

**The Incorporation of Mexican Immigrants in New
Destinations: A Research Agenda**

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Background

Scholars of Mexican migration to the United States have recently documented the increased dispersion of Mexican-born persons throughout the country over the past 25 years, particularly during the 1990s, concluding that the scale of this phenomenon has become so large that Mexican migration is no longer a regional phenomenon confined mostly to traditional destinations in the Southwest {Passel, 2001 #20;Suro, 2003 #26;Johnson, 2000 #42;Massey, 2002 #13}. New (or newly expanded) communities of Mexican-born persons rapidly grew in the 1990s both in large urban metropolises such as New York and Atlanta and in small rural towns throughout the Midwest and South – for example, the Mexican-born population in Georgia grew by over 800% between 1990 and 2000. This growth is reflected in the fact that the percentage of Mexican-born persons in the United States living outside the six traditional destination states¹ more than doubled from 10 percent to 25 percent between 1990 and 2000 {Durand, 2000 #3}. Counter to popular perceptions and nativist arguments {Huntington, 2004 #52}, preliminary research shows considerable heterogeneity among the Mexican-born persons who settle in non-traditional destinations {Leach, 2005 #98}. They vary greatly in terms of their experience in the United States, household living arrangements, occupations, and where they lived prior to settling in the new destinations, which suggests both that multiple macro- and micro- socioeconomic factors are involved in driving the dispersion of Mexican migrants to new locations and that they also have disparate incorporation experiences. This would be particularly true for those who migrate to new destinations

¹ Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico and Texas.

from within the United States and arrive with more U.S.-based job experience and other resources that might set them apart from others arriving directly from Mexico.

Although research on the likely determinants of internal migration² among immigrants abounds {See, for example, \ Kritz, 1994 #9; Bartel, 1989 #2}, we know relatively little about how internal migration directly impacts incorporation outcomes. This is particularly true for Mexican-born persons who, prior to the 1990s, migrated long distances within the United States in small proportions relative to other immigrant groups and U.S.-born persons {Kritz, 1994 #9; Bartel, 1989 #2}. Although one might hypothesize that migration to newly formed and high growth co-ethnic communities may positively impact incorporation outcomes, this has yet to be systematically investigated beyond a few cases {See \ Zúñiga, 2005 #133}. The present research seeks to fill this void in the literature on the incorporation experiences of Mexican-born persons in the United States. Does internal migration directly or indirectly facilitate socioeconomic incorporation among Mexican-born persons? Are conditions in migration origins and destinations such that their relative socioeconomic position changes after inter-regional migration? Do the earnings of Mexican-born internal migrants increase subsequent to migration? Are migrants benefiting from lower costs-of-living and experiencing better quality-of-life in new destinations? Or do similar barriers exist in new destinations that inhibit Mexican-born persons from achieving upward socioeconomic incorporation as in the traditional destinations?

Depending upon the answers to these questions, immigration scholars may have to reassess the nature and pace of Mexican-born persons' socioeconomic incorporation,

² The present research uses internal migration as synonymous with inter-metropolitan or inter-state migration – sometimes referred to as secondary migration with respect to immigrants – as distinguished from more ubiquitous and shorter-distance intra-metropolitan migration.

particularly the role of group dispersion and internal migration in facilitating new pathways to relative socioeconomic improvement. While earnings and quality of jobs are vitally important with regard to socioeconomic outcomes, this research looks beyond these two common measures of incorporation to account for migrant strategies that may trade higher wages or quality jobs for better quality of life and more opportunities for their children. This may be particularly relevant for Mexican-born persons who often face especially daunting economic, social and political barriers to socioeconomic mobility {Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994 #87; Bean, 2003 #41}. This research is also timely for its policy implications. Several proposals to reform immigration policy view currently immigration dynamics, particularly unauthorized flows, as if it is still largely circular migration of the 1970s and early 1980s when many of the migrants returned home after time in the United States. This has largely changed and settlement is a reality any eventual policy must recognize if it is to be effective. By doing so, it can facilitate first-generation Mexican immigrants' socioeconomic incorporation and thus improve the chances of future generations.

