifically undocumented immigrants, among them. This is especially true for those in the lower socioeconomic strata because of their phenotype, their limited knowledge of English, the neighborhoods the live in, and their low-skilled, low-paying jobs. Furthermore, given the preponderance of Mexicans, and in particular low-skilled Mexican workers, socioeconomic indicators for Latinos as a whole tend to be low, despite the fact that among South Americans and Cubans, in particular, and also Mexicans and Central Americans, there are many highly skilled immigrants with high incomes.

Salaries in most of the labor market niches with high numbers or high percentages of Latino workers tend to be low and, furthermore, have declined over the last few decades. Therefore, the prospects for socioeconomic mobility among new Latino immigrants are more limited now than in the past (Levine 2008). Most labor migrants with no college degree—which happens to be the case for the majority of Latin American immigrants to the U.S., given the high percentage of Mexicans in this situation—leave precarious, low-paying jobs in their home countries in search of precarious low-paying jobs in the U.S. or other parts of the world. Because of the existing wage differentials, which may be up to tenfold or more, they are, nevertheless, taking on what are usually the least desirable and lowest paying jobs in the destination country (Levine 2001, 2008).

## Mexicans and Other Latinos in the U.S. Labor Market

Since their main motivation for migrating is to get a job that pays in dollars, it is not surprising that Mexicans are currently the group with the highest labor force participation rate in the U.S., 67.7 percent in 2010 (USDOL 2011). The participation rate for Mexican men, 79.4 percent in 2010, is considerably higher than that of any other population group (whites, 72.0 percent; Afro-Americans, 65 percent; Asians, 73.2 percent). Although the participation rate for Mexican women, 54.1 percent, is lower than for other groups (whites 58.5 percent, Afro-Americans 59.9 percent, Asians 57 percent), it is significantly higher than the labor force participation rate for women in Mexico, which is now 44 percent (INEGI 2012).

Unemployment rates tend to reflect the cyclical changes in economic activity, as they usually rise and fall more or less in opposition to the rate of economic growth. As mentioned earlier, for the past three decades or more, unemployment rates for Latinos, and for Mexican-origin Latinos as well, have consistently been above the rate for whites,<sup>6</sup> and below the rate for African-Americans. The unemployment rate for Mexicans is usually lower than for Puerto Ricans and higher than for Cubans. Cubans have habitually registered lower unemployment rates than whites as a whole (which, as mentioned before, includes most Latinos). However, in 2010, Cuban men had an unusually high unemployment rate (12.9 percent), which was slightly above the rate for Mexican men (12.3 percent), but not nearly as high as the extremely high rates for African-American men (18.4 percent) and Puerto Rican men (17.3 percent).

It is not unusual for some recent immigrants to hold the lowest paying, least desirable jobs in the U.S., which nevertheless provide much more than they could expect to earn in their home countries. This has been the case for most Mexican immigrants because of their low educational attainment, limited knowledge of English, and adverse labor market conditions in their home country. Unfortunately, the educational disadvantages often persist among second- and third-generation Mexicans born in the U.S.

U.S. Department of Labor data for 2010 (see Table 1) indicate that the Mexican-origin work force—in other words Mexican immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants—is more or less evenly distributed among three of the five major occupational categories: 19 percent in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations; 18.2 in production, transportation, and material moving occupations; and 19.9 percent in sales and office occupations. Their participation in management, professional, and related occupations (16.1 percent) is lower than for any other ethnic or racial group, and in service occupations it is higher (26.7 percent),

<sup>6</sup> The unemployment rate for non-Hispanic whites is lower than the figure indicated here, which is for all whites and therefore includes most Latinos, who tend to have higher unemployment rates than non-Hispanic whites.

