

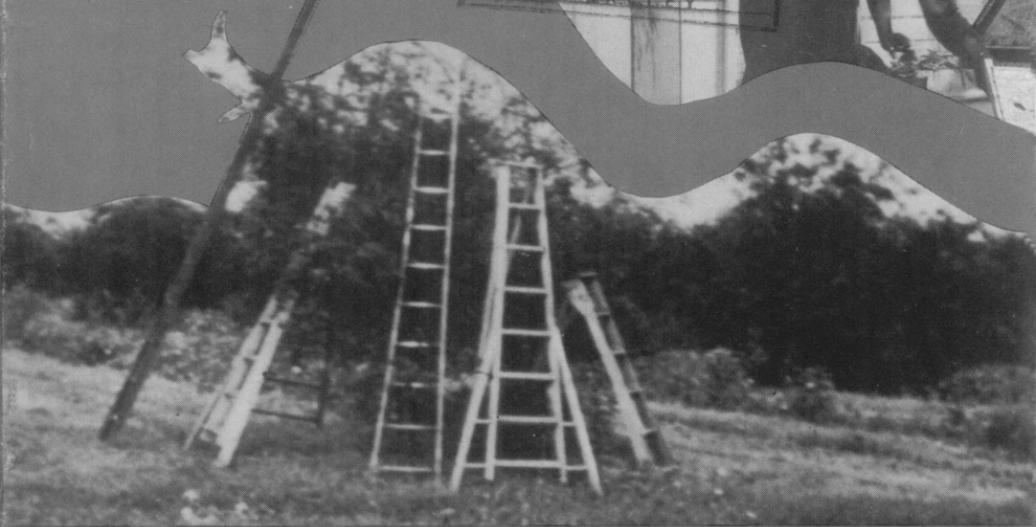
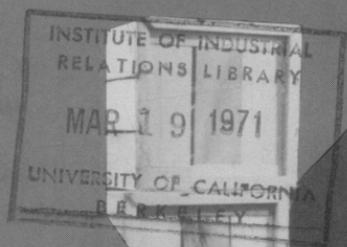
Migrant Labor
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On the Season: Aspects of the Migrant Labor System

By Dorothy Nelkin

Cornell University, New York State
School of Industrial and Labor Relations.



On the Season: Aspects of the Migrant Labor System

On the Season:
*Aspects of the
Migrant Labor System*

By Dorothy Nelkin

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New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations
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TO

Laurie and Lisa

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Foreword

THE research upon which this monograph is based was directed by William H. Friedland, currently Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Support for field work and writing was provided by the Manpower Administration of the United States Department of Labor, the Cornell University Agricultural Research Station, and the Ford Foundation.

The project was organized as part of a teaching research program in the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell. It was designed as a vehicle to teach sociology by involving students in empirical research on a social problem (Friedland, 1969a). The author, formerly a research associate at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, is presently affiliated with the Cornell University Program on Science, Technology, and Society.

The project primarily utilized participant observation techniques. During the summers of 1966 to 1968, sixteen undergraduate students from Cornell University and Tuskegee Institute lived five to ten weeks in fourteen migrant labor camps.

They were trained in observation techniques prior to their field research, and they analyzed and compared their data in class during the semester following field work. While in the field, they were assisted by eight other students, who lived in nearby farm communities and served as liaisons, tape recording field notes with the participant observers about every three days. These eight students also studied farmers, government agencies, social workers, and church groups, which are part of the total network of relationships in the migrant labor system. Most of the camps in which field observations were made were in New York State. The camps housed southern black migrant labor crews originating in Florida. The crews studied spent from three to five months in the Northeast harvesting mainly cherries, tomatoes, apples, corn, beans, and potatoes.

Most of the data in this study were gathered from field notes that chronologically recorded the daily routine. A set of guidelines suggested specific areas to emphasize, and these were regularly adjusted throughout the season as data on the daily routine of each crew revealed interesting new areas of emphasis and opportunities for work on comparative material from different camps. In addition, face-sheet data were gathered about individual crew members. A substantial part of the field notes recorded conversations, interactions, and special events that the observers considered important. All field notes were later indexed to facilitate analysis.

Along with the field research program, two surveys were conducted. One — of migrants, crew leaders, and growers — was part of the thesis research of Judith Stewart (1968); she interviewed 181 workers from twelve crews, as well as the growers and crew leaders associated with each crew. The other was a small survey of an agricultural community.

The essays in this study draw upon the two surveys, the field notes of the participant observers living and working with migrants, and also interviews with persons in administrative, teaching, and social service positions related to the migrant labor system.

The following students lent their enthusiastic support under

often trying circumstances. From Cornell University were Jane Avery, Les Durant, Howard Gladston, David Gruenberg, Arthur Kimmel, Sandra Grotberg Kistler, Craig Leslie, Iles Minoff, George Price, David Rindos, Michael Rotkin, John Rounds, Leonard Rubin, Nedra Sanfilipo, Marie-Celeste Scully, Roger Stetter, Judith Stewart, Ed Taub, Lillian Trager, and Lucy Whyte. From Tuskegee Institute were Janet Perkins Carter, Harry Hutchinson, Lee Packer, Jessalyn Pendarvis, and Graham Wiggins.

Information relating to the migrants in Florida was provided by William Channel of the American Friends Service Committee. Many individuals attached to government agencies, social service organizations, and the agricultural extension service assisted us in the complex arrangements involved in placing observers in camps.

Above all, the imaginative leadership of William H. Friedland was crucial to the very existence of the migrant labor project.

My thanks to Sidney Siskin, whose penetrating comments helped to clarify ideas as well as their expression.

Permission to reprint Section II has been granted by the Society for the Study of Social Problems and its journal, *Social Problems*, where the chapter appeared in a somewhat modified form as a research paper in vol. 17, spring 1970. An extended treatment of the field notes from which these papers were developed is in press (Friedland and Nelkin, 1971).

DOROTHY NELKIN

Cornell University
Ithaca, New York
June 10, 1970

Introduction:

A Migrant Labor Profile

[They] suffered from a system which left them unemployed and wageless on wet days or in seasonal slackness. . . . This short hire system in itself would not have been injurious if wages had risen sufficiently to allow of saving against unemployment. . . . Complaints were universal of [their] vice, idleness, drunkenness and thriftlessness. . . . Deprived of all means of rising in life, [they] lost the ambition to rise. There were only ale houses. . . .

(Dunlop, 1913)

THIS description of farm labor was written in 18th century England, but it could aptly describe the current condition of migrant farm workers in the United States.

Migrant workers are a crucial, yet problematic, group within our society. Their labor is vital to performing menial, labor-intensive farm chores such as weeding and thinning row crops, and harvesting fresh market fruits and vegetables too fragile to be picked by machine. At the same time, their poverty and the conditions in which they live and work constitute a major

social problem in the United States. The contrast between the efficiency and abundance of American agriculture and the inequities of the migrant farm labor system is a striking paradox. "We have on stage a picture of productivity, technological advancement, efficiency, and growth. But just as present backstage are such realities as rural poverty, ethnic isolation, and a plantation corporation system of agriculture" (Fujimoto, 1969).

This series of essays explores three aspects of the migrant farm labor system. It is not intended to be a definitive or exhaustive study of the system in its organizational complexity.¹ It is an analysis, based on systematic ethnographic observations, of the internal dynamics of a social group so low in the American socioeconomic hierarchy that it may be considered outside, or marginal to, it. The essays take the structure of the migrant labor system as observed *in situ*, and examine migrants' reactions and adjustments to it.

Some background information is necessary to place the analysis in context. The workers studied in this project are those who harvest crops each summer on the small and middle-sized farms characteristic of New York State agriculture. These farms, in terms of acreage, are only about half as large as the average-sized farms in the nation as a whole (Marzloff, 1966). This factor of size gives to the migrant labor system in New York State a dynamic considerably different from that operating in the larger, industrialized farms of the West and Middle West. In New York State, crews are smaller, each living on a farmer's own land; industrial style labor-management practices are rarely found.

The number of migrants coming into New York State for the

¹There are many detailed studies on various dimensions of the migrant labor problem. For example, Moore (1965), Wright (1965), and Allen (1966) provide general material. Padfield (1965) looks at the impact of technological changes on various groups in Arizona agriculture. Demographic material relating to migrant workers in the Eastern United States appears in Larson (1968), Koos (1957), and Meltzer (1955). Hoffman (1968) gives a factual background for the migrant labor situation in New York State, including data on wages, conditions, and legislative practices. See references beginning on p. 81 below.

harvest has been steadily declining over the past ten years, as the following estimates of the New York State Employment Service indicate. The figures refer to peak season employment of interstate farm workers

1960.....	27,600
1965.....	19,300
1966.....	16,100
1967.....	16,900
1968.....	14,400

These are almost entirely black migrants; the only other sizeable ethnic group of migrants in New York State are Puerto Ricans who come to the state specifically for the harvest and return to Puerto Rico in the fall. They usually live in their own camps, apart from the black migrants.

Of the latter group, about half are recruited in the South by a crew leader operating on behalf of a grower. The crew leader brings the workers north in a bus and serves as labor boss for the entire season. There are also migrants who make informal contact directly with a grower, without the crew leader as intermediary. They come north in private cars and join a crew when they arrive in the camp. Formal recruiting is organized through a cooperative arrangement between the Farm Employment Service of the New York State Employment Service and its Florida counterpart. Labor needs are estimated, job orders are recorded, and crews are scheduled to meet them. The actual recruiting of workers, however, is an informal process controlled entirely by the crew leader. Federal legislation in 1964 required that crew leaders register and that they provide workers, prior to recruitment, with information concerning wages and conditions. This legislation, and vehicle insurance laws, are the only formal constraints on crew leader activity. In 1968, 368 crew leaders were registered in New York State.

The average size of crews coming to New York is about thirty workers (New York State J.L.C., 1967). Most crews consist of thirty to eighty persons, but there are many smaller kinship-based units of as few as half a dozen, and occasionally there are larger crews of more than a hundred.

Workers who join the migrant labor stream vary in age, family structure, and in their experience in agricultural work. According to demographic studies done in 1959, 18 percent of New York's black migrant workers were under fourteen years of age, 15 percent were from fifteen to nineteen, 52 percent were from twenty to forty-four, and 15 percent were over forty-five. Sixty-four percent of these were male, 36 percent female (Larson, 1968). At that time, a sizeable percentage of the migrant workers came north in family groupings. Thirty-one percent of Larson's 1959 sample of 506 migrants had spouses living in their camps. This pattern appears to be changing, however. Families tend to settle down permanently as soon as it becomes economically possible, often moving into stable agricultural jobs, such as packing house work, or remaining unemployed during the summer. Each year the migrant labor stream has attracted fewer families. Thus, there is an increasing predominance of young single men.

The fourteen crews studied intensively for this project ranged in size from twenty-eight to 130 workers. The ages of the crew members varied from two to seventy-six years, with a conspicuous drop in the number of men between twenty-five and forty. The family structure varied from crews consisting entirely of single adults and in which the only "families" were temporary liaisons formed for the summer, to one crew in which most of the members were related to one of several large and complex kinship groupings. There were some women in every camp studied; this was a prerequisite for placement of observers.

Most of the migrants who come to New York State winter in Florida, where they harvest vegetables along the "range line" bordering U.S. 441. The towns of Belle Glade and Pahokee and the large "housing authority" camps nearby are migrant communities, crowded in winter and largely deserted in summer, when lack of work forces most residents to move in search of crops. Typically, a crew leader will recruit as many Floridians as he can, and fill out his crew with people picked up as he drives his bus north. Upon arriving in New York State, migrants do not necessarily work in the same crops they picked in the South.

There is, in fact, considerable variety in the crops of New York State, where different areas specialize in different crops. Long Island and Steuben County grow potatoes; the Hudson Valley, apples, cherries, and lettuce; parts of the Catskills grow corn; central New York, snap beans and strawberries; and upstate New York, cherries and apples. Our observations, made primarily in central and upstate New York, were of crews picking cherries, apples, strawberries, snap beans, potatoes, corn, tomatoes, and onions. In addition, the crews studied did some packing house work, and hourly field tasks such as haying, weeding, thinning, and laying irrigation pipes.

Throughout the state, migrants live in camps privately owned by growers who hire a crew primarily to work on their own farms. There are numerous exchange arrangements, however, usually carried on informally. One grower will release his crew to another during a slack period, and raiding of crews by crew leaders short of workers is a common practice. A camp may serve as a home for a crew for several months. Most crews, it was found, preferred to travel long distances to various jobs rather than move camp many times during the season.

Labor camps vary enormously in character and in condition. Our observations revealed housing which ranged from modern concrete block structures to decrepit wooden barracks and frame houses. In one case, a camp authorized by the Health Department to house no more than eighty people, actually housed 130. Crowding was not a problem in every camp, however, since the annual decline in the number of workers has resulted in smaller crews. A number of camps in the state close each year, as increasingly stringent health regulations specified in the State Sanitary Code require alterations and repairs which are economically unviable. The attrition rate reflects the small size and economically marginal state of many of the farms which employ migrant workers.

Migrant farm workers have the lowest annual income of all occupational groups in the United States. Wages rates are very low, and work is irregular. Migrants are not paid for rainy days when work is not available, and they have no guarantee of a

minimum number of days work during a season. Nationally, in 1968, the annual earnings of migrant workers (including women and children) averaged \$1,562, including all sources of income. This annual sum ranged from \$1,018, for the 57 percent who did only farm work, to \$2,274, for those who were able to find some nonfarm work to supplement their income. The median daily earnings for farm workers in the Northeastern United States in 1968 were calculated to be \$9.05 (U. S. Department of Labor, October 1969).

A minimum wage for farm workers was first established in 1967 under an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act, which had formerly excluded agricultural workers. The minimum was set at \$1.00 an hour in 1967 and increased to \$1.30 by 1969. However, the minimum wage applies only to larger farms and, thus, has limited effective application in the Northeast. "In the low wage regions where the minimum is higher than prevailing wages, most farms are exempt from coverage because they are small. In the areas of larger farms where coverage is more extensive, prevailing wage rates are likely to exceed the statutory minimum" (Fuller, 1968, 439). In the case of non-exempt farms, according to our observations, application was also limited by the difficulty of enforcing an hourly minimum wage where there is a piece-work system of remuneration; for hours may be easily adjusted to actual productivity.

Observers who were in camps when the new minimum wage legislation was introduced did not find evidence that the legislation resulted in any changes in the system of remuneration. In any case, official statistics concerning wages have little meaning, considering the unpredictable variation in the number of hours that work is available, and the possibilities of exploitation inherent in the present system.

How does this system operate? How does it relate to the social context outside the agricultural system? What is its effect on the migrant worker? What are the adjustments that allow individuals to work within this bounded system? These are the main questions considered in the following essays.

These essays deal with the interplay between the social,

political, and economic environment that constitutes the migrant labor system and the adaptive processes which enable migrants to function within this environment. There are many aspects of the migrant labor system that reflect the broader racial problem in the United States. Selected for discussion here are those particularly salient in the context of the migrant labor system. Thus, the essays concentrate on migrants' adaptation to an environment shaped by such factors as physical and social exclusion from the wider society, an uprooted pattern of life marked by seasonal geographic mobility, the conditions of stoop labor, the dependence and powerlessness imposed by living in an employer-owned camp, the limited physical setting of a labor camp, the effects of the temporary character of a labor crew.