The remainder of this proposal is broken into four sections. First, I highlight several theoretical perspectives that inform the research regarding the socioeconomic incorporation of Mexican-born internal migrants. I then present several hypotheses and expected results for one of several group comparisons to illustrate broader conceptualizations of socioeconomic progress. Third, I outline the data and methods used to answer the above research questions. Finally, I reiterate the importance of the study and its relevance to contemporary immigration theory and policies.

Theory

Research tends to generate pessimism regarding prospects for Mexican-origin socioeconomic incorporation, particularly in the first immigrant generation, due to an abundance of empirical evidence that indicates Mexican-born persons in the United States face formidable barriers to upward socioeconomic mobility. Bojas {,1995 #107; ,1999 #74} suggests this is increasingly due to “declining quality” of individual attributes such as relatively lower levels of education and high rates of unauthorized status. Others point to both individual attributes and changes in macro-economic structures that have resulted not only in lower rewards for individual endowments but also constructed barriers which inhibit socioeconomic mobility {Myers, 1998 #108; Bean, 2003 #41;Portes, 2001 #49}. Transformations in the organization of economic activity in many urban areas around the country – for example, increased demand for both high-end and low-end services – create many low-skill jobs that are largely occupied by immigrants {Sassen, 1993 #105;Sassen, 2000 #99}. Such jobs, however, have increasingly become segmented from the rest of the economy in terms of low stagnant wages and dim prospects for upward mobility. As a result, paths to upward mobility are now less clear for low-skilled immigrants than in earlier decades {Portes, 2001 #49;Massey, 1999 #12}. While debates regarding the causes of such outcomes are sure to continue, there is little doubt that relative declines among Mexican-born persons exist. For example, while research shows that Mexican-born persons’ earnings increase with more time in the United States {Saenz, 2000 #106;Bean, 1987 #33;Clark, 2003 #93}, there is near consensus among immigration scholars that this growth has not kept pace with earnings growth among non-Latino whites {Bean, 2003 #41;Myers, 1998

#108;Borjas, 1995 #107}, which increasingly keeps the Mexican-born population in a relatively disadvantaged position economically.

One's place and community of residence are closely tied to socioeconomic status {Massey, 1993 #76}. Research on residential segregation indicates that living in poor neighborhoods is not only a result of economic and social stratification but also exacerbates such dynamics {Massey, 1985 #100}. For low-skilled immigrants, ethnic neighborhoods offer a dual-edged sword: initial settlement in ethnic neighborhoods may ease the transition upon arrival in the United States by offering access to initial jobs and housing {Portes, 1985 #34}, however remaining in such areas for long periods of time may inhibit socioeconomic incorporation by limiting access to higher paying jobs and other valuable resources that facilitate upward mobility {Alba, 2003 #56;Alba, 1999 #94;Massey, 1985 #100}. Research finds this to be particularly salient for Mexican-born persons who have difficulty moving beyond immigrant enclaves. Just as they have difficulty in increasing their relative earnings, they are also among the least likely to gain access to higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods or reduce over-crowded living conditions, both of which impact efforts to change such situations {Alba, 1999 #94;Fong, 2000 #96; Myers, 1996 #134}. This has important implications not only for their own well-being but also for their children who may grow to despise and reject mainstream society in light of such barriers, further sealing their fate in the lower tiers of the U.S. socioeconomic strata {Portes, 2001 #49}. In light of stagnant wages and little residential mobility within metropolitan areas, one might expect that internal migration of Mexican-born persons may have no impact on socioeconomic incorporation. In other words, because macro-level barriers such as segmented labor markets and residential segregation

may not vary across labor markets, Mexican-born persons may face similar disadvantages in any locale to which they relocate. Thus, one hypothesis regarding internal migration and incorporation among Mexican-born persons is that they are not related, especially if structural barriers and poor economic conditions are the reasons for much of the migration. If conditions in places of origin prevent economic viability for some immigrants, those that leave may do so due to their inability to compete, which, in turn, might make it less likely that they will succeed in another locale. Ivan Light {,2003 #95} considers negative “push” factors such as overcrowding and exorbitant housing costs as driving some of the migration to new destinations. Additionally, other research shows that although Mexican-origin persons are dispersing across the country, decreasing their levels of segregation at the national-level, they are also re-concentrating in the new destinations so their levels of segregation, and potentially disadvantage, are not changing {Logan, 2004 #134}.