TABLE 1  
 OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE U.S. BY POPULATION GROUPS (2010)

	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Asians</i>	<i>Mexicans</i>	<i>Pto. Ricans</i>	<i>Cubans</i>
	139 064	114 168	15 010	6 705	12 622	1 612	850
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Occupations 2010</b>							
<b>1. Management, professional, and related occupations</b>	37.2	37.9	29.1	47.0	16.1	28.6	30.9
<b>Management, business, and financial occupations</b>	15.1	15.8	10.2	14.9	6.8	11.0	13.3
Management occupations	10.8	11.5	6.4	9.9	5.1	7.9	10.0
Business and financial operations occupations	4.3	4.3	3.9	5.0	1.7	3.2	3.2
<b>Professional and related occupations</b>	22.2	22.1	18.8	32.1	9.3	17.6	17.6
Computer and mathematical	2.5	2.3	1.6	8.5	0.8	2.0	1.2
Architecture and engineering	1.9	1.9	0.9	3.5	0.8	1.4	1.3
Life, physical, and social science	1.0	1.0	0.6	2.3	0.4	0.4	0.5
Community and social services	1.7	1.5	3.0	1.1	0.9	2.2	1.4
Legal occupations	1.2	1.3	0.7	0.9	0.3	0.7	1.3
Education, training, and library	6.2	6.4	5.4	4.9	3.1	5.3	4.9
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	2.0	2.1	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.6	2.1
Healthcare practitioners and technical	5.6	5.4	5.6	9.1	2.0	4.0	5.1
<b>2. Service occupations</b>	17.7	16.6	25.1	18.0	26.7	23.3	20.4
Healthcare support	2.4	2.0	5.7	2.0	2.3	4.1	2.6

Protective service	2.4	2.2	3.9	1.2	2.0	4.6	3.2
Food preparation and serving related	5.5	5.4	5.8	6.4	9.6	5.1	4.9
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	3.8	3.8	4.8	2.5	9.8	5.4	5.6
Personal care and service	3.6	3.3	4.9	5.8	3.2	4.2	4.0
<b>3. Sales and office occupations</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>27.9</b>	<b>25.3</b>
Sales and related	11.1	11.2	10.0	11.4	8.5	9.6	12.5
Office and administrative	13.0	12.9	15.0	9.7	11.4	18.3	12.8
<b>4. Natural resources construction and maintenance occupations</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>10.0</b>
Farming, fishing and forestry	0.7	0.8	0.3	0.3	3.0	0.1	0.0
Construction and extraction	5.2	5.6	2.9	1.5	12.0	3.1	6.4
Installation, maintenance, and repair	3.5	3.7	2.6	2.1	4.0	3.2	3.5
<b>5. Production, transportation, and material moving occupations</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>13.4</b>
Production occupations	5.8	5.7	6.0	6.6	9.7	6.9	5.2
Transportation and material moving	5.9	5.6	8.9	3.5	8.4	6.9	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>						

SOURCE: Compiled by the author with data from USDOL (2011).

exceeding the rates for African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. Only 3 percent of all Mexican-origin workers are currently employed in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations (which as of 2004 is no longer shown as an independent category and now employs less than 2 percent of the total labor force), but this proportion is much higher than that of any other group. Furthermore, 42 percent of all those working in such occupations nationwide are Latinos (USDOL 2011).

In terms of occupational sub-categories, within the five major categories, 9.3 percent of Mexicans were employed in professional and related occupations. A similar proportion, 9.7 percent, worked in manufacturing, and 12 percent worked in construction and extraction; in these two categories, some well-paying positions exist for highly skilled, experienced workers, but most are low-skilled, low-paying jobs. Eleven and four-tenths percent were employed in office and administrative support occupations. This category contains many female-dominated occupations, and earnings tend to be low. The same holds for sales and related occupations which employ 8.5 percent of the Mexican-origin work force. Food preparation and serving and related occupations, and building and grounds cleaning and maintenance employ 9.6 percent and 9.8 percent, respectively, where wages are quite low. Within each of the general categories, Mexicans and other Latinos tend to be most heavily concentrated in a few specific occupations such as certain branches of light, rather than heavy, manufacturing; maids and housekeeping cleaners; grounds maintenance workers; dishwashers; cooks; and various types of construction work.