Analysis is based on assumptions similar to those put forth in a recent book on Afro-American anthropology (Whitten, 1970): "Survival has meant adapting not only to the exigencies in the natural environments, but to the continuing vicissitudes of life imposed by the dominating white social, political, and economic systems. That black aggregates have survived under enormous pressures. . . would suggest some powerful adaptive mechanisms" (p. 40).

The first essay focusses on the structure of work, the influence of employment relationships on satisfaction, work attitudes, and stability. The second essay concerns the bearing of unpredictability and disorder — characteristic of the migrant labor setting — on life style in the camps. The third deals with the relationship of the migrant to the wider society.

These aspects of the migrant labor system are explored primarily through observations of the daily life of migrant workers. The method of research enabled us, in each setting, to observe events closely, listen to reactions, and gain insight into the "organizational climate." Observations necessarily focussed on particular situations which, as noted above, varied considerably. Generalizations, however, are supported by the comparative material which emerged from regular discussions among the observers in different camps, and from survey and interview data.

I-

Employment Practices

GROWERS have long assumed they cannot and need not compete for workers in the general labor market. Pressured by time, perishable crops, and shortage of labor, they are willing to employ the young or the old, the able-bodied or the infirm — anyone who is available at harvest time. Growers complain about the productivity of agricultural labor, yet few of them try to develop labor-management practices competitive with those of other industries. They argue that machines are replacing hand labor; that whatever the state of the migrant labor system may be, it is a system rapidly becoming obsolete, and therefore is no longer cause for concern.

This study of employment practices assumes, on the contrary, that it is important to come to grips with manpower problems during periods of technological change. As the use of machine harvesters increases, labor needs do not disappear. It becomes more important to develop the skills of workers and to foster labor stability and commitment, despite the continuing seasonal character of labor demand.

After a brief introduction suggesting some of the unique characteristics of employment needs in agriculture, this section will consider some aspects of the present organizational structure of the work involving migrant workers, as observed in the fields and in the camps, as well as the modes of behavior developed by migrants in their attempts to cope with the organization of work.

The Characteristics of Labor Demand

Growers are concerned with the economic goals of productivity and efficiency, i.e., the largest number of units picked at the lowest possible cost. For a number of reasons, productivity and efficiency in agricultural work depend on considerable commitment on the part of the worker. First, labor is a major cost in crops that are hand harvested. With mechanization, the ratio of capital to labor costs increases, indicating the need for greater efficiency. Second, fast and efficient performance is required of workers over a short period of time during the harvest, when timing is critical owing to rapid spoilage of crops. Third, workers employed to do hand harvesting are handling produce for the fresh market, too fragile to be picked by machine. Finally, control and supervision during the work process pose intrinsic difficulties, since people seldom work in groups and are spatially dispersed. Each worker picks independently, the productivity of one having no bearing on that of another. Pay by piece work is not, in itself, sufficient as an incentive to high productivity.

Despite the importance of commitment to productivity during the critical harvest period and the costly nature of labor mismanagement, employment relationships in agriculture have developed in a casual and haphazard manner. In analyzing these relationships, Etzioni's classification of power, and its bearing on commitment, is a useful point of departure (Etzioni, 1961). Etzioni's three categories are coercive power, remunerative power, and normative power. The migrant labor system involves some degree of remunerative power through the allocation of wages; but, in large part, the power in the system is coercive, exercised by the grower or crew leader through the centralized control of basic needs. Consistent with Etzioni's model, migrant

workers express a strong negative orientation to work; as we shall see, they manifest little commitment to or sense of identification with their jobs (cf. Fuller, 1968, 434). This has its effect on work performance and, in particular, on employment stability.

The migrant labor system developed as a consequence of several social and economic factors. With industrialization, the local labor supply in rural areas, once able to handle the harvests, was drained into urban industries. At the same time, southern workers became available as a result of economic and technological changes during the depression — in particular, the decline of the share-crop system, and the mechanization of cotton picking. The migrant labor system as it gradually evolved was also affected by increased development of technology in agriculture, which limited labor needs to brief but highly intensive manpower-demand periods. The situation of a peak labor supply required in any given area for only a short period of time creates a somewhat unusual framework for an employment relationship. It is a problem further compounded by the element of unpredictability and contingency characteristic of agriculture — the dependence on weather, and on market conditions that can seldom be controlled at a local level.

To meet the seasonal demand for labor, migrants come to the Northeastern United States for three to five months each summer, specifically for the purpose of harvesting crops. They move into a labor camp with a crew during this short period. Because the employer usually owns the camp in which his employees live, he has a somewhat different relationship with his workers than has the factory manager, whose contact with workers relates only to "on-the-job" conditions. Responsibility extends beyond the work place in agriculture, for the grower must arrange management of the living facilities of employees, transportation to work, and sometimes sustenance. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of the old "company town" or of lumber camps.

This relationship between work and nonwork settings is a peculiarity of the migrant labor system on the East Coast. A crew shares experiences on a 24-hour-a-day basis. This means, for

example, that with the small crews and relatively informal work organization, those in supervisory roles at work are a part of the crew, living in the camp, sharing the same limited facilities.

Current management practices in the migrant labor system will be described with respect to the patterns of authority, the division of labor, communication, and the planning and adjustment mechanisms used to control efficiency under various conditions.

Management Practices

PATTERNS OF AUTHORITY

The grower, as the owner of the farm and labor camp, is the ultimate source of authority. But, in most cases studied, growers "solved" their problems of labor management by allocating responsibility for supervision and crew management to a crew leader. In contrast to industrial organization, with year-round operation, there is no stable core of full-time supervisory personnel on most farms. Special provision must be made just for the few months of the harvest. While the grower himself, or a year-round hired man, sometimes assumes a supervisory role, the usual practice is to transfer authority to a crew leader.

Several growers offered reasons for their reluctance to exercise authority directly. Some felt that they poorly understood the migrants and did not know how to communicate with them. A crew leader was "one of them" and could penetrate what was felt to be a communications barrier. Other growers, especially those on smaller farms, had insufficient hired labor and simply too much else to do, for they themselves were occupied with farm tasks such as bookkeeping, spraying, repairs, and the operation of mechanical equipment. One grower operating a large farm with several year-round farm hands claimed that he could not get the year-round men to assume responsibility for supervising migrants. This grower was critical of the crew leader system, considered it exploitative, and operated without it. When not himself supervising, he neglected entirely the task of supervision. He experimented with selecting temporary supervisors from within the crew, but he discovered that this was

resented and ineffective. The crew would more readily accept the authority of someone outside the group. As a result, except at times of peak pressure, when he personally remained in the fields with the workers, there was essentially no supervisory control. Other growers abdicated management of labor out of sheer dislike for this aspect of farming and expressed sentiments similar to those of the grower who shouted to a *New York Times* reporter: "See those people in the fields? Well, they're nothing, I tell you, nothing. They never were nothing and you and me and God Almighty ain't going to change them. They gave me the bottom of the barrel and I'd fire them all, clean them off the fields if you'd get me someone else" (*New York Times*, Sept. 22, 1966, 39).

A study of the relation between growers and crew leaders on twelve farms (Stewart, 1968) revealed various degrees of crew leader control. At one extreme was the crew leader who had total power over all aspects of his crew's existence, being recruiter, camp manager, provider of food and whiskey, policeman, and banker, as well as work supervisor. After making initial arrangements with this crew leader, the grower avoided all involvement. "I don't really know what is going on and even if I did, there's nothing I can do about it. I just have to take whatever the crew leader is handing out." At the other extreme was the crew leader with delimited control over specific jobs. An unusual case was that of the grower who hired a crew leader essentially to be a liaison; the grower retained control himself through owning the only bus, running the food distribution system, and owning the local store. In addition, camp management was controlled through his brother, who was a state trooper.

The Stewart survey of twelve crews also tried to assess variation in grower control. To the question, "Does the grower ever tell you what to do at work?" 67 percent of 119 respondents said "never." When asked who gave the most orders, 74 percent said the crew leader, 9 percent said a field walker who was a member of the crew, and 9 percent said, "No one, we're on our own." Only 5 percent of the respondents indicated that the

grower gave orders, and 3 percent said they received orders from his hired man.

The coercive character of the crew leader's power, his absolute control over the basic needs of his crew, was accepted in most camps either out of fear or dependence.

What about Pole? Nobody messes with him. He comes down the line, he tells you to do something, and you get down that line in 3 or 4 minutes because his feet are as big as half the line.

Rev feels that people should not drink at all and makes continual references to the Bible on the evils of alcohol. However, he also makes money selling wine in the camp at a 100% markup. . . . I once asked Clinton if he thought it was right that Rev should charge such a high price. Clinton said, "Well, if I went to the store to get it, I would have to spend a dollar to drive there and back." "Well, should he make that much profit?" Clinton just shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, you know."*

The extent of the crew leader's power is not necessarily correlated with high productivity. In fact, his ability to earn money from the various services he provides in the camp reduces his stake in productivity. Yet, some cases were observed of crew leaders who were very much concerned with productivity; and here, the unlimited means at their disposal gave them effective power to force people to work. One crew leader in particular regularly manipulated workers through his control over the food distribution system.

I don't understand how JB keeps anybody in the camp. I just don't understand it. They won't give me anything to eat because I just picked one bushel. I can't have any dinner.

While migrants necessarily yield to crew leader control, an underlying resentment is apparent, usually in vague expressions of dissatisfaction and nondirected grumbling. At times, however, this resentment is expressed directly.

He [the crew leader] must be crazy. He wants everyone to work themselves to death around here. I'm not here to make his family rich, I'm here to work for me and me alone.

*All quotes without references are from field diaries.

A crew clearly recognizes the source of real authority in the camp. When a man is selected by the crew leader or grower to supervise, he bolsters his authority by referring back to the crew leader or "the Man." "I only do what I'm told. You have to see the crew leader about that. He's the man you want to see." In the case of a camp where the grower maintained personal control over wages and planning but used a hired man to supervise the actual work, the limited character of the hired man's control was clearly perceived by the crew, and his somewhat pretentious manner resented. "Tom ain't shit. You shouldn't take anything from him because he's nothing. He just thinks he's alot. Tom wants to be a big wheel but he's not even a hub cap yet." In a similar situation, the hired man happened to be personally sensitive to the mood of the crew and adjusted his style accordingly. He went around talking about old times, carefully encouraging and manipulating people without placing himself above them. The response from the crew was positive. They identified with him to the point where they did not feel he was bossing them around. He had no real power to enforce his demands; his success was based on the appeal of his personal style. But in this camp, as in others, the crew leader remained the ultimate source of authority and was careful not to encourage competition in leadership. One means by which power remains centralized, as we shall see, is to rotate supervisory roles so only the crew leader or grower retains permanent authority.

The consequences of this pattern of allocating authority are enormous for the migrant who must meet all his work and non-work needs within the migrant labor system. However, because there is little structure, and few restrictions on him, a crew leader's exercise of authority becomes largely a matter of his personal inclination. The style in which he exercises his authority appears to be the most important influence on the character and orientation of the crew. (Friedland, 1969).

THE DIVISION OF LABOR

The tasks involved in harvesting are relatively few. Most crew members are pickers, and their jobs require a limited

variety of skills, though there are considerable skill differences evident in the actual picking process. There is an intermediate level of personnel: field walkers, who supervise the picking, checkers, loaders, and weighers, who handle the produce once it is picked, and drivers, who bring the crop to the processor. The number and character of these jobs vary according to the crop and the extent of mechanization. To pick corn, for example, a "mule train" is normally employed. This is a moving platform on which corn is crated while it is picked. The job requires packers and boxmakers as well as pickers, who work with far more interdependence than is the case of workers in other hand-harvested crops. But in corn, as well as other crops, the division of labor is neither stable nor formalized. The crew leader or grower selects and controls his "lieutenants," who hold their jobs at his pleasure. In some crews, the crew leader's kin performed the nonpicking jobs. In others, the crew leader used the allocation of these tasks as a means of dispensing favors and of creating social obligation among as many members of his crew as possible. Thus, workers were shifted around, sometimes acting as field walkers or weighers, sometimes as pickers. As a result, they were often ineffective, particularly when required to tell others what to do.

Paul, who is usually a picker like everyone else, was given supervision of the third field and was to assign rows and grade cherries. The pickers resented his being a supervisor. Paul was just another picker and there he was out walking around telling other people what to do. "Grading the cherries and sitting on his behind all day." Red said he could have done the job as well as Paul. ". . . I don't like it. You put a nigger on a position like that and he thinks he's some kind of damn fool what's supposed to be running around the field giving orders, and I just don't think that he can give me orders. . . . I'm not going to pick any more cherries."

The division of labor, then, is temporary, and intermediate roles are held through the good will of the grower or crew leader, rather than through being a permanent part of the work structure. This limits the possibility of social mobility and stratifica-

tion. Moreover, those who are temporarily assigned to various jobs are faced with ambiguities that result from a vague definition of their authority and independence.

Spaceman assigned us three rows apiece but later the farmer came out in the field and said, "Oh no, let them take one row each." We had started working already and were annoyed at having to come back and be reassigned.

When we filled a bucket of cherries, we brought it to the checker, a woman who punched tickets and dumped the bucket into a large box. She complains. . . "Well, if I take all the white cherries I'm going to bring the grade down and the Man will tell me that I'm picking the wrong cherries; but if I don't take the white cherries, he's going to tell me that they're left on the tree so there's nothing I can do about it." She seems to split the difference, sometimes telling us to pick the whites, sometimes telling us to skip them.

Another aspect of the division of labor is the method of allocating rows and trees. On some mornings there was a lineup and the crew leader would make assignments, but more often, lacking direction, migrants developed their own system. Sometimes this consisted of a random process; sometimes, if for some reason one part of a field was considered to be better than another, there would be a dash to the preferred area.

Norms develop within the crew to avoid conflict with respect to work.

When you finish your tree you must take the next available one in the row even if it is very scrawny. Occasionally one row will have some very bad trees and when this happens, people will hide in the grove waiting for someone else to get stuck with the bad trees. At first I complained about the scrawny trees and the field walker gave me a lecture about how every man had to take whatever came to him. Someone had to do these trees after all. He talked to me as if taking these trees was the Christian thing to do. . . . People will often work in partners. Sometimes a man will see a friend working on a good tree in a field where most of the other trees are bad. He will ask to "help hit this tree" until someone else gets the bad ones. . . . At times, people beat the trees with sticks trying to knock cherries down rather than pick them. . . . In some cases, beating trees, a common practice, has an

economic motive. If the tree is bad and the person feels he is being slowed down by having to pick it, he will often knock the cherries down just so he can move on to a better tree where he will be able to make money much faster.

COMMUNICATION

It is required by law that migrants be informed about the type of crops they will pick and the wage rates for each crop. The crew leader is responsible for communicating these facts and for posting information in the camp. Nevertheless, when migrants were asked in a survey (Stewart, 1968) if the crew leader had informed them of the rate for each crop before they came north, 47 percent of the 163 respondents had not been informed, 8 percent had been inaccurately informed, 2 percent were not sure, and the remaining 43 percent had been informed. Ambiguity with respect to wages was observed to be a source of discontent, distrust, and considerable wasted time.

The field walker had said, "You can make a lot of money today, if you work hard." But he never told us the rate per bushel. Someone asked him and he said 60¢ but ten minutes later he told someone else 50¢. A few people asked about the discrepancy and he replied, "Now don't give me any lip." There was a great deal of quiet complaining about the ambiguity, but no one said anything further to the field walker who complained that he himself was not making any money either.