Such outcomes, however, appear to be only part of the story. Research that investigates the determinants of immigrants’ internal migration suggests that migrants are often positively selected in terms of individual endowments, which likely increases their chances of success, and conditions in destinations may also lead to socioeconomic progress. Such results suggest more optimistic prospects, particularly for Mexican-born persons, and alternative hypotheses to that stated above. Regarding individual characteristics of Mexican-born migrants, they tend to be more educated, have more job experience in the United States, and possess a better command of English than those remaining in traditional destinations {Saenz, 1991 #23; Bartel, 1989 #2; Kritz, 1994 #9; Neuman, 1994 #19; Leach, 2005 #98}. These attributes are likely to provide more

resources available to migrants and increase their chances of achieving some degree of socioeconomic mobility. We know this to be the case among intra-metropolitan migrants who are able to move into better neighborhoods and purchase homes. So although Mexican-born persons are often prevented from achieving mobility within metropolitan regions, it appears they may be using inter-regional migration to achieve similar outcomes such as living in larger homes and nicer neighborhoods. So from this perspective, one might hypothesize that internal migration facilitates socioeconomic incorporation. Largely prevented from doing so within metropolitan regions as mentioned above, Mexican-born persons may migrate to alternative regions where it is possible to achieve outcomes such as living in nicer homes and safer neighborhoods with better amenities. Evidence of such outcomes would suggest Mexican-born persons migrate to improve their socioeconomic positions.

Micro-economic theories of migration also offer reasons for optimism with regard to migrant incorporation outcomes, although alternative measures of success used by most researchers may be necessary. Economists contend that long distance migrants, in general, base their decisions to migrate on rational cost-benefit calculations such that those with the highest expectations, and the greatest amount of resources, migrate {DaVanzo, 1978 #110;Greenwood, 1991 #111}. Thus, migrants self-select such that success likely follows migration. Empirical results indicate that this is largely the case, particularly in terms of net gains in earnings as a gauge of success {Bartel, 1979 #112;Greenwood, 1991 #111}. Earnings may not be the best gauge of net benefits, though, complicating the application of this theory to Mexican-born migrants. The economics literature suggests that some migrants benefit more than others, depending

upon their labor market experience and position prior to migration {Greenwood, 1991 #111; Dickie, 1989 #113; Bartel, 1979 #112; Perloff, 1998 #114}. Outcomes for blue-collar, low-skilled, and farm workers, who do not view their primary labor market on a national scale, are not so clear relative to more common highly-skilled migrants. Given their low wages and segmented labor markets discussed above, Mexican-born persons may not have reason to believe they will make higher earnings in any other labor market. So what might motivate them to migrate if in fact they cannot expect higher earnings?

Some researchers include housing costs in their models, arguing that the oft-held assumption that earnings capture all the benefits of migration is inaccurate. They contend that benefits such as costs-of-living and other amenities do are not completely redundant with earnings and thus should be included in such analyses. Although Graves {,1983 #115} finds that migration results in higher rents, he shows that this was only because the earnings of those in his sample also increased (i.e., they were purchasing better amenities). Graves also hypothesized that rents would decrease for those whose earnings do not increase subsequent to migration although he did not directly test this. Thus, Mexican-born migrants may include other benefits such as lower costs-of-living or less crowded living conditions in addition to earnings in their cost-benefit calculations. Retirees often implement similar strategies when they transition to fixed incomes by migrating to reduce their housing costs {Walters, 2002 #116}. The present research attempts to account for these additional factors that may prompt Mexican-born persons to migrate by considering outcomes such as housing costs and size of living space subsequent to migration. Various media reports and several case studies highlight these

benefits as reasons for migration, offering some empirical support for this theory {Kelley, 2004 #51; Greenhouse, 2004 #92; Hernández-León, 2000 #7}.