Between 1990 and 2010 the percentage of Latinos in the work force grew from 7.5 to 14.3 percent. The data for the number employed by detailed industry (see Table 2) show that some branches became increasingly dependent on Latino labor. Over the two decades considered here, the percent of Latino workers grew significantly in the following branches: support activities for agriculture and forestry, from 15.4 percent in 1990 to 35 percent in 2010; landscaping services, from 25.2 to 41.5 percent; cut and sew apparel, from 22.6 to 34.8 percent; services to buildings and dwellings, from 18 to 35.6 percent; dry cleaning and laundry services, from 14.6 to 28.5 percent; and services to private households, from 17.6 to 39.5 percent. In the general branch of food manufacturing, Latino participation grew from 14.1 to 27.6 percent, and growth was even more pronounced in some subsectors: animal slaughtering and processing went from 17.0 to 38.1 percent; and bakeries, except retail, from 13.0 to 31.8 percent. In some cases, Latino participation rates had reached slightly higher levels in 2007, before the recession, and in others it continued to grow, although minimally, even afterwards.

Construction and carpet and rug mills were the industries where the percentage of Latinos employed had increased the most between 1990 and 2007. In construction, it rose from 8.5 percent in 1990 to 25.3 percent in 2007, with almost 3 million Latinos employed. Given the severe impact the recession had on this

TABLE 2  
INDUSTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST PERCENT OF LATINOS EMPLOYED IN U.S.  
(1990, 2007, AND 2010)

Ordered by percent Latino in 2007

<i>Industries</i>	<i>Percent Latino 1990</i>	<i>Percent Latino 2007</i>	<i>Percent Latino 2010</i>
Total percent of Latinos employed	7.5	14.0	14.3
Landscaping services	25.2	43.7	41.5
Cutting and sewing apparel	22.6	39.6	34.8
Support activities for agriculture and forestry	15.4	37.1	35.5
Animal slaughtering and processing	17.0	35.2	38.1
Private households	17.6	34.8	39.5
Services to buildings and dwellings	18.0	33.1	35.6
Bakeries, except retail	13.0	31.7	31.8
Drycleaning and laundry services	14.6	31.2	28.5
Carpet and rug mills	10.1	29.4	49.0
Crop production	19.5	28.8	30.6
Car washes	22.5	27.8	34.8
Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty foods	21.0	27.6	30.0
Construction	8.5	25.3	24.4
Traveler accommodation	15.2	24.8	24.4
Apparel, fabrics, and notions wholesale trade	15.2	23.7	21.8
Warehousing and storage	13.8	23.6	28.8
Retail bakeries	9.0	22.3	23.9
Groceries and related products wholesale trade	13.4	21.9	21.1
Restaurants and other food services	11.6	21.6	22.3
Barber shops	10.0	21.5	11.7
Cement, concrete, lime, and gypsum products	8.2	19.9	19.9

SOURCE: Compiled by the author with data from USDOL (1991, 2008, 2011).

industry, the number of Latinos employed had dropped to only 2.1 million by 2010, which was 24.4 percent of the total employed. Latino participation in carpet and rug manufacturing grew from 10.1 percent in 1990 to 29.4 percent in 2007. It dropped sharply to 19.2 percent in 2008 and registered a spectacular rebound to 49 percent in 2010. However, the total number of persons employed in this industry is quite small, only 59 million in 2010. The small city of Dalton, Georgia (known as “carpet city” or the “carpet capital of the U.S.”), is the most important site for carpet and rug mills in the country; Latinos now constitute almost one-third of the total population in Whitfield County, where Dalton is located.

Latinos’ occupational and industrial concentration is closely tied to their geographic concentration, which is still quite pronounced despite significant dispersion to new destinations in recent years. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, 75 percent of the Latino population resided in just seven states. However, some states in the Southeast, whose Latino populations are still numerically rather small, registered extraordinary growth rates (ranging from over 200 to almost 400 percent between 1990 and 2000) in their Latino populations because of the employment opportunities opening up there at that time. Mexicans and other Latinos have frequently been actively recruited for jobs in meat packing, poultry processing, carpet manufacturing, or crop production, for example, that local residents disdain. It seems that all that is necessary to consolidate a labor market niche of this type is an influx of Latino immigrants and jobs that no one else wants, at least at the going wage rates. This has been very clear for agricultural work in states like California, Texas, and Oregon. The demand for labor for many undesirable, low-wage jobs grew significantly at the end of the twentieth century, just as new waves of immigrants were arriving from Mexico and other parts of Latin America who were more than willing to accept those jobs.