We asked the field walker the wage rate and he said we would be paid "the regular price." But when asked what that was, he replied, "Don't bother me. Can't you see I'm busy." Rumors began to circulate. One woman said she had seen a sign saying 75¢, but a man said that was ridiculous. "75¢ means that we are only to get 50¢ because the crew leader takes something out of each bushel we pick." Another woman said she thought it was 60¢ because she heard the crew leaders were getting 80¢. We eventually got 60¢, but people worried about the rate throughout the entire day.

A communications vacuum also exists with respect to the hours of work. People are seldom sure when the bus will take them back to camp. "We were first told we could quit at 4:30,

later this was changed to 5:00 and then to 5:30 and then to 6:00. It turned out that we weren't brought back on the bus until 6:30." Knowing quitting time can be important, since it determines whether it pays to start filling another basket.

Most of us had finished our basket and were on the bus. But there were still 12 people in the field and we all had to wait for them. Those on the bus complained. "Why don't those fools come on, they hold up everyone else." It took the last man another 45 minutes to finish and this meant time wasted for more than 25 of us, for the entire crew must wait until the last man finishes picking the hamper he is working on.

Weaknesses in the system of communication have counter-productive consequences. Uninformed, and assuming on the basis of past experience that there is often not enough work available, migrants develop ways to beat the system.

The rows were long. People were telling each other "Slow down. Don't do it so fast, we're getting paid by the hour. Make this job last a week or so." Actually, it is a job we could do in about two days, but the idea was to stretch the work out as we weren't sure if other jobs would follow. Everyone seemed to like the work. "This is a good job." "It could last all week. Maybe we'll make some money this week."

Weak communication is also manifest in training. While picking is low-skill work, there are techniques to be learned; yet this is usually ignored.

The crew leader gave me a bucket and a piece of string which I used to tie the bucket around my body. I asked him what I was supposed to do and he said, "Just pick some cherries." When I got up on the ladder, I asked an old man, whether I should pick all the cherries or just the red ones of a certain size. He said, "Just pick em all, pick em all."

In many crops, the skill of the picker in handling fruit without bruising it is crucial. It is just the most highly fragile crops which are increasingly the focus of hand harvesting, as harvesting of tougher crops becomes easier to mechanize. It is assumed that most migrants are professional pickers who work the same

crops regularly and know how to pick efficiently and effectively. However, one study, surveying 402 migrants, indicated that only 47 percent had been working in crops during the preceding twelve months (Larson, 1968).

Of all the camps investigated in this project either through surveys or observational research, there was only one case of an attempt to institute a formal system of training or guidance for inexperienced pickers (Stewart, 1968). In this case, there was, for every fifteen migrants, one year-round employee responsible for supervising and training. The system used numbered tickets to allocate work, to identify produce picked, and to serve later as a check by which workers could see that they were not cheated out of their proper earnings. This system was also striking in its being the only one in which the workers were provided with a means to communicate their complaints to the grower. Elsewhere, migrants assumed that the crew leader was the only liaison, and that if he chose to do nothing about a problem it must remain unsolved. For example, on one farm there was a shortage of buckets. People knew that if they left the pails in the field, they were likely to be gone the following day; so they brought pails back to their small rooms each evening. Here, an easily removed source of irritation was never brought to the attention of the grower. Elsewhere, a more serious problem was brought to the attention of the crew leader, but with no result.

While working on the trees, a plane came by and sprayed the grove. Everyone climbed down and went under the trees to avoid being sprayed. Meanwhile the plane circled over the grove. People crouched since the plane sweeps down very close to the tops of the trees. They complained that the Man shouldn't spray while there were people in the grove. Someone shouted something about this to the crew leader but he didn't respond.

Opportunities to approach the grower directly with problems were rare. In questioning workers, 29 percent of 158 respondents had never seen their grower come to the camp. Of those who were aware of his occasional presence, only 21 percent thought that he might be there for helpful or friendly reasons.

PLANNING AND ADJUSTMENT

Effective organization of work in agriculture must include mechanisms to adjust to varying conditions, for the predicted need of labor may vary with weather, crop conditions, or the state of the market. From a rational economic point of view, a grower requires maximum flexibility; that is, he must have an available labor force ready to move in quickly when the need arises. Given the present system, however, this is unrealistic. The migrant, coming north to pick, and doing little else, cannot afford to remain unemployed while waiting for crops to mature. These conflicting needs of grower and worker are currently handled in a number of ways. Some growers plant "filler crops," which are not a major source of income, but which provide work for the crew between major harvests. Others have informal labor-pool arrangements with nearby growers, and permit the crew living in their camp to work on neighboring farms until peak season. Many growers, however, were found to be reluctant to do this, fearing their workers might settle somewhere else and be unavailable when needed. On some farms, attempts are made to hire crews or parts of crews just for the brief period of the harvest. Part of a bean crew in the Utica area was loaned to a corn grower in the Catskills. The men in the camps moved to the Catskills when work was slack in the Utica area and remained for two weeks. There are some mobile crews moving from camp to camp following the crops, but this is relatively unusual. While crews will often make two stops in the North, more than that is considered undesirable, particularly by families. Also, growers tend to be nervous if a crew is not available at least for a short time before their peak demand period. One means of keeping a crew on hand is to spread out the available work.

Right now there is only part time work most days and no work at all on Friday or Saturday. There is an oversupply of onions already cut and stored in the shed. When there are too many onions in the shed we have to work half days only, for if we work full time, we will finish the work sooner. Since the crop doesn't spoil, they prefer us to take

twice as long. This is an attempt to keep us at least partly busy so the crew will stay together for the next crop.

Even during the peak season, working conditions are erratic and there are many idle days and hours. Much of this is simply the result of careless management (Friedland, 1969).

When we first arrived at the field, there were no buckets or ladders. Another crew was there already using the equipment and we waited while someone went to get more for our group.

The field walker woke us up at 6:00 to get to work early but we sat on the bus for an hour before we went anywhere. At 6:50 when 40 people arrived, he finally decided to leave, but then the women had to wait until the nursery opened so they could leave their children and this caused further delay. Finally, on the road, we drove for about 20 miles and then stopped because the driver was unable to find the field.

Time is also wasted when crews are used for second pickings or for work on fields where the yields are low. Their response to delays or to poor picking conditions is to slow down.

We got up at 5:30 a.m. and reached the field at 7:30. This was the same field we had picked the day before and the beans were poor. People were very slow in getting off the bus. First they just sat there and then straggled toward the field slowly. No one joked or showed any enthusiasm. "I want to be taken home. I'm not going to waste my time here."

Price negotiations between processors and growers are a continual source of delay and lost working time for the migrant, for trees are not picked if delivery cannot be made. Similarly, the cost of a strike in a canning plant, in addition to affecting the grower, was also borne by the crew, which found itself idle during the season when they expected the greatest amount of work. Under the present system, the burden of adjustment to most eventualities is carried by the migrant, since he works on a piece-work basis with no compensation for time lost.

This brings us to consideration of the effect of managerial practices on the migrant's orientation to work and the reflection of this orientation in productivity and stability.

The Orientation to Work

The migrant labor stream attracts a number of winos and others well beyond the stage at which even appropriate conditions could foster high productivity. It is difficult to estimate what percentage of workers falls into this category. The low status of migrant work draws persons unable to find other jobs. Moreover, the requirements of employment are loose: there are no criteria beyond personal selection by a crew leader, who often merely uses "bar-sweeping" methods to fill out his crew. Yet there are people who come north with every intention of saving money, and our data suggest that there are attitudes potentially supportive of productivity. For example, when asked, "Why did you first decide to come North on the Season?" 35.8 percent of 170 respondents indicated they came expressly to earn money and saw their stay in the North either as an opportunity to earn more than they earned in the South or as a necessary seasonal alternative. The existence of similar goals cannot, of course, be precluded among the others, the 28.8 percent who said they came because their family or friends came, the 15.3 percent who came to "look around," and the rest who did not know or who offered negative reasons ("to get away from home"). However, observational data further suggest that there is a potential for productivity. Many people talk of specific goals: a new car, a set of false teeth, money for school or for clothes.

Although these are indirect indicators of potential productivity, it seems clear that the current management structures, based largely on coercive control, discourage whatever potential may exist. These structures do nothing to encourage better workers to remain or to return to the same farm each year. Moreover, employment practices in agriculture reinforce the image of harvest labor as a "last resort," thus perpetuating recruitment difficulties.

There are problems, not unique to agriculture, in trying to correlate job satisfaction and work performance; for there are many variables involved in considering productivity (Katz, 1966,

375). Enormous variation in the quality of fields, for example, makes it impossible to compare systematically the productivity of different crews. Qualitative evidence, however, is suggestive. Compare the attitudes expressed in the following two excerpts from field diaries.

It appeared that it would be a good day to get a large number of buckets. The field was good and people were working quietly trying to get as many buckets as possible. . . . There was little conversation except talk related to picking. "Boy you really shifted into third gear now." "Let's get em boys, bring em in, let's go."

We went to the fields and it seemed like there were almost no beans there. People set very low goals. Tussy, who was the best picker in the crew said he would only try to get three bushels. . . . As we worked down the field, people commented, "There's no beans here. Look how far I've come. I'm getting one bushel and then I'm quitting."

Not only did work slow down on bad days, but the few people who tried to produce despite discouraging conditions were resented as "ratebusters." Their productivity reflected on the others and was considered threatening.

Productivity also appeared to relate to boredom. Harvesting is simple and repetitive work. Migrants experience paralyzing boredom compounded by the limited social life of the camp. The extent of boredom was revealed in the enthusiasm elicited when there was a change in crop; during the first few days at the new task, this enthusiasm was reflected in energetic work. Boredom was markedly reduced on jobs which required coordination. One of the more productive crews worked on a mule train, picking and packing corn. Here the work demanded a division of labor and cooperation among a number of people doing different jobs.

Migrants were often heard to talk about their "spirit," as if it were measurable. It seemed to vary from day to day according to the condition of the field, delays, the style of supervision, or the extent of boredom.

Jessie. . . said he came out with a lot of spirit this morning but when he found out he could only pick until noon it "cut his spirit." He claims

he "makes it" on some days but picks poorly on others. "It sort of depends on whether I'm left alone or not. . . if someone comes around and messes with me telling me I can't pick past twelve or if I can't get started on time, it cuts my spirit and I just can't pick a damn thing."

Changes in "spirit," the decline in enthusiasm, expectations, and ambitions in the course of the season were remarked by every observer.

When people first came to the camp they said, "Well I at least want to make enough money to get out of debt. Now it seems to be, "I want to get enough to get a 'man' (a bottle of wine).

Survey data supported this impression of their disappointment. When probed as to whether they were earning as much as they had expected before leaving home, 35 percent of 167 respondents said they were making as much as anticipated; 52 percent were not. Thirteen percent thought it was too early to tell or did not know. Of those who were earning less than expected, 29 percent placed the blame on not having enough work, 5 percent on mismanagement, 35 percent on the fact that wages were contrary to their expectations.

When conditions preclude productivity, it is at considerable social as well as economic cost to the migrant. During periods of scarce work, their demoralization is often reflected by violence in the camp.

There is no work and everyone is very tense. People snap at each other and arguments develop about nothing. Everyone is in a sour mood. . . . Everyone is wondering how he will ever get any money and people are anxious for the bean season to begin. . . . The women are not as tense as the men about the lack of work; however I heard a couple of women talk about trying to make money through prostitution. "If worse comes to worst, I guess I can do that." "There's nothing wrong with it. These babies have to eat."

Finally, the demoralization of employees has serious implications for stability of employment. Industrial studies suggest that satisfaction does bear directly on the stability of a work group, its absentee rate, and turnover (Vroom, 1964; Katz, 1960, 375).

A common topic of conversation in the camps is the hope of not returning "on the season." When asked if they expected to be doing this work the following summer, 41 percent of 172 respondents said, yes; 40 percent said, no; the rest did not know yet. When asked if they would come back to the same camp, 105 people responded: 40 percent saying, yes; 48 percent saying, no; the rest were unsure. Whatever stability exists in the system appears to be negative; that is, some migrants return each year only because they have no alternative.

Some of the older migrants indicated pride in their ability to pick rapidly and to bear the rigors and hazards of this type of work. More prevalent, however, was the image of migrant work as "dirty work," "a bad deal."

This isn't a man's work. This is just too dirty. I'd like to see people doing other work, not like this.

II-

Unpredictability and Life Style in a Migrant Labor Camp

A lot of people think they're going to make it when tomatoes come in but you never can tell, it may be a bad year, you never can tell.

I don't know how I'll eat tomorrow. It happens in this business. I got caught with my pants down. . . . Every year is getting worse and worse. It's a sorry assed world.

This travelling stuff is not good. You can't predict the weather, you can't predict what's going to happen, you can't predict the good days or the bad days, so nine times out of ten you end up with some kind of complication and no work. You do pretty good for a week and then have no work at all so it just doesn't add up to anything.

THE migrant worker perceives his world as arbitrary, unpredictable, and capricious. He lives with the discontinuity inherent in work which must "follow the crops," and with the

unpredictability of agriculture, dependent on weather and non-local market conditions. His problems are further compounded by the way the farm employment system is organized. The migrant assumes he has no control over his daily life and, from his experience "working the seasons," expects discontinuity and unresolvable ambiguity.

This situation of unpredictability and lack of order will be considered here in seeking to understand the life style of migrant workers. Particular aspects of their behavior are examined in this section as they relate to the environmental context in which unpredictability is a predominant feature. And this feature, inherent in the migrant situation, appears to be more relevant to migrants' social behavior than any sociocultural determinants.¹

The behavior of migrant laborers is usually looked upon as irrational and dysfunctional by social planners and casual observers. Why do so many migrants spend all their savings on wine and gambling? Why do they not take advantage of opportunities for mobility when they occasionally arise? Why do they sometimes destroy the facilities provided for them?² Their

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¹See the statement by Roach (1967) that the study of lower-class behavior has been restricted by the deterministic framework that de-emphasizes non-social factors. He claims that the physical milieu and the material conditions of life directly and significantly impinge upon the behavior and social life of the poor. In line with this, it is the situational variables relating to disorder which are emphasized here, rather than class or cultural variables.

²Clearly, it is not intended here to characterize all migrants as sharing a consistent life style; as in any group, there is a great deal of variation. Nor is it intended to convey that the behavior described is limited to migrants. Similarities will be noted, for example, to Elliot Liebow's observations of "streetcorner men" (1967). However, for several reasons, the migrant labor setting provides a kind of laboratory in which the relationship between behavior and the situational context is more transparent than in other settings. First, despite some heterogeneity within the system, there is perhaps less variation among migrants than among other groups, because the migrant labor stream serves as a "last resort" for so many of its participants. In other words, the circumstances in which people enter the stream tend to

behavior does not appear to bear much relation to the predictable consequences. Yet, if situational features of the environment such as unpredictability and lack of order are emphasized, such "senseless" behavior begins to take on functional dimensions. A recent paper by Richard A. Ball (1968) is of use in developing this link between the situational feature of unpredictability and the behavior of migrants. Ball, borrowing from experiments on frustration-instigated behavior, insists that certain groups blocked by frustration consistently exhibit behavior which is neither rational nor goal directed, but is a "terminal response to the frustration itself rather than a means to any end." A similar process is operating with respect to migrant behavior. Migrant workers, seeing little predictable relationship between their actions and consequences, consider their problems insoluble. They adjust, not through attempts to cope with their environment in a rational, goal-oriented manner, but through modes of behavior which, in themselves, make their situation more tolerable by providing relief or reducing tension.