Hypotheses

I use three socioeconomic indicators – earnings, ratio of housing costs to income, and persons per bedroom – to assess socioeconomic outcomes of internal migration for Mexican-born migrants. Earnings are the most commonly used indicator of socioeconomic incorporation, indicative of relative purchasing power and general socioeconomic wellbeing. As discussed, earnings alone may not provide a complete picture of one's status before and after migration since earnings vary by region and may actually decrease for Mexican-born persons subsequent to migration. Migration will provide a net benefit, though, if costs-of-living are reduced to a greater degree than no gain or even losses in earnings. I use housing costs as a close proxy for costs-of-living as this measure has been shown to account for much of the variation in cost-of-living estimates across metropolitan regions {McMahon, 1991 #118}. Thus, I also use a ratio of housing costs to income as a measure of socioeconomic status. Finally, although less frequently considered by immigration scholars with regard to incorporation outcomes {for an exception, see / Myers, 1996 #134}, reducing over-crowding may be a primary reason for leaving traditional immigrant destinations in favor of places where rents are less expensive for more living space. Following Myers, I operationalize living space with persons per bedroom.

I investigate each of these measures for Mexican-born migrants relative to several racial/ethnic reference groups in both the migration origins and destinations: specifically, non-Latino whites, U.S.-born persons of Mexican origin and Mexican-born non-migrate.

Incorporation studies typically view non-Latino whites as the standard of socioeconomic progress for immigrants so the gap between them and Mexican-born migrants will be my primary focus {Alba, 2003 #56; Bean, 2003 #41}. The other reference groups become important when considering when and where internal migrants settle. Initially, Mexican-born persons' decisions to migrate may be motivated by potential gains relative to other co-ethnic non-migrants in the migration origin so gains relative to this group also are important. And although they may be initially unaware of larger compositional effects in the destinations, their incorporation outcomes are also likely influenced by the size of both their own co-ethnic group and other ethnic groups {Blalock, 1979 #136; Marrow, 2005 #137} and the extent to which they enter the local labor force as complements or competition {Smith, 1997 #72}. For the remainder of this section, I present hypotheses for potential effects of migration on differences between Mexican-born persons and non-Latino whites and leave hypothesis relative to other groups for later development.

Generally, I hypothesize that migration will benefit Mexican-born persons relative to non-Latino whites in both migration origins and destinations. In other words, migration should provide an immediate boost in the *relative* socioeconomic position of Mexican-born migrants. Using the three socioeconomic indicators, I test this hypothesis by comparing differences between non-Latino whites in the migration origins and Mexican-born migrants (Gap 1 in Figure 1) with the gap between non-Latino whites in the destinations and Mexican-born migrants in the region of destination (Gap 2 in Figure 1). These comparisons provide an indication of the immediate effects of migration on the migrants' relative socioeconomic position. Further consideration of each indicator is needed, however, to understand the complexity of potential gains.

Regarding earnings, I expect that the gap in earnings will be less in migration destinations largely due to more variation in earnings among non-Latino whites in the migration origins (Figure 2). Because Mexican-born persons' earnings are so low in general, there is likely a floor effect on their earnings regardless of the labor market in which they reside. Although they may experience some decline between locales due to their recent arrival in a new labor market, the declines are not expected to be large. For non-Latino whites, however, earnings will be relatively greater in traditional migration destinations (migration origins) because earnings have increased so dramatically among the highly-skilled, largely non-Latino whites, in recent decades {Sassen, 2000 #99}.