I have used the U.S. Department of Labor’s data on “Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity” to provide some insights about specific labor market niches for Mexican and other Latino immigrants. It should be pointed out that given the preponderance of Mexicans in the Latino labor force—almost two thirds of all Latino workers are Mexican or of Mexican origin—and the fact that the tendencies for the other two main groups, Puerto Ricans and Cubans, often diverge in opposite directions, data for Latinos as a whole can provide a fairly accurate approximation to labor market outcomes for Mexicans. Furthermore, slightly over half the Latinos employed in the U.S. in recent years are immigrants (Motel 2012).

Having analyzed these statistics over several years, I have been able to ascertain that the occupations with the highest numbers of Latino workers are mainly low-skilled, low-paying jobs that do not require a college degree. The same holds true for occupations with the highest percentages of Latinos (Levine 2001, 2008,

2010). Moreover, most of the occupations with the highest percentages of Latinos in 2007 and in 2010 also had relatively high percentages of undocumented workers prior to the onset of the recession at the end of 2007 (Passel 2006). Therefore, I will attempt to make some inferences about the recession's impact on Latino immigrants in the U.S. labor force by observing the effects it had on Latino workers in general.

### **Impacts of the Crisis on Latino Workers**

At the height of the recession, Latinos had lost 863 800 jobs, or 14 percent of the 6.2 million jobs that disappeared in the U.S. between 2007 and 2009, which was proportional to their participation in the employed labor force at the time. The most severe loss for Latino workers was in the construction industry, where 720 000 people were thrown out of work. In contrast, simultaneously, in some industries and occupations, they experienced slight job gains, which can most likely be explained by the lower cost of their labor. However, Latinos registered job losses in many of the occupations with relatively high percentages of Latino workers. Table 3 shows the net changes between 2007 and 2010 in the number of Latino workers in the industries that employed the highest numbers of Latinos in 2007.

During 2010, when some sectors of the economy began to show mild signs of recovery, Latinos recuperated approximately 300 000 jobs, even though overall employment continued to decline. The economy as a whole lost an additional 813 000 jobs, and therefore Latino participation in the workforce rose to 14.3 percent (USDOL 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Analysis of the USDOL detailed occupations data (see Table 4) shows that from 2007 to 2010 Latinos suffered net job losses in most of the occupations with high numbers of Latino workers. The annual figures reveal that in general the sharpest losses occurred between 2008 and 2009, even though the patterns are somewhat different for each occupation. Such differences are surely tied to regional and local variations in industrial and occupational structures and as well as demographic variations and different outcomes for different population groups. It is definitely noteworthy that the mild recovery observed in some sectors of the economy produced a net increase in Latino employment in 2010, even though the overall level of employment continued to decline. Nevertheless, the total number of Latinos employed in 2010, 19 886 000, was still lower than it had been in 2007, when there were 20 447 000 Latinos working. Total employment continued to fall throughout 2010, but finally reversed the trend in 2011 as employment for non-Latinos began to rise slowly.

TABLE 3  
INDUSTRIES EMPLOYING THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF LATINOS IN THE U.S.  
IN 2007 AND THE CHANGES FROM 2007 TO 2010