Ironically, what American society considers "organization" or "routine" may, to migrant workers, appear to be an impediment to their adjustment to "disorder." But this is not to say that life in a migrant labor camp is disorganized. There is, as we shall see, a consistent pattern to behavior in a camp, and it emerges when this behavior is placed within its context of a disordered and unpredictable environment.

In exploring the social consequences of a system in which disorder is inherent and the conditions for predictability lacking, it is useful to refer to Maslow's model (1954) of an ascending hierarchy of needs, in which each level must be satisfied before higher needs are relevant. Briefly, the levels of Maslow's hierarchy are physiological needs, need for safety, for belongingness and love, and for esteem and self-actualization. The empha-

limit variation. Second, a crew is isolated, living in a limited setting and subjected to a comparatively uncomplex set of circumstances. Third, a crew shares experiences twenty-four hours a day. In this sense, all members are more uniformly exposed to similar situational variables than are people in an urban setting, who have diverse and different experiences.

sis here is on the second level — safety — in which Maslow includes the need for predictability, order, and a world that can be counted on.³ Frustrated at this level, in an environment they perceive as hostile, migrants organize their behavior and relationships to maximize their safety. Unable to control the features which preclude order and unable to create a world in which the unexpected does not occur, they seek safety by adapting to disorder.

How does this adaptation reflect itself in daily behavior? With a description of relevant aspects of the migrant labor system as background, the rhythm of time is explored as a dependent variable intervening between the environmental context and the life style in the camps. Then, several aspects of behavior are analyzed in relation to the unpredictable setting.

Unpredictability in the Migrant Labor System

The migrant crews that harvest crops each summer in the Northeastern United States are, by definition, seasonal or temporary social groups. A crew is brought together in the South by a crew leader in the spring and remains a social unit three to five months of the year.⁴ During the rest of the year, in the South, migrants are dispersed in diverse living and working arrangements, normally contracting their labor under a day haul system in which they are recruited daily into different crews and live independently from the group with which they work. In the summer, by contrast, a crew will live and work in the closest proximity, only to disband again on returning to the South in the fall.

The formal process of recruitment that puts growers into contact with crew leaders is, from the point of view of the

³Aronoff (1967), in a comparative study of a cane-cutting gang and a fishing crew in St. Kitts, uses the Maslow model to demonstrate that the organization of social and psychological systems is based on the interaction of environment, institutional determinants, and psychological needs.

⁴According to crude census data, there were about 15,000 southern Negro migrant workers in New York State at peak harvest season during the summers this research was done.

migrant, highly casual and fortuitous. Contracts specifying wages, housing arrangements, crew size, and dates are negotiated with crew leaders long before the migrant himself is involved. It is only the crew leader who has contact with the worker, and he relies on informal procedures to recruit his crew. The core of a crew consists of those the crew leader knows and has worked with in his home community; but others are picked up in bars and street corners elsewhere in Florida, or in southern states, as the crew travels north. With "bar sweeping" an important means of recruitment, many migrants do not, in fact, decide to go north until the day of departure. Lured by the extravagant promises of a crew leader, or restlessly seeking a change, they often make on-the-spot decisions to come north because the opportunity presents itself at a timely moment. When asked, in a survey, if they thought they would be "on the season" the following summer, of 172 respondents 41 per cent said yes, 40 percent said no, and the rest did not know. All hoped to avoid what they viewed as an ordeal. But the citrus and vegetable crops in Florida — the main source of the Eastern migrant stream — are over by spring, and workers lack other alternatives.

Brought together in this fashion, the membership of a migrant crew has little continuity during a given season or from one season to the next. Furthermore, there is some turnover within a crew during the summer, as people drop out and others join. The core of people, well known to the crew leader, usually remains; and the size of this core, varying with the personal style of the crew leader, determines the ambience of the season.

The crew leader is the key figure to consider in examining the social structure of the crew. The extraordinarily wide range of his power is striking: he serves as contractor, recruiter, camp manager, work supervisor, policeman, and banker. In many camps, he provides food, alcohol, and auxiliary services such as local transportation and credit. His income is formally drawn from a percentage on crops harvested; but his provision of services is often a source of income more lucrative than the percentage arrangement. A crew leader may easily maintain his control because of the dependence of his crew members, who

are far from familiar surroundings. The rural isolation of the camps and the crew leader's control of transportation sustain this dependence. But perhaps more significant is the migrant's fear of the white world and his preference for having as little contact as possible with it. Similarly, growers prefer to have as little contact as possible with migrants.⁵ They tend to delegate managerial responsibility to crew leaders, who, having developed the ability to articulate with both worlds, are looked upon as liaisons.

Of the many and diverse mechanisms through which a crew leader exercises control over migrants, the credit system is a particularly potent one. The migrant starts out the season with debts acquired during the trip north, debts quickly compounded since the season often starts slowly with limited work available early in the summer. The credit system has arbitrary aspects that give the crew leader extraordinary leverage. Responsible for the sustenance of individuals with limited alternatives, he may charge what he will for the services he provides. Records are seldom kept by migrants, who rely on their memory or on the credit books of the crew leader.

How a crew leader chooses to implement these mechanisms of control is a matter of his personal style.⁶ Some crew leaders use coercion, either physical force or manipulation of the credit system; threats of expulsion; or refusal to provide food or loans. Some are paternalistic and build up social obligation through favors. Others manipulate their crews through skilled use of social techniques such as humor, cajoling, mock threats, or teasing in a context that brings group pressures to bear on individuals. Whatever the pattern, crews must adapt to the personal, noninstitutionalized control of omnipotent individuals whose

⁵In a thesis, Judith Stewart (1968) outlines the variety of grower-crew leader relationships existing in a sample of farms in New York State. Noting variation, developing in part out of market and technical considerations, she documents the tendency of growers to abdicate responsibility to the crew leader, even at the obvious expense of efficient work organization.

⁶A typology of crew leaders developed in this project included four types: the coal baron, the village chief, the *pater familias*, and the manipulative democrat (Friedland, 1969).

often unpredictable decisions are based on criteria that may have little to do with the needs of the crew members or with the rational requirements of work. For example, crew leaders may negotiate contracts strictly on the basis of their own arrangements with the growers, leaving aside considerations of the wage to be paid to the picker, the physical condition of the camp, crop conditions, and other factors of relevance to the worker.

Most crews are small enough for the crew leader to assume all managerial functions himself. However, several migrants assist the crew leader in various specialized work tasks. They have no official role in the camp, but on the job serve as field walkers, loaders, drivers, checkers, or weighers. These work roles are nonpermanent and interchangeable. Hierarchy does not tend to crystallize, because assistants hold their jobs temporarily and only through the decision of the crew leaders. There is limited differentiation within most crews that perform the relatively unskilled task of hand picking crops. Both the technical demands of their work and the supervisory policy of the crew leader minimize social stratification.

Management practices, of course, vary from farm to farm, but compared to industrial practices, the inefficiency and wastage of migrant labor are extraordinary (Friedland, 1969). Most growers prefer to delegate all responsibility for labor management and so, for the harvest operation, to the crew leader. Because of his multiple sources of income, he has little stake in efficiency. It is the migrant who assumes the cost of inefficiency, for he is paid for piece work and is not remunerated when not actually picking. Wasteful management practices are manifest in numerous delays owing, for example, to shortage of tools, assignment to fields which have been previously picked over, bus breakdowns, confusion in work assignments, or failures of the loading truck to appear so that pails may be emptied and refilled. These and many other problems, compounded by unanticipated weather changes and the dependence on personal idiosyncracies of crew leaders and growers, combine to create an erratic work situation. Migrants feel themselves totally

dependent on the weather and "the Man," both equally unpredictable.

Ambiguities in the system are compounded by the fact that migrants are poorly informed, seldom knowing where they will be working or for how long, or sometimes even the wages they will be paid. When surveyed as to whether they were informed of the wage rates for each crop prior to coming north, of 163 responses, 47 percent had not been informed, 8 percent received inaccurate information, 43 percent had been informed, 2 percent did not know. Even for those informed, however, planning is out of the question because of the uncertain routine. There is no well-defined system of rewards — no protection for periods when work is unavailable, no adjustment to compensate for variations in the quality of the crop and the richness of the yield. Even the rate of pay may vary for the same crop harvested in the same area, for piecework rates are decided arbitrarily unless there is competition for labor. Recent minimum-wage controls, based on hourly work, are difficult to enforce in a piecework system where hours may be manipulated to conform to regulations.

The disordered situation at work is reinforced by the situation in the camp. The inadequate and poorly maintained facilities, which are ubiquitous, have been well described (Moore, 1965). Other, more subtle aspects of the physical setting, also shape the character of camp life. There is no real privacy, no opportunity to reinforce personal identity. It is difficult to move "off stage" and resist group commitments. A room in a migrant labor camp is undifferentiated from the others; it is merely a place for its occupant to sleep, a place with no associations, no history, no personalization, nothing to place it in an ordered context with respect to his past or future. And, often, such a room must be shared, so that even the rare opportunity of simply being alone is removed.

Because of the isolation of the camp and the vague fears felt by most migrants concerning the community outside it, most social activities take place within the physical setting of the camp. This social life — eating, drinking, gambling, as well as listening to music — is focussed around the "juke." Extensive

and continual contact within a limited group in such a camp setting often leads to hostility (cf. Schwartz, 1968).

Eating in the camps may be irregular, for migrants are dependent on the crew leader either to take them to a store to buy food or, most often, to serve meals prepared by the crew leader's wife. In the latter case, the timing of meals, their quality, and their price are beyond the control of the migrant who has no alternatives to these arrangements.

Conditions, then, in the camp and at work are characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, and lack of order. Indeed, migrants' expectation of irregularity is so great that efforts by growers or supervisors to systemize and order the work process often meet with resistance. A too-rigid approach is resented. The most effective style of supervision is one in which the field walker is "one of the boys." Similarly, migrants claim to prefer agricultural work because of its irregularity and lack of commitment, often described by them as its "freedom."

How does the social process operate in such an environment? By what sort of rules and norms does a crew live together in close and uncomfortable contact, adapting to unpredictable circumstances? To explore these questions let us first examine migrants' perceptions of regularity and time, for these perceptions are basic to many of the social patterns that develop within a crew.

The Rhythm of Time

Perceptions of time are subjective, and are developed and defined by "concrete real experience." "The regularity of time is not an intrinsic part of nature; it is a man-made notion which we have projected into our environment for our own particular purposes" (Leach, 1961, 127, 133). In a migrant labor camp, time is not to be spent; it is to be killed. Time is not perceived as a continuous and predictable process. It is amorphous, has little regularity, and imposes few routine obligations. Because there is little diversity or differentiation in their daily activities, and because the tempo of their lives is usually slow, migrants have little concern with precisely articulated conventional time units.

For them, there are good seasons and bad seasons, good weeks and bad weeks.

Although time is basically not important, it nevertheless has shape. The rhythm of time in the life of migrant workers consists of three major cycles based on daily, weekly, and seasonal intervals. On a daily basis, time passes with irregularity and uncertainty. Hours for working, eating, and sleeping are irregular; the daily routine is structured in terms of the weather, the distance to work on a particular day, or the personal decision of the grower or crew leader. The day may begin at 5:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m.; from the point of view of the migrant, it begins arbitrarily.

The weekly cycle, especially at peak season, is not necessarily demarcated by Sundays. A day off may occur at any time, depending on weather, crop conditions, or other forces outside the migrants' control. The week is marked by payday, normally Friday night or Saturday, though in some camps wages are paid after each work day. The importance of payday as a definite and crucial point in the week became clear in several cases when it was necessary to delay wage payment. In one camp, a delay of several hours one Friday evening resulted in a tense and restless situation, punctuated by outbursts of, "I want my damn money." In another camp, a crisis occurred when it was announced one Thursday that the payment Friday night of that week's wages would include wages only for Monday through Thursday, and that Friday's labor would be remunerated the following week. The crew refused to work on Friday. There was one camp in which the grower felt obliged to pay wages daily. In a world they view as capricious, migrants tend to be concerned with "today" and to demand immediate gratification; they basically mistrust the compensatory system.⁷ The usual procedure of wage distribution has the quality of ritual, as the whole crew sits around silently observing each individual as he is called up to collect his envelope and pay off his debts. Payday is usually

⁷In a review of studies concerning deferred gratification patterns, Miller (1968) suggests that trust based on situational rather than psychodynamic or class variables underlies the capacity to delay gratification.

followed by excessive drinking on the weekend, and Monday is relatively unproductive.

The main cycle for migrant workers is the season, beginning late in May or June and extending for four to five months, depending upon the crops. Even this extended period of time has an aspect of unpredictability. As indicated above, decisions to go north tend to be unplanned. Once in the north, people talk incessantly about their return to the South; but the date of their return is normally unknown until late in the season and is controlled by the crew leader who owns the bus which will bring the crew back.

Time is often killed by waiting and anticipation. One waits for the end of the workday, payday, the next crop, or the trip home. Although unnecessary delays (waiting for the bus to be repaired or for tools to arrive) are a source of minor irritation, they are expected and accepted. Tomorrow is vaguely anticipated to be better than today: "Can't wait till tomatoes [or cherries or celery]." Yet, there is no planning or activity directed toward realizing these expectations, for migrants have no real conviction that they are able to influence or control the future. And what happens during the current week or season is not seen as having much to do with what will happen during a future period. When decisions are made to act with the future in mind, they are made spontaneously, as in the case of the man who decided two days after arriving at a camp that he must leave; so he sold his new television set and his pots and pans for a total of \$10.00 — just enough to pay for a bus ride — and he left the same day.

The focus on the present also bears on aspirations. Few workers expect to move out of the migrant labor stream, and those who talk about doing so are put down. "Better get used to picking, you're not going to be a teacher or any other kind of lady. You'll be picking the rest of your life."

In sum, the migrants' sense of the relation between effort and return, between behavior and its consequences, is based on the assumption that their environment may be neither predicted nor controlled. In this context, time is present-oriented, irrational,

and highly personal, in contrast to the future-oriented, rational, and impersonal character of "standard American time" (Horton, 1967). This has significant implications for the life style in a migrant labor camp.

Aspects of Life Style

The migrant worker seeks to maximize security within this unpredictable setting. In looking at what goes on in the camp, Goffman's model of adaptation in chance situations, or what he calls "minimizing fatefulness" (1967, 174ff.) is suggestive. One adaptation of individuals who find themselves in chance situations is "to cope," that is, to reduce the risk of unpredictable consequences, through insurance or some instrumental means of avoidance or control. The other is to develop a "defense." Defense implies that one relinquishes all possibilities of control and merely seeks relief in some form. Defensive action may take the shape of ritual activity, or it may transform an event into an instance of "bad luck" about which nothing could have been done. To add to Goffman's model for present purposes, defensive adaptation to disorder may also involve defiance of order on the grounds of its irrelevance to the realities of daily circumstances.