In addition to decreasing the ethnic gap in earnings, Mexican-born migrants' relative socioeconomic position is also likely to depend on the proportion of their income that they must spend on housing costs. As with earnings, I expect housing costs to decline for both Mexican-born migrants and between non-Latino whites in the origins and destinations. However, predicting the relative rates of decline for each group is more difficult than earnings due to two possible motives with regard to housing. First, one might expect that migrants seek to reduce the proportion of their income that they spend on housing by moving into an equally-sized or smaller household structure that likely costs significantly lower in their destination than a similarly sized structure from which they moved. In contrast, non-Latino whites across the two regions might differ more in terms of size of property occupied and less in terms of lower housing costs. This would result in origin-destination differences to be less for non-Latino whites than for the Mexican-born migrants. Therefore, one would expect the gap in housing costs between non-Latino whites and Mexican-born migrants relative to be less in the destination

(Figure 3). An alternative hypothesis would be that Mexican-born migrants strategize to increase their living space rather than maximizing reductions in housing costs. For example, if a householder spent 40% of his income on an overcrowded apartment shared with several other families, he may have migrated not to decrease his housing costs but to spend the same percentage of income to live in a rented four-bedroom house with only his immediate family. If this scenario predominates among the migrants, one would expect less of a decline in the gap between the migrants and non-Latino whites (Figure 4). This scenario illustrates the importance of analyzing persons per household along with housing costs as more abstract quality-of-life factors may play into migration decisions (Lee and Edmonston, 1994).

Finally, I hypothesize that Mexican-born migrants reduce levels of over-crowding relative to non-Latino whites. Over-crowding is particularly salient for Mexican-born persons in traditional destinations due to inflated housing costs, low wages and network-driven international migration {Light, 2003 #95; Myers, 1996 #134}. Therefore, prospects of reducing overcrowding may be a dominant factor in migration decisions, and given low overcrowding rates among non-Latino whites, Mexican-born persons are expected to make significant gains with regard to persons per household (Figure 5).

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[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]
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Data and Methodology

I use a multi-method approach to investigate socioeconomic outcomes of Mexican-born internal migrants. Although my study will primarily focus on quantitative methods using Census micro data, I will also gather interview data both to understand

individual migrant motivations and particular socioeconomic outcomes not available in Census data and to enhance the findings of the quantitative methods. The quantitative aspect of my study will consist of two phases to test whether the above hypotheses can be generalized to all Mexican-born internal migrants or if socioeconomic outcomes vary across particular migration flows. The first phase will include all Mexican-born internal migrants in the United States between 1995 and 2000, regardless of migration origin and destination, and the second will focus on two particularly relevant migration flows that vary in terms of volume, relative maturity, and industrial composition at origin and destination: 1) Los Angeles and Omaha, Nebraska and 2) Houston and Atlanta. These two migration flows are also my target locales for contacting subjects to gather supplementary qualitative interview data.

For the quantitative analysis, as mentioned, I will use Census 2000 micro data as it contains the most comprehensive information regarding individual characteristics and socioeconomic indicators of first generation immigrants in combination with the greatest geographical detail of both the migrants' current and previous places of residence. Another advantage to this data is the recent availability of estimated immigration status, developed by Passel, Van Hook and Bean (2005), because unauthorized status is particularly relevant for the Mexican case. My sample will consist of all adult Mexican-born individuals between the primary working ages of 25 and 64 who migrated between two metropolitan regions between 1995 and 2000. I will use a two-stage regression approach for both phases of the quantitative analysis. Because Census data does not have information on migrant earnings or housing costs at region of origin, I will first specify regression models to simulate these for each migrant. The second stage will use the

simulation results, in combination with earnings and housing cost averages for non-Latino whites in both the migration origin and destination, to calculate changes in the gaps between the migrants and the non-Latino white population in each locale. Also, I will conduct analyses for each phase at both individual and household levels to understand the effects of income pooling within households.

For each of the regression models, I will use common control variables at both the individual level – age, gender, education, occupation, time in the United States, immigration status, marital status, and number of children – and metropolitan level – ethnic group residential density, occupational and industrial concentrations, and economic indicators. In addition to these usual control variables, I also consider stages of development of migration flows into each new destination and rates of Mexican-born population growth, which research shows may be related to incorporation outcomes through migrant selectivity {Hernández-León, 2003 #8;Leach, 2005 #98}.