Ordered by number of Latinos employed in 2007

<i>Industries</i>	<i>Number of Latinos</i>		
	2007	2010	<i>Net change 2007-2010</i>
Total Latinos employed, 16 years and over	20 446 580	19 886 152	-560 428
Construction	2 999 568	2 214 788	-784 780
Restaurants and other food services	1 697 112	1 761 031	63 919
Elementary and secondary schools	845 937	903 310	57 373
Landscaping services	560 234	489 700	-70 534
Hospitals	458 535	543 663	85 128
Services to buildings and dwellings	438 575	492 348	53 773
Grocery stores	398 544	413 624	15 080
Real estate	346 236	308 352	-37 884
Traveler accommodation	340 752	319 396	-21 356
Truck transportation	320 280	264 808	-55 472
Department stores and discount stores	285 375	353 829	68 454
Private households	282 924	263 465	-19 459
Justice, public order, and safety activities	260 624	339 710	79 086
Crop production	258 048	301 104	43 056
Child day-care services	240 240	241 983	1 743
Automotive repair and maintenance	238 329	243 080	4 751
Colleges and universities, including junior colleges	227 392	279 318	51,926
Banking and related activities	226 884	246 266	19 382
Other amusement, gambling, and recreation industries	213 048	204 633	-8 415
Insurance carriers and related activities	202 951	183 464	-19 487
Employment services	184 851	192 643	7 792
Home health-care services	184 128	177 504	-6 624
Groceries and related products	182 427	177 029	-5 398
Automobile dealers	172 746	150 795	-21 951
Individual and family services	169 224	208 882	39 658
Animal slaughtering and processing	167 904	179 832	11 928
Clothing and accessory stores (except shoes)	167 660	185 031	17 371
Non-depository credit and related activities	156 800	84 588	-72 212
Physicians' offices	153 080	175 902	22 822

SOURCE: Compiled by the author with data from USDOL (2008, 2011).

TABLE 4  
 OCCUPATIONS EMPLOYING THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF LATINOS IN THE U.S.  
 IN 2007 AND THE CHANGES FROM 2007 TO 2010

Ordered by number of Latinos employed in 2007

	2007	2010	<i>Net change 2007-2010</i>
Total employed 16 years and over	146 047 000	139 064 000	-6 983 000
Total Latinos employed 16 years and over	20 446 580	19 886 152	-560 428
<b>Occupations</b>	<b>Number of Latinos</b>		
Construction laborers	789 866	546 077	-243 789
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	605 500	529 900	-75 600
Cooks	601 090	634 075	32 985
Grounds maintenance workers	591 408	523 410	-67 998
Janitors and building cleaners	582 400	675 474	93 074
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	576 508	574 056	-2 452
Cashiers	513 740	506 767	-6 973
Carpenters	490 656	319 194	-171 462
Retail salespersons	426 024	450 182	24 158
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, [by] hand	377 277	362 100	-15 177
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	330 720	322 596	-8 124
Secretaries and administrative assistants	316 293	289 708	-26 585
Miscellaneous agricultural workers	313 497	330 989	17 492
Waiters and waitresses	302 634	343 122	40 488
Painters, construction, and maintenance	292 740	236 980	-55 760
Customer service representatives	270 297	288 192	17 895
Stock clerks and order fillers	261 576	281 008	19 432
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	259 302	283 416	24 114
Managers, all other	237 860	246 330	8 470
Production workers, all other	234 398	209 988	-24 410
Child care workers	225 288	238 177	12 889
Receptionists and information clerks	206 063	215 208	9 145
Elementary and middle school teachers	203 067	205 349	2 282
Miscellaneous assemblers and fabricators	199 206	165 025	-34 181
Supervisors/managers office and administrative support	184 077	167 277	-16 800

TABLE 4 (CONTINUATION)  
 OCCUPATIONS EMPLOYING THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF LATINOS IN THE U.S.  
 IN 2007 AND THE CHANGES FROM 2007 TO 2010

Ordered by number of Latinos employed in 2007

	2007	2010	<i>Net change 2007-2010</i>
Packers and packagers, [by] hand	167 272	166 439	-833
Pipelayers, plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters	160 310	109 408	-50 902
Food preparation workers	159 354	169 929	10 575
Automotive service technicians and mechanics	155 583	162 806	7 223
Teacher assistants	153 892	145 866	-8 026
Office clerks, general	151 386	155 064	3 678
Supervisors/managers construction trades and extraction	145 962	108 735	-37 227
Personal and home care aides	144 008	171 248	27 240
Food service managers	143 286	140 160	-3 126
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	141 550	114 136	-27 414
Industrial truck and tractor operators	135 898	159 680	23 782
Electricians	130 416	96 740	-33 676
Drywall installers, ceiling tile installers, and tapers	124 352	100 206	-24 146

SOURCE: Compiled by the author with data from USDOL (2008, 2011).