One way the migrant adapts to a system he cannot himself control is by submitting to the crew leader system, accepting the exploitative consequences of this system for its protective and risk-reducing benefits. The crew leader, as we have seen, has enormous power, sustained and supported by growers. However, in submitting to the crew leader system, possibilities of coping are reduced. Moreover, within this protective and highly dependent framework the situation remains one of disorder and unpredictability. The examples described below suggest that this disorder is accepted by migrants as inevitable and that their adaptations to it are largely defensive.

The adaptive response is best characterized by its volatility. This does not imply chaos or disorganization but that equilibrium is maintained more through expressive action than

through instrumental or "coping" forms of behavior. Examples will be provided at the level of personal behavior and social relationships.

PERSONAL BEHAVIOR

Migrant workers manifest, as does any group, a broad spectrum of behavior with respect to personal matters such as health and hygiene. But there are several striking tendencies, sometimes described as indications of social disorganization, sometimes, pejoratively, as dirtiness and degeneracy. Here it is suggested that these tendencies are adaptive in a defensive sense and are consistent with migrants' preconceptions concerning order and regularity. Self-neglect and apathy concerning health are widespread, reinforced by a prevalent mistrust of doctors and clinics. Home remedies are common; for example, soaking two strings in kerosene and tying them around a finger is said to help cramps. Traditional root medicine is, in some cases, trusted more than professional medicine, which is often available to migrants through clinics and visiting physicians. While the extent of such beliefs cannot be estimated, several camps have a "root man" living with the crew, and there are root men who make the rounds to various camps, dispensing cures. Root medicine has appeal in that it provides both an explanation of problems and a ritual means of controlling them. In this sense, it may help to put order into a poorly understood situation.

Hygiene habits vary considerably, but even those migrants who carefully maintain their own rooms and express middle-class disgust over poor physical conditions have ambivalent attitudes when it comes to maintenance of shared facilities, such as showers and outhouses. For one thing, there is little expectation that one's own clean habits will guarantee the cleanliness of a shared environment. For another, in the temporary setting, immediate personal impulses prevail over longer range group goals of maintaining the camp.

One striking aspect of personal hygiene was observed to occur with sufficient frequency that it seems to have symbolic signifi-

cance for migrants. There are many cases of deliberate urination or defecation in odd places where the circumstances suggest there is more to the act than simply the avoidance of dirty out-houses. For example, in one case a man urinated into his friend's hat; in another, a migrant returned to his room to find his shoes full. Elsewhere, a pile of feces was found near a side entrance and another in front of a student observer's door. The shower was often the location of "matter out of place." As objects of taboo, urine and feces "out of place" become a focus of anxiety. And one might speculate that such behavior expresses a desire to create the anxiety and disturbance which it surely does. Goffman (1967, 89) considers similar acts as "calculated to convey complete disrespect and contempt through symbolic means . . . a use of our ceremonial idiom that is as exquisite in its way as is a bow from the waist down done with grace and a flourish." Or, perhaps these acts are "pungent" symbols of defiance of order, reminiscent of Gulliver urinating on Queen Mab's castle, or of Gargantua drowning mobs of Parisiens.

One might further speculate that personal habits and the self-neglect so striking in this group, may reflect the group's social position on the fringes of the larger social order. Exposed to the values of a dominant society, yet outside it, migrants are intrinsically in a position of ambiguity. Defiance of order is their consistent response. Interesting parallels may be noted with sloppiness of teenagers, a group similarly on the fringes of adult society and in which expectations also have an ambiguous character.

One striking characteristic of migrant workers related to this theme of discontinuity and defiance of order is their use of nicknames. Although most people in the camp revealed their full names when pressed, many were known to each other only by descriptive nicknames, and others were known only by their first names. The nicknames themselves were found to be of three types, as shown in the following list.

Nicknames		
<i>Denoting Physical Characteristics</i>	<i>Denoting Personality or Behavioral Characteristics</i>	<i>Denoting Skill</i>
Tusi (Watusi)	Space Man	Hook
Flat Top	Bo Lightning	Business Man
Blind Man	Willy Wino	Pinochle
Shorty	Root Man	Checker Bill
Red	Skeet (Mosquito)	
Grease	Jitterbug	
Pee Wee	Bozo	
Slim	Sleepy	
White Man	June Bug	
Red Cap	Hobo	
Fats	Government	
Little John	Brother Man	
Big John	Mae West	
Chubby	Smokey	
Little Man	Big Time	
Gate Mouth	Sundance Kid	
Red-eye	Shot	
Happy Head	Loner	
	Pops	
	Chatty	
	Geech	

Most were descriptive either of physical peculiarities or of personal or behavioral quirks. Of those few referring to skill distinctions, three related to skill in games; the fourth ("business man") was used pejoratively. Nicknames lend color to a tedious situation. In some cases, nicknames may result from a desire for secrecy on the part of those few migrants who are, in fact, hiding from their past. The tendency to ignore full names may also be a way to ensure safety in unpredictable circumstances. One may not need to hide now, but anonymity may be useful in the

future. Perhaps the fact that few migrants will seek to learn the full names of their close associates also reflects an unconscious defiance of the formal order, as do other aspects of migrants' personal behavior. Names, after all, are formal categories and a basis of ordered relationships in the larger society. A more probable explanation of the use of nicknames, however, must consider the disorder and discontinuity of the migrant situation and the advantage of quick association based on immediately evident, easy to remember characteristics. The predominance of nicknames based on description rather than on skill suggests this: "Fats" or "Jitterbug" are names easier to associate with a new acquaintance than is "Pinochle," because it may take some time to identify particular skills. Thus, the use of nicknames relates to the temporary and uncertain nature of social relationships.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships among members of a migrant labor crew reflect the nonpermanent character of the group. Often many members of a crew do not know each other before the season and do not expect to continue relationships after the season is over. Relationships tend to exist only in the present, with neither reference in the past nor plans for the future. Notable exceptions are those crews with a large core of regular members who work with the crew leader year round. Many of these groups are kinship-based, and their permanent ties lead to different sets of behavior.

Normative understandings between many of the members of a crew are few and exceedingly tenuous. They stand in contrast to the norms in permanent groups, where the character of interpersonal relations is controlled by well understood, comprehensive norms, established over a long period of time. Clearly understood by all participants, they serve to regulate and control social relationships. The poverty of such understandings among migrants, and the necessity for rapid socialization during the short season, result in ambiguous and unpredictable situations

at the level of daily behavior. How does one behave toward newcomers in the crew? Who is it that can be trusted? Which women can be approached? If a child is making a disturbance, can he be scolded?

The lack of normative understandings concerning these and other day-to-day situations was observed to lead to numerous problems. These were particularly difficult to manage owing to the limited physical and social setting. Social interaction takes place almost exclusively within the crew; few opportunities exist for outside contacts. In this context of proximity and 24-hour-a-day contact, avoidance of difficult relationships is impossible, and mistrust and tension prevail, occasionally exacerbated by the disruptive or grating individual who cannot be isolated or ignored. This atmosphere is most intense during periods when work is scarce and is stimulated by frustration and excess leisure time. It has many manifestations: most men and many women carry knives, doors are kept locked, accusations are rife, and, in the hostile atmosphere, arguments or playful gestures often escalate into serious incidents.

Strain of this sort is characteristic of an "atomistic society," in which "qualities of contention, invidiousness and wariness are paramount in the perceptions which individuals hold of one another; and in which such social behavior and emotional qualities are consonant with normative expectations" (Rubel 1966, 260). Though migrant crews meet Rubel's criteria, this does not imply their social disorganization. On the contrary, the social arrangements that develop within a crew tend to reduce misunderstanding and to make life within the context viable. Let us look at various kinds of social arrangements with respect to their adaptiveness.

Marital relationships among migrants are peppered with suspicion, mistrust, and concern about adultery. The prevailing arrangement is that of temporary liaisons established during the summer and, interestingly, labelled "tramp" or "muck" marriages. Despite pejorative labels, muck marriages are expected and accepted even by persons with spouses elsewhere. In the

context of the camp, these relationships are very convenient and practical. Both parties benefit: the women have someone to help them pick and the men can save more money if they have someone to cook for them.

Friendships among migrants reflect the circumstances in which they live: the close physical setting, continual social contact, and the temporary character of most of their relationships. They consider sociability extremely important; the social "lone wolf" is suspect. Company and mutual support are sought while drinking, gambling, or just listening to music. Friendships tend to be more affective than instrumental, for migrants see themselves in a closed situation where instrumental relationships serve no end (cf. Reina, 1959). Affective relationships help to render their lives more tolerable and counterbalance demands inherent in a situation which they feel can be neither controlled nor avoided.

Interpersonal exchange in this context sometimes has a ritual quality resembling a duel. "Bickering relationships" develop as individuals pit themselves against each other. There are people who relate to each other almost exclusively through continual arguing about trivial details. Quarrels were overheard concerning the length of certain roads, the size of towns, the number of stars on the flag, the age of Presidents. Highly valued is ability to argue effectively, to put down one's opponent in an argument regardless of its content; thus, the subject is less important than the relationship between the protagonists. These arguments — perpetual, ritualistic and repetitive — always take place before spectators. The constant arguments observed in the camps appeared on the surface to be evidence of discord, but, in fact, such exchanges helped to maintain the system: serious breeches were prevented by ritualization and by focussing conflict on trivial matters that could be managed or disregarded.

Arguments also serve as leveling mechanisms, as "put downs" for individuals who may stand out in other activities. They often take the form of verbal games called "scoring" or "playing the dozens" in which aggressive, humorous, and colorfully phrased insults are exchanged. As punishment-free forms of aggressive

expression, these verbal games serve to dissipate tension. But they also are used to bring group pressure to bear on individuals who defy group norms, or in some way threaten the precarious balance of social relationships in the camp.

The levelling tendency is a major normative pattern in migrant camps (Nelkin, 1969). It is an adaptive means to reduce conflict and misunderstanding in a setting where relationships are unstable, short term, and unpredictable, and where there are few opportunities for social avoidance. Patterns of friendship among migrants tend to minimize the differences among them and to bring people to a common level, a characteristic to be understood within the context of the marginal status of migrant farm workers with respect to the larger society. When a group of people feel threatened, the anonymity provided by a homogeneous social structure is protective. Furthermore, assertive behavior on the part of individuals is nonfunctional in a group sharing common conditions within a system permitting little upward mobility. Hierarchy in such a group has little meaning, for basic decisions influencing the group are made from outside. And with no hierarchy, instrumental relationships among friends serve little purpose.

The affective role of friendship in relieving tension and in reducing conflict contrasts with the instrumental role it plays in other social groups where friendships are often manipulated for such purposes as increasing social status. The character of friendship among migrants is illustrated by the process of exchange. Friendships are maintained by extensive sharing, but the concept of reciprocity differs from that in more permanent groups. It is understood that people share food, cigarettes, and wine. If one man earns more than the others, he will balance this by buying the wine, putting quarters in the "piccolo" (juke box), or having people to his room to eat with him. Accumulation of goods without sharing is suspect. A wino, who, when sober, was a highly skilled picker, would set a goal for himself; when this was reached, he would help others pick as insurance against times when he was drunk and needed assistance. Reciprocity is always expected, though not necessarily in kind. Favors may be

exchanged for services or gifts; however, they are seldom exchanged for deference, except in the case of crew leaders who use the providing of favors to maintain control. Although in many social groups gift-giving may be a means to establish prestige, within a migrant labor camp it serves rather to maintain current relationships; for the most striking aspect of exchange is the expectation that reciprocity will be prompt. The time scale of exchange is extremely short, and sharing wealth is not a means to building long-term social obligations. Moreover, the nature and the content of exchange are explicit and usually verbalized — that is, they are not taken for granted as normative. A request for a bean ticket goes along with an offer to share a meal later in the day. A researcher who lent his friend 55¢ was given a radio to hold as collateral.

Just as friendship is nondirected, violence similarly appears to lack goals. Tensions suddenly develop into violence; brief explosions are easily sparked and as easily forgotten. A fight seldom focusses on any one issue and, if it does have a goal, it is only that of putting down an assertive individual. Let us look more closely at the character of fights and the contexts in which they occur, to clarify the degree to which frequent violence may be a sign of disorganization. First, considering the number of incidents, relatively few require hospitalization or interference from police. Weapons are often used, but mainly as a threat; and, even with knives, the pattern is to slash rather than to stab, limiting the seriousness of the consequences. In the most serious fight observed, a man received a slash requiring about a hundred stitches, but he was only out of work for one week, a fact that reflects both his stamina and the superficiality of his wounds. Second, fights always have an audience that closely observes the action but seldom interferes. A third characteristic of fights is the rapid dissipation of anger. Those who fight one day may be the best of friends the next. Grudges are not held. These points suggest that violence serves, in a ritual manner, to break boredom, to dissipate tension, and thus to maintain viable relationships. In an unpredictable environment with few institutional

mechanisms of social control, fighting can, in fact, be regarded more as a factor contributing to organization than as a sign of disorganization.

The excessive drinking and gambling in the camps are also adaptive in this context of disorder. There is an unusually large amount of time available to migrants for leisure activities: many days with no work because of bad weather or poor planning, slack days between crops, long bus rides with extended periods of waiting. Furthermore, unlike the complex and differentiated society outside the camp, migrants spend both leisure and work time within a single limited social group. Recreation may involve some variety in activities, but not in social relationships. While a factory worker may drink with one group and work with another, migrants share all their activities. Drinking provides them escape and temporary relief from this constraint; being drunk permits the expression of thoughts that would not be expressed otherwise. It allows a change in behavior in a situation in which personal associations cannot be varied. As an outlet to express the unexpressible, drinking has the character of ritual and, like ritual, has implications for order and equilibrium.

The games migrants play are also consistent with the character of the camp context. There are relatively few examples of goal-related games, or sports involving teamwork and competition. Craps or card games requiring little skill and a high component of chance are popular. The gambling, in contrast to the play, may be complex and require considerable skill. Based on luck rather than strategy, and rich in superstition, games are congruous with the broader situation in the migrant labor camp, in which strategy and planning are irrelevant (cf. Roberts, 1959). With little relation between cause and effect, or effort and reward; with little control over his own destiny, optimizing luck allows a migrant to save face in case of failure. As Goffman suggests (1967, 172), one way of "making it" in unpredictable circumstances is to seek even greater risk. It is only by chance or fate that things go well, therefore behavior would tend to

maximize the possibilities of a lucky break. In this sense, gambling serves as a kind of defensive adaptation.⁸

Cheating is expected in gambling, and if one can "beat the system" in this way and get away with it, cheating is accepted. This also has the aspect of defensive adaptation, for it is based on the assumption that coping with a system, or confronting an opponent with direct strategy, leads nowhere.

Story telling in migrant camps, a means of entertainment requiring little equipment or energy, occupies a great deal of migrants' leisure time. Migrant stories reflect the ambiguity and lack of predictability in the migrant labor system. Analyzing thematic material, one finds parallels between the content of these stories and the games described above (cf. Roberts, 1963). For example, a thread of luck or fate runs through most tales and, in a content analysis of 148 stories collected in migrant labor camps, 24 percent of the themes had to do with getting away with something, or "beating the system" in some indirect way. Again, since one cannot control or confront the system, it must be defied or circumvented.

Humor plays an important adaptive role in the migrant camps. Dissatisfactions are seldom directly expressed and humor is an accommodating mechanism, relieving the tensions of uncertainty and strained relationships. The more popular jokes heard in the camps construct situations in which the white man's actions against a migrant backfire. Through cleverness and earthiness rather than status or power, the underdog wins out in the end and the white man, or the dominant figure, becomes a fool.