Finally, I will conduct approximately 10 to 15 interviews with Mexican-born persons who migrated between traditional and new destinations in the past decade. This aspect of my research will enable me to gather information not available in Census data such as individuals' subjective reasons for migration, their expectations regarding the new metropolitan region and their general experience and interactions with their new community. Because these interviews are intended only to supplement the quantitative results, I conduct a smaller number than is often typical for a qualitative study. I have chosen two destinations as target areas to recruit subjects and conduct the interviews across several important theoretical dimensions. First, research both on international migration {Massey, 1994 #17} and internal migration {Leach, 2005 #98} show that

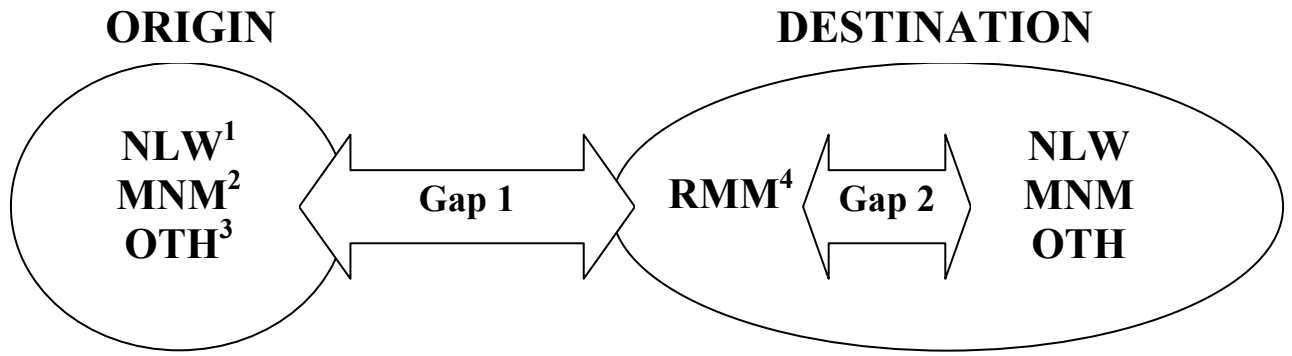
stages in the development of migration flows largely determine the kinds of migrants involved in the migration streams. As of 2000, the Mexican-born migration flows into Omaha, Nebraska and Atlanta, Georgia were at quite different points in their development. Annual migration flows into Omaha were relatively small as of 1990, and the migrants were predominately arriving from California {Johnson Jr., 1999 #117}. Between 1990 and 2000, the migration flows into Nebraska had grown from about one Mexican-born migrant per 1,000 total population to over nine migrants per 1,000 total population, but relative to Atlanta the flows were relatively new (U.S. Census, 2000). In contrast, Atlanta's migrant population was quite large by 1990 and had arrived from a variety of origins, including Chicago, California and Texas {Johnson Jr., 1999 #117}. These differences in timing and size of the migration flows should result in migrant populations quite different in composition with regard to age, marital status and education of the migrants. In addition, different economic factors have contributed to variation in how and why the migrants arrived in each destination. Omaha is a regional hub of agricultural production and food processing industries whereas many migrants in Atlanta work in low-end service sectors.