The employment behavior in specific industries and occupations and the impacts for specific groups in the labor force deserves a much more detailed analysis than can be provided here. In general, Rakesh Kochhar and his collaborators (2010) confirmed that during the first year of economic recovery, starting in July 2009, the unemployment rate for immigrants began to fall slightly (a decline of 0.6 percent), even though unemployment for native born workers continued to rise by 0.5 percent. In spite of this employment growth, the total number of immigrants employed in mid-2010 remained below the pre-recession level. This was also the case among Latinos. The unemployment rate for Latino immigrants decreased slightly, from 11.0 percent in the second quarter of 2009 to 10.1 percent in the second quarter of 2010; meanwhile the rate for U.S.-born Latinos continued to rise, from 12.9 percent to 14.0 percent. Thus, as the economy began to turn around

and growth resumed, it seems that most of the initial gains in employment were for foreign-born rather than U.S.-born Latinos.

However, this small rise in immigrant employment, during what was officially the first year of economic recovery, was accompanied by a 4.5 percent decline in their earnings, whereas earnings for the native-born population fell by only 1 percent. Furthermore, Latino immigrants suffered the greatest wage losses. Their median weekly earnings decreased 1.3 percent from 2008 to mid-2009 and an additional 5.8 percent by the second quarter of 2010. As Kochhar points out, “Hispanics are the only group of workers whose median earnings decreased during both the recession and the recovery”; and moreover, “The downward momentum in earnings for Latinos was led by immigrants” (2010, 20). As a result of these changes, by the second quarter of 2010, the median weekly earnings of native born workers stood at US\$653, and for foreign-born workers it was US\$525. At the same time, the median for all Latinos was US\$480 and only US\$422 for Latino immigrants (Kochhar 2010, 20).

Undoubtedly, Latino workers and Latino immigrant workers have directly suffered the effects of the most severe recession in the U.S. since the 1930s. They are among the millions who lost their jobs, or whose family members lost their jobs, and later lost their homes because they could not meet the mortgage payments. Most of the U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents who became unemployed during this recession have received at least some relief from unemployment insurance payments, which are nevertheless certainly insufficient to compensate for their losses. Obviously, none of the unemployed, undocumented immigrant workers have received any benefits whatsoever.

Furthermore, the repercussions, both direct and indirect, of this “great recession” for Latino immigrants in particular, and to some extent for Latinos in general, go far beyond the immediate economic impacts. In some places, especially in some of the southeastern states, the hard times experienced throughout the country have generated hostility toward those who a few years earlier had been sought out and even actively recruited to fill thousands of jobs that local workers would not accept. I will briefly refer to the case of the state of Georgia, where I conducted field work during a sabbatical stay from August 2009 to July 2010, to show how the recession contributed to generating an extremely adverse social and political climate for Latino workers and their families.

### **Growing Hostility toward Latino Immigrants in Georgia**

The number of immigrants in Georgia has grown tremendously over the last two decades—this is also the case in other states in the Southeast or other regions where previously there had been few immigrant workers—, rising from just 173 000 in

1990 to approximately one million in 2010. Two-thirds of these recent immigrants have settled in and around metropolitan Atlanta. They come from many different countries of origin, but more than half are Latin Americans and approximately one-third are from Mexico. Mainly as a result of these recent migratory flows, the Latino population in Georgia has grown from 109 000 in 1990 to 853 700 and increased from 1.7 to 9 percent of the state's total population.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center's "Demographic Profile of Hispanics in Georgia, 2010," the state's Latino population is now evenly divided between immigrants and U.S.-born Latinos. However the median age of Latino immigrants in the state is 32 and for U.S. born Latinos, it is only 11. This means that a significant majority of the working-age Latinos are immigrants. The proportion of immigrants in Georgia's Latino population is significantly higher than the national rate of 37.1 percent in 2010 (Pew 2012; Motel 2012). Median income for Latinos in Georgia was US\$17 300 in 2010, in other words, US\$2 049 less than in 2008 and US\$2 700 below the national median for all Latino workers in 2010. In contrast, median income for Latinos who worked full time year round was \$29 000 in 2010, with a considerable difference between the median for immigrants (US\$25 000) and U.S.-born Latinos (US\$34 800).