A white man went under a tree every day and prayed for the Lord to kill all niggers. One day a Negro overheard him and said, "If he comes back here tomorrow, I'll fix him." He climbed the tree the next day and sure enough the man returned and prayed to the Lord to kill all niggers. The man in the tree shot a brick down and hit him in the

⁸Williams (1965) has suggested the difference between calculated risk, and risk taking where the outcome is strictly a matter of chance. The gambling among migrants — playing the numbers, craps, and card games like Georgia Skin — are of the latter type.

head, upon which the white man jumped and hollered, "Good God, Lord, can't you tell the difference between a nigger and a white man yet?"

Humor also allows expression of sentiments otherwise suppressed:

There were four little Negro boys down by the train yard playing in the mud, making little mud pies and things like that. This one white engineer in the train that had stopped by the mud hole said, "What you doing boys?" The boys said, "Oh we're just making little colored boys out of mud." The engineer laughed and said, "Why don't you make some little white boys?" One little colored boy looked up and said, "Oh, no my mamma told me not to never play in shit."

Humor is also used specifically to resolve problems of ambiguity and uncertainty, in a strange environment. A "no trespassing" sign will become a subject of exaggerated wise cracks. "You see that sign. You might get stretched by the neck from some tree up here a thousand miles from home." One day, a group of migrants were walking into town. They had recently arrived in the north and were uncomfortable—concerned with the unfamiliarity of the area both culturally and geographically. While talking about their concerns, they spotted an antique yoke with loops for two draft animals in front of a house.

"I wonder what they use that for?" "Man, that's a nigger beater." "What do you mean by that?" "Don't you know? They do it once every three years. They come to the camp and bring everyone down here and put the two biggest and strongest guys through the loop with one ass facing north and the other facing south. All the other migrants sit in a circle and watch and they come out with boards with nails in them and beat them. That's how they keep people in check up here." "Then they might get us when we're coming through here. You don't know what these people might do. Let's get back to camp."

By articulating a concern in an exaggerated form which is obviously ludicrous, fears and anxieties are allayed.

Jokes and stories deal directly with the elementary preoccupations of the migrants and are warmly appreciated. They

serve not so much to reinforce common goals as to resolve some of the tensions flowing from difficult relationships.

To conclude, various facets of life in a migrant labor camp form an ensemble that is structurally consistent. Parallels have been suggested between the impulsive quality of personal behavior, the nondirected and volatile character of friendships and exchange, the fighting, the family relationships, gambling, drinking, and the content of stories. When viewed from a perspective that assumes behavior is rational and motivated toward specific goals or objectives, many of these aspects of life style appear disorganized and "senseless." However, although these behaviors may not enable a migrant to cope satisfactorily with his environment, to save money, to get a better job, they may, as "terminal responses," permit adjustment by providing relief or reducing tension. The volatility, the risk, the unplanned and expressive character of behavior are consistent aspects of a life style shaped by the perception that there is no predictable pattern in the progression of events and that there is no possibility of controlling this situation of disorder. It is not by chance that the very activities basic to "making it" in a labor camp are just those most abhorred by the larger middle-class society. In a sense, the ritual aspects of the migrant life style, the fighting, the drinking and gambling, are a kind of antiritual, mocking the values of the larger social order. For they blatantly point to the limited relevance these values have to the context of disorder to which the migrant worker must adapt.

III-

Invisibility: Migrants and Others

That the poor are invisible is one of the most important things about them. They are not simply neglected and forgotten as in the old rhetoric of reform; what is much worse, they are not seen.

(Harrington, 1962, 14)

I am an invisible man...invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or, again, you often doubt if you really exist.

(Ellison, 1952)

THIS essay seeks to document the “invisibility of the poor”¹ with reference to black migrant farm workers in the Northeast.

¹For statistical material relating to the “invisible poor” see MacDonald (1965). Harrington (1962) describes the “masks” of poverty and the reasons that “make the other America an invisible land.”

This particular social group has remained unobtrusively stagnant, outside the mainstream of society. Its visibility is controlled by various mechanisms, both internal and external to the group. The conditions in which migrant farm workers live and work are occasionally a source of public outrage. Although publicity by journalists, focussing on the horrors of the physical conditions of migrant life, brings their situation before the public eye, it does little to increase their visibility beyond the dramatic moment. Indeed, popular demand to "tell it like it is" suggests a cathartic process that permits the reader to dissociate himself from the problem and to ignore its depth and complexity.²

That people will render certain social facts invisible was well revealed during World War II in the assertions of public ignorance of the atrocities in Germany. Everett Hughes (1964), for example, remarks with reference to the German case, "We have taken collective unwillingness to know unpleasant facts more or less for granted. . . . That people can and do keep a silence about things whose open discussion would threaten the group's conception of itself, and hence its solidarity, is common knowledge."

Just as people tend to ignore unpleasant facts, so they have a tendency to control the visibility of certain groups whose existence may in some way threaten social values or imply a need for change in an ongoing balance of power. Often, when faced with relationships that defy conventional categories, people will react by blinding themselves. Thus, anomalous or threatening social groups tend to be rendered, in effect, invisible. The poor, existing outside the normal structure of American society — at its boundaries, as it were — call into question social values and definitions. "They" are outside society and regarded as a problem that must be managed. To do so, the proverbial "carrot and stick" may operate, whereby control over visibility is exercised forcibly, but at the same time there is an attempt to maintain a level of satisfaction in order to minimize demands. Furthermore,

²One of the field workers on this project, who had lived and worked for a summer as a migrant in a labor camp, told a friend to tell about his summer experiences. His friend's reaction was: "How romantic!"

there is a tendency to delegate management of outgroups to a few people and then to ignore the consequences. "The greater their social distance from us, the more we leave in the hands of others a sort of mandate by default to deal with them on our behalf" (Hughes, 1964). As Hughes points out, in delegating the management of outgroups, it is intended that they be managed well. But what actually happens goes unnoticed.

Outgroups subject to external pressures may respond to their situation by exercising control over their own visibility, for purposes of protection. For invisibility permits autonomy and limits interference. Examples come to mind of gypsies, who have developed subtle and complex mechanisms to create and maintain a mystique of obscurity. They control their own physical communication, knowing back roads and inconspicuous places to gather. They have a private language and use decoys and façades to maintain supervisibility in limited areas. Fortune telling, for example, is reported to have no importance for gypsy culture, but to be a decoy that diverts attention away from its essential aspects (Yoors, 1967).³ Similarly, Goffman (1963) notes the process of information control, in talking of "stigma management."

The situation of migrant farm workers provides an extreme example of what may be called "institutional invisibility." Migrants live in labor camps as a group apart from local communities. Camps are usually located a number of miles outside small towns, in isolated spots often invisible from the highway. Access to town is difficult because most migrants lack transportation, having been brought north on a bus. Where they do use the facilities of a community near their camp, every effort is made to keep them apart from local residents. Social, if not physical, walls isolate them. For example, the illegal sale of alcohol in camps is well known and ignored, in the hope that this will limit the use of bars in town. Employer contact is minimized through delegation of managerial responsibilities to crew leaders. Thus, communication between migrant workers,

³More mundane groups have similar, if somewhat less subtle, means to maintain the invisibility of some of their activities (e.g., closed faculty meetings).

who may live in a camp three to five months a year, and the permanent community is the province of the various agencies that are specifically designated to deal with migrants as *problems*. The invisibility of this particular social group is not unique to the Northeastern United States. A report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor (1951) emphasized the isolation of all migrants. A recent study of farm labor in Michigan has also noted the isolation of migrants and their limited association with the community in which they work (Voland, 1968, 26ff).

The documentation of the migrant's invisibility which follows emphasizes (1) external controls, illustrating how invisibility is fostered even by those who act with the best of intentions to encourage change; (2) the defensive response of migrants who control their own visibility; and (3) community perceptions as revealed both in the normal awareness of migrants and in the reactions to crises that bring social problems into view.

External Controls

A network of public and private organizations and individuals is directly and indirectly concerned with the migrant worker. Government officials are responsible for facilitating recruitment of labor, and for regulating and administering the legal aspects of the system. Poverty organizations with federal and state support work with migrants. Church and lay groups from local communities have formed committees to deal with migrant problems. Many useful services are provided through the activities of these groups, and there are indications that each year some improvements are made in migrant housing, education, health, and welfare facilities.⁴ Yet, those involved in active organizations often express frustration with their work, complaining that their efforts are superficial. A founding member of one organization stated: "It isn't doing one thing and should

⁴For example, summer school programs supported by federal funds have been expanded. Enrollment in New York State has grown from 1,542 children in 1965 to 2,628 in 1968 (New York State Interdepartmental Committee 1969).

be gotten rid of. It's a waste of time and money." Similarly, observers living in camps were struck by the inability of migrant programs to reach their clients, and by the fact that various activities were performed with little reference to their focus. Clearly, not all programs fail; but the problem is not simply one of occasional individual incompetence. The incidents described below are representative and indicate that the invisibility of migrants is built into the very institutions that are created to deal with them.⁵

Migrant invisibility is first evident in the recruitment process. Arrangements for recruiting agricultural labor are handled through the State Employment Services. The grower makes his manpower needs known in the early spring, and contracts are negotiated with crew leaders, through the Farm Labor Service in Florida, to transport a specified number of workers north on a specified date. Here ends the responsibility of the Employment Service and, in many cases, of the grower. The migrant himself is only involved when he is recruited by the crew leader, who acts as intermediary throughout the season. Growers provide camps and work sites, but many prefer to leave all communication with the migrants to crew leaders, often sacrificing efficiency to avoid contact. In an interview of migrants, 67 percent of 119 respondents had never been directly supervised by a grower.

The crew leader system, developed from this delegation of employment responsibility, perpetuates migrant invisibility. For the crew leader assumes all responsibility, not only for recruitment and work supervision, but also for the sustenance of his crew, the policing of the camp, transportation, and the provision of other services normally provided by a community. And a crew leader may have a stake in concealing his activities. Note

⁵The following information has largely been gathered through informal, nonstructured interviews with individuals directly concerned with migrant farm workers, in their capacity of clergymen, social workers, teachers, or government employees. There were also opportunities to observe the activities of social workers, clergymen, and others in the camps. The groups referred to, however, are composites. An effort has been made to mask identity, with as little distortion of factual material as possible.

the occasional publicity about crew leaders who threaten farm workers if they agree to testify before an investigating committee (*New York Times*, August 30, 1967).

Less subtle mechanisms are also at work. "No trespassing" signs, currently being challenged by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, are placed at the entrance of many camps (*New York Times*, June 14, 1967). One relatively enlightened grower, active, in fact, on several migrant service committees, considers that the condition of migrants has greatly improved, and that there are now far too many social agencies involved. Social workers, he has claimed, do not recognize that migrants have different cultural backgrounds and that "they do not need the same things we do." From his perspective, most social work activities are destructive because they create publicity. The immediate source of his bitterness was a "phony" newspaper photograph of a tarpaper shack in a camp.

The desire of growers to minimize public awareness of their labor camps was evident in the difficulties experienced by VISTA volunteers who found themselves barred from some camps (*New York Times*, September 22, 1966), and in the problems experienced in trying to place students in camps for this project. Because growers have a vested interest in leaving things as they are, their avoidance of visibility is understandable. The subtle pervasiveness of this tendency is better illustrated with reference to other groups, whose self-interest is less obvious.

Government inspectors are responsible for deciding whether or not migrant camps meet minimum standards. The main inspection occurs prior to the season, before the occupants of the camp arrive. Subsequent inspections, if they occur, are cursory, according to our observations. There are complex structural problems in the current New York State system of inspection that could seriously hamper vision. The New York State Joint Legislative Committee Report (1967, 25) noted that local county health officers were not enforcing the State Sanitary Code effectively. "It is the opinion of this Committee that the County health officers and their assistants are too close to the leadership structure in the county, where the migrants are non voters and

have no representation in the power structure of these counties." As members of the local community, inspectors are often friends of growers and see them regularly the year round, a difficult situation in which to enforce regulations. It was an inspector who asserted to our researcher that there was no exploitation in labor camps. He thought the only problem was that migrants had too many expectations. Most of them, he claimed, are happy to live in the kind of housing provided. A desirable goal, he suggested, would be to build a large and self-contained labor camp with complete service facilities such as stores, clinics, and child-care centers. This would avoid scattering people in tenant houses and small camps throughout agricultural communities. While this might be convenient in terms of the availability of services, it is a solution that could effectively further reduce migrant visibility.

Although enforcement problems are ubiquitous, the legislation concerning labor camps places the burden of responsibility on the inspector. A content analysis of the New York State Health Code introduced in March 1968 reveals that in sixteen items the decision on the adequacy of a given condition is left to the discretion of the permit-issuing official. Other parts of this legislation, introduced with the intention to improve the situation, illustrate blindness to the social realities in the camps and the dangers of piecemeal improvement of a fundamentally poor situation. Ironically, the sloppiness of the previous legislation with respect to cooking facilities permitted the migrant a degree of independence from the crew leader. Allowed to cook food in his room, he could avoid paying the crew leader for prepared meals. The new legislation, establishing (for purposes of fire prevention) minimum standards for cooking areas, provides no alternatives to buying food from the crew leader; it formally precludes such independence, a fact which can only reinforce crew leader control.

The migrant is invisible in other ways with respect to the law. A police officer was interviewed about his investigation of a fight in town between two migrants. He went to the scene of the disturbance and instructed a group of Negroes who had observed

the fight to take care of the problem. "These are your people, you take care of them." They obliged by driving the men back to the camp. The officer was seldom called to the camps in his territory. He thought that if he spent too much time on migrant problems, his supervisor would tell him that he must limit himself to enforcing the law. Besides, he claimed, he did not like to arrest migrants, even when this was called for, because they lost work. He preferred to ignore incidents or just to "quiet things down." There are migrants who want police protection, and they do not appreciate their invisibility to the law, but they have come to expect it. In the case of a stabbing where there was an arrest, observers in the camp made bets with each other that the man arrested would shortly be back in the camp.

Agencies organized for the purpose of stimulating change in the migrant labor situation are faced with many problems, not the least of which is their difficulty in communicating with their clients and arousing their interest in the programs they provide. Social workers assume that the value of their offerings is self-evident, that they have only to bring what they think is necessary into the camps and the migrants will welcome them. They are often dismayed to discover this is not the case. There are a number of possible reasons for this; among them, migrants' mistrust, their fear that outsiders are only introducing one more exploitative mechanism. It is proposed here, however, that an important source of failure of most programs is that client invisibility is built into their sponsoring organizations. Let me illustrate with an example of a social work organization trying to improve conditions for migrants and to teach them to deal knowledgeably and effectively with society. Participants in the organization's program indicated they were perpetually frustrated with their work and with their lack of rapport with migrants in the camps they visited. One difficulty was that energy was deflected to manipulating problems within the organization itself. The director of the program knew little about his clients and seldom visited the camps in which his program operated. He worked entirely through subordinate field instructors, yet ran the program in a centralized and authoritarian manner,

despite his limited activity in the field. The field instructors, who had day-to-day familiarity with the camps, often found themselves in conflict with decisions made from above. For the most part, they occupied their time playing with children and showing films, many of which were inappropriate for the audience. One in particular comes to mind: an oil company advertisement exalting the American farmer — pictured as fair and blond, and driving a tractor in a stereotyped Midwestern setting — as a national hero. Another was a sex-education film originally developed for a middle-class school audience.