Implications

This study differs from typical studies on internal migration in important ways. Whereas most studies profile individual characteristics and various aspects of migration origins and destinations to understand determinants of migration and conjecture about outcomes, I seek to take this body of research a step further to directly test theories regarding socioeconomic outcomes and internal migration. Current theories of immigrant incorporation may be inadequate if the findings of this study suggest that

Mexican-born internal migrants reduce the gap between themselves and the majority group in the community to which they migrate in terms of earnings and costs-of-living. An analysis of earnings, costs-of-living and homeownership in combination may provide a clearer picture of whether Mexican-born persons in new destinations improve their relative socioeconomic position by relocating. An in depth analysis of Mexican migration and settlement in new destinations, as this project proposes, has great significance for both incorporation theory and immigration policy. At a minimum, the research will shed light on the new dynamics and geography of Mexican migration and the extent to which processes of socioeconomic incorporation are different from those occurring in more established areas. At best, it may suggest a need for reconceptualizing incorporation theory that accounts for the new dynamics and settlement of communities in regions not accustomed to receiving international migrants. In light of these potential findings, this research may also help resolve what appears to be a large gap between current policy proposals and actual processes of incorporation. Contemporary policy debates largely revolve around assumptions that recent migration dynamics are similar to those which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s: that Mexican migration is circular in nature and the migrants do not desire to incorporate into United States society {Huntington, 2004 #52}. This research reconceptualizes the nature and pace of incorporation of Mexican-born persons in what are increasingly new destinations, thus adding both policy and theoretical significance to the study of immigrant incorporation.