Over half the immigrants in Georgia are presumed to be undocumented. However, this was not such a problematic issue during the economic boom years of the 1990s and early 2000s. It is well known that in the mid-1990s, undocumented Mexicans were actively recruited to work in constructing the installations for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, just as they had previously been sought to work in Dalton's carpet mills and Gainesville's poultry processing plants (Amescua 2006). However, only a decade later the political and economic climate had changed considerably. In 2006, Georgia began to pass anti-immigrant laws that affected undocumented workers. Four counties with high percentages of Latino immigrants have established 287(g) agreements with the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE),<sup>7</sup> which allow local police to make inquiries about a person's immigration status and as a result have led to the detention and deportation of thousands of undocumented immigrants.

Many of the 91 persons I interviewed at the Mexican Consulate in Atlanta reported that they had initially been attracted to Georgia because of the abundant job opportunities there and that often wages were higher and the cost of living lower than in other regions. The annualized individual median income of those interviewed was US\$23 400, not much lower than the US\$25 000 median for Latino immigrants nationwide. Median household income (for those interviewed)

<sup>7</sup> I am referring to what are known as "287(g) agreements" derived from section 287(g), "Delegation of Immigration Authority," of the *Immigration and Nationality Act*, in accordance with the reforms established as part of the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act* of September 30, 1996.

was US\$35 880, only US\$1 020 below the national median for Latino immigrants. Almost half (48 percent) reported more than one person working per household. Most had been living in the U.S. for 10 years or less and only 36.4 percent had lived elsewhere in the U.S. before coming to Georgia. In all, 30 percent worked in construction-related occupations and 15.7 percent worked in restaurants.

Ten of the ninety-one persons interviewed reported having lost their jobs because of the recession, but only two said that they were planning to return to Mexico for that reason. Most of those interviewed had not returned to Mexico at any time since they arrived in the U.S. and had no plans to do so in the near future. Three women reported having entered the labor force because their husbands had lost their jobs or had their working hours cut back. Thirty-three persons (36.3 percent of those interviewed) reported working fewer hours because of forced layoffs for several days or even weeks and in some cases months, and/or a considerable drop in the amount of overtime they had previously been accustomed to working. This was most prevalent for those employed in construction. However, when the interviews were conducted (between February and May 2010), almost all of them said that working hours had begun to rise again somewhat.

Some reported having to cut back on spending because of the recession and that their incomes were insufficient to cover their living expenses. They said the cost of living was going up at the same time that their income was going down. A few said that some family members and friends had left the state of Georgia because of the economic conditions related to the recession. Others mentioned the rise in detentions and “persecution” of Latinos as situations somehow related to the economic crisis. However, in Georgia in 2010, Mexican immigrants did not speak very freely about the problems they had because of being undocumented. In this respect, my experience was quite different from what it had been in Los Angeles ten years earlier, before 9/11, and long before Arizona’s SB1070, or Georgia’s HB87 and the 287g agreements in four Georgia counties.

It was mainly by means of other experiences, rather than from direct interviews, that I was able to perceive the effects that anti-immigrant actions have had on Latino communities in Georgia. By working as a volunteer in the office of an organization that defends Latinos’ human rights in Georgia, I could see the impact that detention and deportation policies were having on Latino residents in the state. My main task was simply to answer phone calls, take note of the situations callers reported, and write down the pertinent information. I also attended various meetings with community members seeking information about how to cope with the enforcement measures implemented in the counties where they lived and worked. Based on everything I saw and heard as a result of this experience, I am convinced that the intimidation, fear, emotional suffering, and human rights violations caused by anti-immigrant attitudes and persecutory actions prevalent in

Georgia over the past few years have had—and will continue to have—a more profound, devastating, and lasting impact on the individuals and communities affected than all the hardships and difficulties caused by the recession.