Field instructors were not only constrained by the centralization of decision making in the organization, but also by their inadequate preparation. They had been trained to deal with migrant problems by teachers who had experience in industrial personnel work, but who had no knowledge of problems peculiar to the migrant system.

The tendency to perpetuate migrant invisibility became apparent in the reaction to the management style of one of the field instructors, a black student, described by his colleagues as “not very well liked here.” Critical of interminable meetings and of people whom he thought avoided going to the camps, he was under continual pressure from colleagues who feared he would “cause trouble.” In the camps, however, where he distributed social security cards and communicated useful information about jobs and events outside the camp, observers noted he was more effective and had closer rapport with the migrants than other instructors. He eventually left the organization.

This agency and others are hampered by their dependence on local authorities. They adjust their activities more to please established community interests than to help the migrants, who make few conspicuous demands. They thus tend to be concerned, first and foremost, with minimizing disruption and their activities reflect this concern.

A number of church groups organize social work programs for migrant workers. The function of church groups with respect to migrant labor ranges broadly from prayer and indignation to the management of day schools and child-care centers. Old

clothes, money, and transportation services are often provided by communities in which there are several people with the energy and ability to organize collections.

In some cases, it was found that ministers were more interested in such programs than their parishioners and often felt under pressure to limit such activities. Minister X had been working with migrants for several years and, despite a highly conservative parish consisting largely of growers, devoted considerable energy to providing social services in nearby labor camps. Torn between this and his obligations to his parish, he hesitated to spend too much time on migrant worker problems. His activities consisted primarily of showing films and bringing athletic equipment to the camp. But the migrants were apathetic about the sports and found the movies uninteresting. The minister felt that he had failed to accomplish anything of significance. He was waiting for mechanization to dry up the migrant labor stream and solve the problem. There were no Negroes in his parish. When asked if his parishioners would mind if migrants came to the church, he said it was so unlikely they would come that the question had not arisen. With absolutely no social contact between the two groups, the migrants would "just not be interested in coming." He strongly asserted that migrants "do better in their own situation," and he would not consider encouraging a migrant to attend services in his church. His parishioners said nothing about his activities. Several donated old clothes, but did not volunteer to participate personally in his programs.

National or state-wide church groups occasionally employ social workers to deal with migrant labor problems. Here, it was observed that a subjective selection process encouraged people who would work quietly, offering services that would keep the migrant happily ensconced in the camps. One social worker said he had once been a "real radical" and described how he had tried to make trouble. His organization did not like what he was doing and he was asked to resign. In order to stay, he promised to change his ways. Now, he says, he is quiet and goes around "wiping noses." He gets along but feels useless.

We have observed social workers conduct themselves in camps as if their clients were not there. One of these social workers talked to a friend about administrative details concerning the migrant program, while showing movies one evening. He was unaware that their conversation was interfering with the sound track. Distracted, the listeners kept looking back, but the two men continued to talk in a normal tone until the end of the film. Another social worker invited the researcher to see some migrant rooms. Although he got no response to his knocking from the occupant of one room, he nevertheless went in. Later, he asked a woman if he could show her room; before she had a chance to answer, he had opened the door and was inside. The woman said nothing. The social worker never considered that he was invading the privacy of these two persons and later commented aloud, as if there were no people nearby, that this was his favorite camp. "People are very friendly and there is never any threat of trouble."

Even volunteers find themselves under pressure to act with constraint. For many church volunteers, welfare work is an occasion for church suppers and sociable meetings. But there are, in fact, many genuinely involved people who find themselves sorely constrained by community pressures. One woman had written a letter to the welfare department concerning instances of migrants refusing medical attention. As a result of her letter, inspectors were sent to investigate the matter. The community felt she had turned against her friends, and delegations visited her home to ask her to retract her statements. We have seen other outspoken volunteers effectively controlled by their organizations and reassigned to innocuous jobs. Thus, finding it difficult to work without an organizational base and equally difficult to work within one, many of the most concerned and active people finally drop out of migrant work altogether and turn their energies elsewhere.

Internal Controls

A visitor to a migrant camp will often find himself next to a juke box turned up to full volume. If there is no juke box

around, he is likely to be confronted by other means of limiting communication such as garbled accents, hand over mouth, or silence. But when not directly approached, migrants maintain their invisibility simply by avoiding outsiders. In its most blatant form, avoidance can consist of literally disappearing. When an inspector came to the fields, children working illegally disappeared into an adjacent grove as soon as the state license plate was spotted. Researchers in the project using state cars found their cars had to be relicensed, because many people in the camps would disappear upon recognizing the state plates. Disappearance is seldom necessary, however, as there are few visitors, and simply to remain in the camp or at work is sufficient to remain unseen. Some older people chose to stay out of town even when a ride was available. Younger people were less concerned, but when they did go to town, they too tried to be inconspicuous by avoiding unfamiliar areas. There are normative constraints against calling attention to the group. A young shoplifter was warned repeatedly, "Don't cause trouble." People hesitated to enter clothing stores, preferring to minimize contact. In one case, a man who tried on a pair of shoes was afraid to refuse to buy them. Although he remarked to the observer with him that he didn't want the shoes because they were too expensive for him, he felt it would be less conspicuous to buy them anyway. A group of migrants on a truck being serviced at a garage would not ask for the key to the rest room nor would they go into the station to buy soda.

To remain invisible it is necessary to avoid any action which might violate the expectations of others. If one acts only in an anticipated manner, attention will be minimized. There was considerable pressure to avoid arguing with a farmer or a supervisor, regardless of the provocation. When one man spoke back to a farmer in a mildly facetious manner, he was immediately rebuked by the group for acting in this unexpected and, therefore, striking fashion. Similarly, there are normative sanctions against picking too rapidly or too slowly. One must not "stand out" by working apart from the group, thereby possibly calling attention to the pace of others. Norms against "ratebusting" are,

of course, not unique to this group, but they are particularly noticeable here owing to the limited channels through which individuals may enjoy mobility. They suggest how the need to avoid visibility, to act only in terms of anticipated expectations, may perpetuate stagnation.

Field researchers were struck by the dual personality exhibited by many migrants, who assumed a meek demeanor in the presence of white people but were aggressive in the camp. To remain inconspicuous, these migrants had learned to assume different styles of behavior according to what was expected of them. They "managed" information that others received about them much as persons with a stigma will try to "obliterate signs that have come to be stigma symbols" (Goffman, 1963, 92).

One symptom of this desire to maintain invisibility is reluctance to call on outside authority. Police are rarely requested to manage internal problems. Migrants tend to mistrust authority, and crew leaders prefer to maintain control themselves. When there is a police inquiry, it is usually initiated by outsiders. For example, one man alienated several people in his camp and was afraid they would beat him. Instead of seeking protection, he fled the camp one night. A police inquiry was initiated by local white residents who were concerned by his presence in their neighborhood. Another symptom is the reluctance of many migrants to participate in adult education and other programs occasionally offered. Their attitude, commonly labelled "apathy," reflects many things: exhaustion, fear, the irrelevance of the particular program offered, and also a desire to remain invisible vis à vis the outside world.

One means of controlling visibility is to develop a homogenized social pattern. Few migrants want to assume leadership, to stand out in any way. Norms within migrant groups tend to level participation, to limit the development of hierarchical distinctions. The dynamics of this levelling tendency and its bearing on interpersonal relationships have been discussed elsewhere (Nelkin, 1969). Here, it suffices to note that the outside society perceives migrants as an undifferentiated group. The levelling

tendency, then, falls in with the expectations of society, and attention is avoided.

Why do migrants seek to control their own visibility? First, they are concerned primarily with self-protection. Living in the North for only part of the year, they feel isolated and alien, unfamiliar with many physical and social aspects of their environment. One articulate individual described his discomfort in these circumstances. In the South, he knew where he could go and what he could do without getting into trouble. Here, he was never sure; he never knew what people were thinking. "Here on the season, the people don't know where they stand and they are self-conscious all the time." A second basis of the need to control visibility lies in lack of autonomy. Control comes from outside the group and from such unpredictable sources as the weather and "the Man." To be invisible permits a sense of independence. By being inconspicuous, one may be left alone. "I don't drink. I mind my own business. It depends on how you act. If you're careful there'll be no trouble." Finally, it is often pragmatically convenient to be invisible. Families needing income from their children's labor, for example, must be sensitive to when they should disappear. In one camp, approved for eighty-six occupants, there were 120 people. The issue was never raised until, in the middle of the season, a count was required for the purpose of welfare allocations. There had been no work and the occupants of the camp were eligible for government food. At this point, when the situation of overcrowding became visible, the crew leader, with a logic clear only to himself, eliminated thirty-four names, claiming that exactly eighty-six people were really eligible. He decided that, by coincidence, precisely thirty-four people had some other source of income and could not properly be included in the listing. In effect, he was able to make more than one fourth of his crew disappear.

Migrant invisibility, then, is fostered both by the migrants themselves, in an effort to adapt to their particular circumstances, and by the larger society. The extent to which the migrant is, in fact, invisible, was suggested by a survey of permanent residents in a small agricultural community.

Community Perceptions

Sodus Village is the center of an agricultural area in which many migrants are employed. In the township of Sodus there were, in 1966, fifty-four labor camps, with facilities to house 1,062 people.⁶ Migrants use the town laundromats and gas stations, shop in the stores, and drink at a local bar. Many of their employers live in the village. Seventy-one townspeople⁷ were interviewed to assess their contact with, and perceptions of, the migrant labor situation in their community. Six claimed they had never had contact with migrants; thirty-four had occasional contact, when running into migrants in town or when visiting grower friends, but claimed not to know any migrants personally; and ten people had indirect contact through their jobs as merchants. Twenty-one had direct occupational contact: twelve through employment in agriculture, and nine as teachers or social workers. Respondents were asked to indicate how many migrants there were in Sodus township. Thirty had no idea, nineteen thought there were more than 1,275. When asked how many camps there were in the township, twenty-nine did not know. Of the others, twenty-one estimated less than thirty, five estimated between sixty and ninety camps, and ten thought there were more than one hundred camps. Many of those who felt they knew the extent of the migrant population made over-estimates, suggesting that, when migrants are visible to a community, their visibility may become exaggerated.

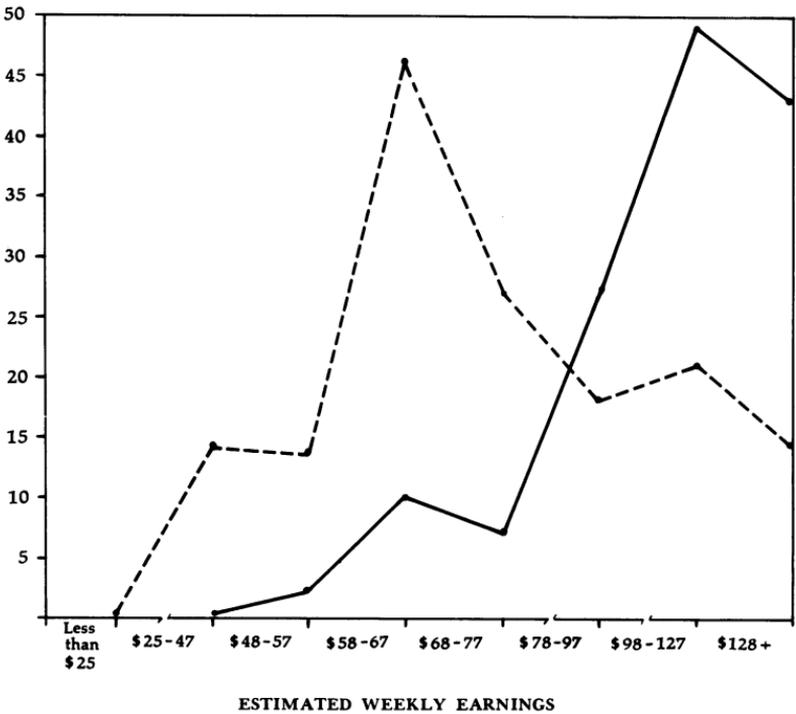
As for knowledge about the camps or migrant life, six respondents claimed never to have noticed a labor camp, and twenty-

⁶These statistics are controversial (as are much of the official data relating to migrant labor). They are based on listings published by the Department of Health, which are supposed to include all approved camps with five or more occupants. Other listings are not always in agreement; for example, the Department of Health lists 154 camps in Wayne County, but a survey by the Cayuga County Community Council of the same county lists 250 camps.

⁷According to the 1960 census, Sodus Village has 1,645 people, 1,233 of whom are aged 14 or over. The sample of 71 was a random selection from the 550 households in the village. One member of each household was interviewed.

three had at some time visited one. The others were aware of the camps, having noticed them from the highway. Probing revealed that, with the exception of the twelve who had direct contact with migrant workers through their agricultural occupations, knowledge of life within the camps was either nonexistent or vague. Despite this, many were willing to estimate both what migrant workers *could* earn if they worked hard and what they actually *do* earn. The estimates can be plotted as follows:

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS



Broken line shows estimate of what the average migrant actually earns at peak season (46 responded). Solid line shows response to the question, "What do you think it possible to earn at peak season if a person works hard?" (49 responded).

This shows that the respondents tended to assume that migrants earn substantially less than they could earn if they worked hard. While thirty-two respondents felt it was possible to earn more than \$97 per week, only thirteen believed that migrants were actually doing so. Conversely, twenty-seven respondents believed the actual earnings were less than \$68, while all but five felt it was quite possible to earn more. By suggesting that earnings are a great deal less than they could be, these responses imply the prevailing stereotyped notion that migrants do not work hard enough to take advantage of existing possibilities.

The survey generally indicated that, except for those with a specific and functional reason to be involved with migrant workers, members of the community had little knowledge of, or concern about, this group. To each of the questions there were many respondents who claimed, for whatever reason, to know nothing whatsoever about migrants, although the number of migrants in the immediate area was a substantial proportion of the permanent residents of the village.

The habit of ignoring controversial or disturbing problems in a community is seldom a conscious one. Occasional crises, however, force an overt response, and the desire to perpetuate the invisibility of an inconvenient and problematic group then may surface. For example, a local migrant child-care center was about to close in the middle of summer because the public school building in which it was held was no longer available. The minister of one of the local churches had an active program in the camps where most of the involved children lived, and he was under pressure to find an alternate location. Asked about using his Sunday School building, he said it would be impossible to use church facilities because there was a very small septic tank and the system would be ruined if more people used the toilets. But he was forced to admit that the vestry was more liberal than the parishioners, who were quite willing to supply old clothes as long as the migrants remained in their camps.

A more dramatic crisis occurred when an organizer convinced a migrant to discuss the problems of farm labor on the radio. They discussed conditions in the camp, describing the decrepit

buildings, the lack of sufficient water supply, and the inadequate cooking and bathroom facilities. They noted the difficulties of earning a reasonable wage. Despite the fact that the program was broadcast on an FM station with relatively few listeners, the publicity was sufficient to infuriate not only local growers but also community groups ostensibly concerned with improving just those conditions criticized on the air. On the morning following the broadcast, the grower, an inspector, and the crew leader questioned the migrant who had appeared on the program, and asked him to leave the camp. He went to town to rent a trailer; but later, when he returned, he was discouraged from leaving by the grower, who feared further publicity. Questioning various people in the community concerning the issue, we found an irate official at the government employment office, who insisted that publicity calls attention only to the worst camps and ignores all the positive changes. Regarding his own position as undermined by the broadcast, he said the organizer was interfering with what was none of his business. A church volunteer criticized the organizer, saying that he had barged in too aggressively and had made a lot of people angry; that by upsetting people, the broadcast had done more harm than good. She, herself, found the publicity disturbing and damaging to social work programs in the area. The migrant who participated in the broadcast was treated with disdain. "He brought his own Beauty Rest mattress north," was said of him, suggesting that, although he had worked as a migrant worker for many years, he was not a "real" migrant at all, because he attempted to cater to his own comfort.