Figure 1. National-level Analysis Group Comparisons



1. Non-Latino whites.
2. Mexican-born non-migrants
3. Other Ethnic Groups
4. Recent Mexican-born migrants in destination

Figure 2. Hypothesis 1A, Earnings

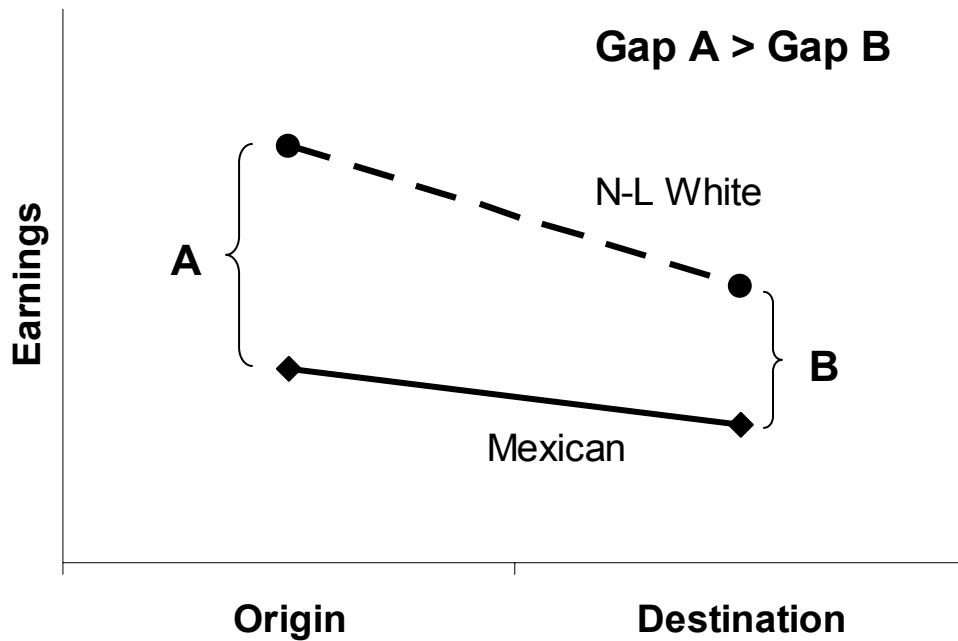


Figure 3. Hypothesis 1B, Housing to Income

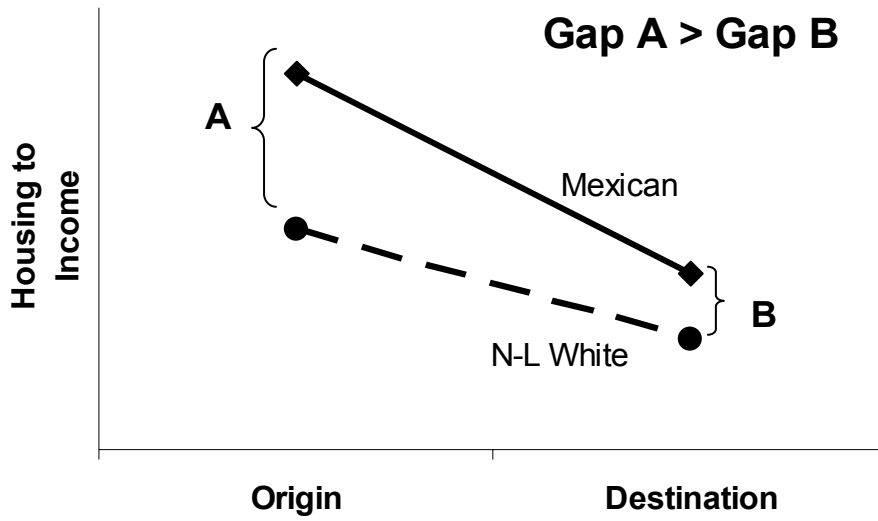


Figure 4. Alternative Hypothesis 1B, Housing to Income

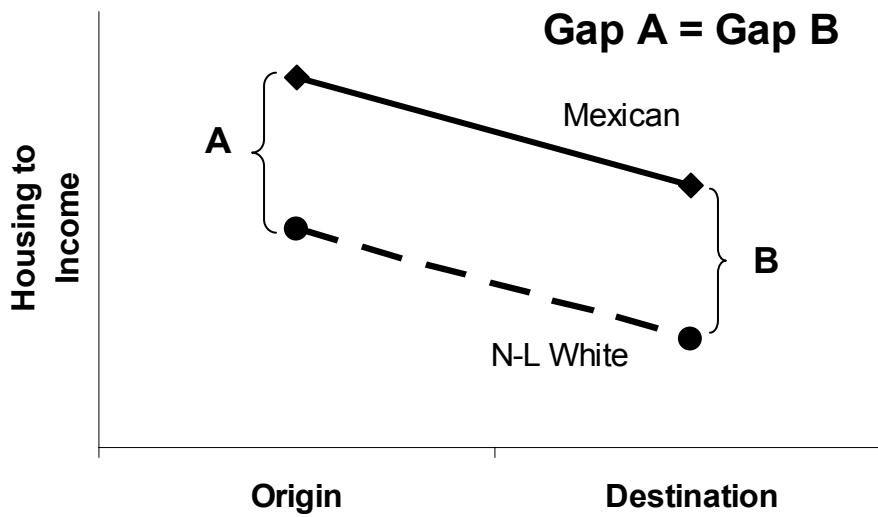
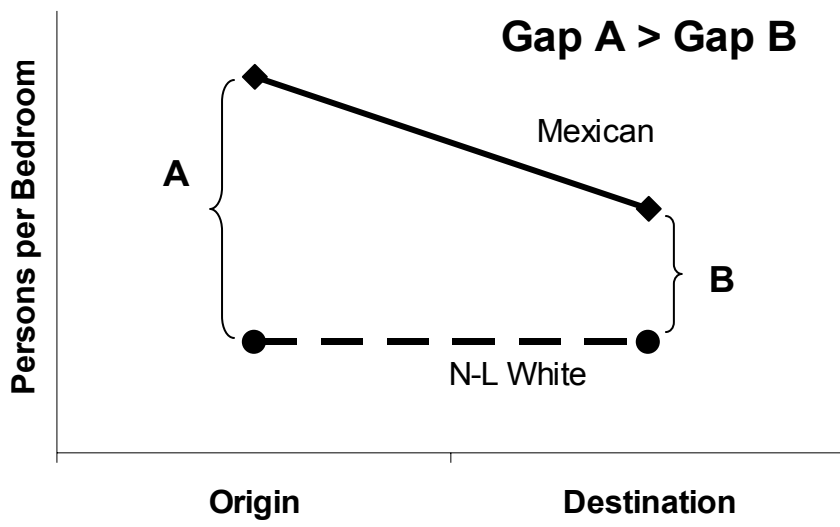


Figure 5. Hypothesis 1C, Persons per Bedroom



Bibliography