Information from a 2012 Department of Homeland Security report provides an example of the terrible injustices committed with the pretext of combatting what is referred to as “illegal” immigration. Thousands of minors under the age of 18, who are U.S. citizens by birth, have been separated from their parents; the parents, in turn, have lost parental rights and custody of their children because of their detention and deportation due to being undocumented immigrants. The report “Deportation of Parents of U.S.-Born Citizens” (USDHS 2012) provides data on the number of deportation, exclusion, and removal orders sought and obtained by ICE in order to expel from the U.S. foreigners who have U.S.-citizen minor children. During the first six months of 2011 (January 1 through June 30, 2011), ICE reports having expelled from the United States 46 846 foreigners who have at least one minor child that is a U.S. citizen.

It is interesting to note that 21 860 of the persons reported as expelled from the country had been detained for some period of time prior to their deportation and the numbers are registered by “District/area of responsibility (AOR) in which the removal order was obtained.” The Atlanta district/AOR showed the greatest number of removals, 2 249 or 10.3 percent of the total, reported for the six month period (USDHS 2012). In the vast majority of these cases, the circumstances would not have warranted detention, except for the fact that the individual involved was an undocumented immigrant. A recent study carried out by the Applied Research Center found that “a disturbing number of children with detained or deported parents are now in foster care.” It was also the case that “in jurisdictions where local police aggressively participate in immigration enforcement (e.g., 287[g] and Secure Communities), children are more likely to be separated from their parents.” Furthermore, “once children of undocumented immigrants enter foster care, [this] research indicates that their families face significant barriers to family reunification” (Freed Wessler 2011, 5, 17, 27).

## **Conclusions**

Attracting immigrant labor to the United States has played a fundamental role in the nation’s economic development throughout its history, and the migratory flows have generally adapted to the ups and downs in economic activity. Latin American immigrants have become an important component of labor force growth in the U.S. over the past few decades. Moreover, there is a clear tendency toward consolidating labor market niches for specific groups of immigrants. The demand for low-skilled labor to carry out undesirable tasks in low-skilled services, construction,

food processing, and light manufacturing for low wages rose considerably in the late twentieth century, just as new waves of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries arrived who were more than willing to take such jobs.

Over this period, the labor demand in the U.S. and the labor supply from Mexico evolved in such a way that Mexico became the primary source of low-skilled, low-wage workers in several branches of activity in various parts of the U.S. Low-skilled Mexican workers, especially if they are undocumented, have become an ideal source of “disposable labor” that is available “just in time.” They have proven to be readily available and easily expendable. They can be easily attracted or recruited in boom times and are totally expendable when the economy contracts. They can be laid off and even deported with no obligation on the part of, or disadvantage for, their employers.

The severe recession in 2008-2009 has momentarily stemmed the arrival of new labor migrants, especially the undocumented. Such changes in supply flows show the increasing complementarity and a certain degree of *de facto* integration of the Mexican and U.S. labor markets. The supply from Mexico is more or less adaptable—or can be forced to adjust—to demand conditions north of the border. From 2009 through 2011, given the severity of the recession and the increasingly hostile political climate in the U.S., ICE removed an average of 1 000 undocumented immigrants a day, and the majority of them were Mexicans.

My central conclusion is that three conditioning factors have all combined to propitiate a hostile climate toward Latin American immigrants: 1) generalized anti-immigrant sentiments that flourished after September 11, 2001; 2) the growing numbers of immigrants, with greatly increased presence in new destinations; and 3) the severe recession, beginning at the end of 2007, with high and persistent unemployment rates since. This is despite the important role these immigrants have played in the country’s economic dynamism in recent decades up until the onset of the recession. In several states in the Southeast, these factors interacted with vestiges of racism and intolerance present in the region to exacerbate anti-immigrant feelings and attitudes and facilitate the passing of hostile and punitive state laws that would criminalize undocumented immigrants if they are allowed to take effect. Therefore, it is likely—and also most unfortunate—that the social effects of this deep and prolonged recession will be felt for a considerable time after economic growth has been restored because of the anti-immigrant sentiments that took root and flourished in the midst of it.

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