A physician publicly called attention to conditions in those camps in his county which violated state regulation. He forced one camp to close early owing to inadequate heat. The newspaper publicity caused by the dramatic move of busing people out of the camp and into a hotel led to extensive criticism, in particular by various church and poverty organizations that thought their own programs seriously jeopardized.

Finally, a more serious crisis, occurring in 1966, revealed the potential consequences of invisibility, and the surprise which

occurs when unsuspected discontent is expressed. A group of migrants in an agricultural community marched into town as a protest against their conditions, and it was feared that a riot would develop. The event genuinely shocked community officials, who had seriously assumed that the migrants were well satisfied with the circumstances in which they lived. "Why," said the mayor, "they walked by here on the road and I waved to them and they laughed and smiled. . . real happy you know." And the wife of the police chief noted: "This place is a paradise compared to what they are used to living in. Of course you or I wouldn't want to live that way, but I believe they like it fine" (*New York Times*, July 17, 1966).

In sum, the activities of those involved in the migrant labor system are carried on with the migrant as an invisible part of the system. Their invisibility is fostered both by those employing labor and by social work groups and poverty organizations seeking to improve the situation. Both groups share the preconception that, while there are many problems, there are no alternatives to present arrangements. Solutions to problems are seen to lie in small nonstructural changes. Migrants, too, avoid visibility, perceiving the cost to outweigh the potential benefits. The primary concern is to avoid disturbing incidents that might in any way threaten the existing system. The tendency is to isolate migrants, to keep them in the camps where there is minimum visibility and limited contact with the community. Most social work activities are directed to making the current migrant situation more bearable: films are brought to the camps, women are trained to cook surplus food, and people are taught their rights as migrants. These activities are, indeed, important, but all are geared to help migrants better adapt to their present circumstances. Old clothes and passive entertainment foster continued dependence and expectations of further gifts, rather than encouraging independence and confidence. Moreover, relatively few programs in the North are specifically directed to training people for jobs out of the migrant labor stream.⁸

⁸Similar concerns have created controversy over involving the poor in antipoverty programs (Cloward, 1965).

The well-publicized and highly visible child-care programs are an exception, but in a sense their supervisibility tends to divert attention from the camps themselves, to which the children return each evening. And it is interesting that, when a child-care center was evicted from a public school building, the program had to be dropped because the community church would not open its doors. The prevailing sentiment among those concerned with migrant labor in the North is that the migrant is only there temporarily (although often as long as five months each year) and is, in any case, about to "disappear," with the mechanization of agriculture.

To render the migrant visible would expose the depths of the problem and certainly jeopardize many people who have a stake in the system as it presently operates. Openly acknowledging the existence of a social situation that is dissonant with basic social values would call these values into question. As long as the migrant remains "out of sight," he is also "out of mind." Disturbance is minimized, but the obvious question remains: Can an invisible problem be resolved?

Summary and Conclusions

Migratory farm laborers move restlessly over the face of the land but they neither belong to the land nor does the land belong to them. They pass through community after community, but they neither claim the community as home nor does the community claim them. As crops ripen, farmers anxiously await their coming; as the harvest closes, the community with equal anxiety, awaits their going.

(President's Commission, 1951)

THE migrant worker remains on the margins of American society, a situation long sustained by indifference and neglect.

The above essays have suggested the profoundly negative effects of this marginal existence on migrant farm workers. For many of them, the migrant labor system is a "last resort" or a "cocoon" that provides them with protection and sustenance not to be found in the larger society. In order to function within the social, economic, and political environment of the migrant labor system, migrants have had to learn to adapt to it. Though they cannot manage this environment, they do manage their

lives within it by developing a subculture adaptive to the circumstances in which they are trapped.

The skill with which migrants adapt to intolerable conditions makes their lives viable on a daily basis, but also leads to serious frustration. Exposure to middle-class values through television exacerbates this frustration. Furthermore, migrants' adaptation to their situation helps to perpetuate the existing system, for the accommodations that are necessary in the context of the migrant labor camp are dysfunctional and maladaptive from the point of view of the larger society. The migrant's goals are influenced by the values of the larger society, but his experience has told him they are not within his grasp. While cohesion and organization are fundamental to effecting social change, migrants as a group are split by internal dissention and mistrust, and the hierarchy necessary for successful organization is normatively rejected. The very norms that make life viable in the unpredictable and restricted circumstances of the labor camp limit the potential for social change and reinforce the socioeconomic marginality of the migrant.

A serious dilemma is posed by the obvious failure of piecemeal improvements to break into this vicious circle. An intolerable situation, reinforced by adaptation to it, can only be penetrated by fundamental changes in the complex relationships that constitute the system. To date, the history of migrant policy has been one of only piecemeal change. In 1951, a President's Commission on Migratory Labor (President's Commission, 1951) cited such problems of the migrant labor system as foreign labor, recruitment, labor management, wages, housing, and social services. With the exception of the restrictions on foreign labor, there has been little significant change. For the migrant, the situation remains basically the same, despite some legislation directed to improving recruitment practices, housing requirements, and wages.

A promising approach to the problem has been suggested by a number of proposals that would significantly change the migrant labor system by decasualizing farm labor on an industry-wide basis. Montero (1966) has suggested four measures to be

initiated and maintained by government regulation. First, she recommends a changing land-use policy, increasing diversification in order to extend the length of the harvest season. This would help to stabilize labor demand. Second, she recommends an increase in wages, reducing the disparity in the wages of farm and nonfarm work. The higher cost of labor would put pressure on growers to develop efficient practices which would lead to increased productivity per worker. Third, she suggests a policy of hiring priority for local workers. Fourth, to stabilize and decasualize employment relationships, she would require labor standards and benefits for farm workers similar to those available in other industries. Montero's ultimate objective, then, is to abolish the migrant labor system by reducing seasonal labor demand and substituting the use of local labor.

Becket (1969) seeks to create a stable labor force through training migrants systematically for the new roles that develop with increasing mechanization. He defines a classification system of farm employment, based on systematic progression from field hand to salaried personnel. Each stage would build on the skill required for the step below.

There are several implications of the Montero and Becket proposals. First, that the migrant labor force is an industrial labor force in which stability can be developed through adequate remuneration; money and mobility, rather than manipulation of basic needs, must be the means of management. Second, that as mechanization continues to reduce the number of employees required for the harvest, growers will be economically able to meet the demands for adequate remuneration and improved conditions. A further implication is that significant change in the migrant labor system will require that farm workers be in a position to share the rights, privileges, and resources of the larger society. Without such power, specific limited improvements are merely frosting on an unpalatable cake. With this in mind, the following recommendations are offered, more to indicate obvious points of vulnerability in the system than to provide quick or sufficient solutions to problems compounded over many years.

Just as growers are regularly advised by extension specialists on use of seeds and fertilizers, and trained to use up-to-date technology, they should be advised on appropriate labor-management practices. Careful planning for effective work organization — anticipating the number of boxes required, the expected yield per tree, knowing the optimal location of scales and loading areas — are called for to minimize labor wastage. Growers or hired professional foremen should be trained specifically for supervisory roles, so that their effectiveness is neither entirely contingent upon personal sensitivity and style nor left to chance.

The control of the crew leader must be undermined. If his function as contractor is maintained, his opportunities for exploitation must be limited and the dependence of migrants on him reduced. Recruitment should eventually be transferred to professional agencies; and, before hiring a crew and bringing dozens of persons north, growers should be required to guarantee them a minimum number of days of work.

To undermine the crew leader's responsibilities with respect to the daily life in camp will involve creating opportunities for cooperative food buying at substantial savings over present concessionaire prices. Perhaps the most crucial need is for provision of transportation to towns and markets and to recreational facilities. Considering the isolation of labor camps, the ultimate source of a crew leader's unconstrained power over his crew can, in many cases, be traced to his control of transportation.

Training should be provided for inexperienced pickers. Some of the older migrants have striking ability to pick rapidly and effectively. By pairing them with inexperienced pickers, or by having them demonstrate their techniques, their skills could be systematically communicated.

As Becket recommends, stable and intermediate positions should be created and made accessible to migrants, encouraging stratification and providing opportunities for mobility. As the use of harvest machinery increases, opportunities for mobility should also increase; migrants must be made to understand that new possibilities are open to them. Today, however, few are

being trained for skilled jobs. Some farmers have introduced innovative techniques with some success, through which unskilled labor can be trusted with sensitive jobs. One, for example, organized the job of spraying using color-coded and premeasured buckets (Volland, 1968). But such cases are rare.

Prearranged decisions should be made concerning wages, crops, location of work, and hours of work; and migrants should be clearly and unambiguously informed. Record-keeping systems should be standardized and written contracts made and enforced. Employees should have copies of all records and be trained and encouraged to keep accounts. One model is the system which currently protects Puerto Rican contract workers. A contract is signed for each worker, stipulating a minimum wage and a minimum number of guaranteed hours of available work.

If it is necessary to pick poor fields, adjustments should be made in the piecework rate to compensate for the extra time required to work under these conditions. Similarly, reimbursement should be made for unnecessary delays during the workday. It has been indicated in recent studies that, contrary to the arguments often used by growers to justify low wages, an increase in labor costs would have little effect on the price of the final product paid for by the consumer. For labor costs are a very small percentage of the total price of food items (U. S. Senate, 1969, p. 55).

Alternative housing arrangements should be considered to eliminate the "company-town" syndrome characteristic of the present system. Temporary housing in agricultural communities should be accessible to families that wish to avoid living in camps. Experiments with alternative types of shelter are needed, and incentives to improve facilities must be provided through adequate government support specifically designated for this purpose. Above all, housing regulation should be unambiguously and stringently enforced, with little leeway allowed for personal decisions by individual inspectors. Regulation will be more effective with a system of appointing regulatory officials who are outside the influence of politically powerful growers.

An effective regulatory system will require better coordination of the many agencies that currently deal with some aspects of the migrant labor system and ignore others that are closely related. For example, attention to child health care is meaningless without consideration of unsanitary housing facilities.

Social legislation and welfare provisions available to the rest of the country's work force should be extended to farm workers, who are presently excluded from workmen's compensation laws, unemployment insurance, and disability insurance, despite the fact that agriculture is one of the most hazardous occupations in the United States. Education, health care, legal aid, and other services should be greatly expanded and made readily available to more migrants, especially those in small isolated camps that have hitherto been neglected.

Contact between migrants and those who provide them with needed services should be direct, avoiding intermediaries, referral systems, and other bureaucracies. Channels should be developed through which migrants can voice their problems and dissatisfactions and get a true hearing. Many of their complaints concern problems that are trivial, yet immensely irritating on a daily basis, and which could be resolved if they were known. In other words, the system must function with the needs of the client clearly visible, recognizing the migrants' difficulty in effectively approaching bureaucracies and in persisting to communicate their needs and interests.

All contact made by those involved in health and education programs should bypass the crew leader. Although he is often more accustomed than crew members to negotiating with persons outside the camp, his role as an intermediary provides further opportunities for strengthening his control over the crew.

In conclusion, stable employment relationships must be developed in agriculture which minimize the effect of seasonality and unpredictability. Possibilities for stable employment will increase as agriculture in the East changes. Many farms are already associated with processing plants, and as vertical integration in the industry increases, this could provide channels both for

upward mobility for migrants and for a complementary system of year-round work coordinated with harvest labor needs. But to do so, well-planned rehabilitation and training programs must be provided, so that migrant workers may move into stable agricultural work.¹ Furthermore, as manpower requirements of agriculture decrease, alternative support must be provided for those no longer employed. The dropouts do not disappear. Their needs, now marginally met in agriculture, must be supported in some other way.²

It is unrealistic to assume that appropriate labor practices in agriculture will ever be introduced without either severe government regulation or a more equitable distribution of bargaining power. For there are intangible factors that compound the more obvious economic obstacles. Growers, particularly on the relatively small Eastern farms, are motivated by the belief that farm work has intrinsic value. They often find it hard to accept the fact that their employees are like industrial workers, for whom work is a balance between its cost in effort and its reward. The strength of these convictions, expressed forcefully by most of the growers observed, suggests that bargaining power is likely to be the only effective way to change the migrant labor situation.

There have been many abortive attempts to organize farm workers since the Wobblies' first efforts in 1905. The success of Cesar Chavez in overcoming some of the difficulties of organiza-

¹Legislative structures now exist that should make it possible to support extensive programs of rehabilitation for migrant agricultural workers. The 1968 amendments to the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (PL90-391) removed the residence requirements, extending the possibility of federal support for rehabilitation services to this group. A recent program, specifically directed toward retraining farm workers, has been established at the Arizona Job College (*New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1969).

²Of relevance here is the literature on the "hard-core unemployed." See, for example, some of the policy papers of the Human Resources and Industrial Relations Institute of the University of Michigan. A useful bibliography of material relating to rehabilitation programs is included in a recent book dealing with socioeconomic variation relating to rehabilitation of Mexican Americans (Howard, 1969).

tion in creating the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee in Delano, California is unlikely to be duplicated in the East, where small farms and predominantly row crops, which spoil if not picked on time, compound other difficulties. The obstacles are formidable in view of such problems as the dispersed nature of the industry, the seasonality of employment, and the powerful political pressure of growers, who have been able successfully to maintain the exclusion of farm workers from the representative election and unfair labor practices provisions of the National Labor Relations Act (Taft-Hartley Act) of 1947. Growers have long argued that extension of the National Labor Relations Act to agriculture would be disastrous.³

The farm production cycle is generally fixed by the calendar and the laws of nature, and if delayed or interfered with beyond narrow time limits, will bring financial ruin. Thus, farmers are uniquely vulnerable to control of their labor supply by a union. They would be under irresistible and compulsive pressure to accept whatever demands the union might make, no matter how unreasonable or arbitrary such demands might be.

(U.S. Senate, 1967, 821)

A further obstacle to organization is the passivity of the migrant farm worker. Though migrants have much to gain from active attempts at organization, their reaction to occasional organizational attempts has been apathy, fear, and a very realistic concern that their subsistence level would not enable them to survive a strike.

³Though the Hawaii agricultural pattern is not entirely comparable to that in the United States, owing to the greater number of nonmigratory workers, the legislative picture gives some indication that recognition of farm worker organization is not necessarily disastrous. In 1945, Hawaii passed an Employment Relations Act, sometimes called the "little Taft Hartley Act," covering most farm workers. This has been described as beneficial. "It does provide an opportunity for agricultural employees to achieve protection under a law designed to encourage collective bargaining, the determination of bargaining units and the prevention of unfair labor practices. On the whole, the labor relations picture has been reasonably stable... [and] a beneficial factor in the development of Hawaii's agricultural industries" (U.S. Senate, 1967, 939-40).

Thus the migrant labor system is perpetuated; by growers through appalling labor practices, by migrants through their adaptation to a situation they cannot control, by government through benign neglect, and by society through sheer indifference.

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