

# THE LIVES OF MIGRANT FARMERS

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Living in America today are many hundreds of thousands of people whose lives

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are characterized by continual movement by crop season from town to town, state to state and region to region. They are people whose hands harvest the fruit and vegetables we eat (3, 16, 20, 21, 23, 28, 33, 35).

There are three large-scale pathways they follow (called "streams" by the farmers,

public health doctors or government officials who are involved in one way or another with their lives). One is along the Pacific coast, drawing upon native white and Negro workers or Mexican workers, and moving from southern California up along to Washington and back as the harvesting season itself moves northward, then southward. There is a middle stream—heavily Mexican, but with a good number of whites and Negroes—which starts in the south central region of Texas, Louisiana or Oklahoma and moves northward in a wide arc, terminating in states like Minnesota, Michigan or Wisconsin. The third stream follows the Atlantic seaboard. It is made up mainly of Negroes, but has some whites too. Starting in Florida in late May and June its workers move steadily northward, up through Georgia, settling into the Carolinas and Virginia for some weeks, then into Delaware, New Jersey and New York—a few into New England. They stay north for the rest of the summer and early fall. Then by the thousands they return to Florida for a winter and spring of gathering the crops there, sometimes in one general area (from farm to farm) or sometimes moving from county to county in that state(3, 16).

The history of migratory farm labor goes back well into the 19th century, when roving bands of men moved about reaping and bundling our wheat crops(32). However, much of American agriculture slowly became heavily mechanized, so that by the 1920's there was a serious crisis developing in the lives of millions of farm workers whose labor was simply no longer needed. To the cities many of them went, even from the South, whose farms and cotton plantations yielded more slowly to machines than the giant wheat and corn fields of the Midwest. Many, however, stayed—eking out what existence they could.

With the onset of the depression years of the 1930's, dispossessed sharecroppers, or small farmers whose income was near nothing because of the depression, or additional thousands driven from their dried, choked land by a series of droughts, combined to offer a frightful spectacle to their countrymen as they moved, by new thou-

sands, hungry, fearful and confused, across the continent in search of a decent chance of work. Their fate—on their sharecropper farms or in migration—has been movingly described by Agee, Steinbeck, and Carey McWilliams(1, 20, 21, 29).

While many of these people also moved into the city, many others remained loyal to their competence in farming by taking jobs as fruit pickers and vegetable harvesters in the expanding farms dedicated to those crops in California, in the Midwest and in Florida. With rapid transportation by train and truck and refined methods of refrigerating these once perishable commodities, there had developed in the period after the first World War a large-scale industry of growing fruit and vegetable produce—once, of course, grown locally by farmers near the cities they supplied(2, 26, 27, 32, 34). As these new farms—and the packing houses attached to them—came into being they required workers to plant and gather their crops, then pack them and load them on waiting boxcars and trucks. The farms themselves were scattered over great distances, and in keeping with the changing seasons, over entire regions of the nation. To work on them men and their families would have to be willing to move regularly and sometimes frequently, too.

Nor do these people have the most comfortable lives, in comparison to the way most of us live. In large measure they live in houses whose adequacy—let alone comfort—leaves much to be desired(3, 13, 14, 16, 17, 28, 30, 31, 33). Often they are flimsy, rat-infested, one-room hovels with improper sanitation. In them live large families, sleeping at close quarters on cots or on the floors, often eating without utensils on the same floor. If some of these people live more comfortable lives, many live under conditions which a paper like this cannot hope to describe fairly. However, in general what most migrants share is more than occasional exposure to poor housing, bad sanitation, a diet poor in vitamins and protein, inadequate medical care, continual movement—and consequent lack of firm association with any particular community—a very limited income, and a lack of eligibility for a number of privi-

leges many of us either take for granted or consider "rights"—the vote, a telephone, a library card, unemployment or welfare benefits, minimum wage protection.

Such political, economic, social and cultural facts affect the lives of these people, influencing the way they act, their view of themselves in relationship to others around them, the assumptions they make about the world. Such facts also become psychological forces as they bear down and help shape the thinking of children, the behavior of parents, the experiences of both. We cannot dwell on them here, but neither can we dismiss them with a sentence or two as part of a vaguely subordinate "background" to the psychological processes at work. In many respects these "environmental" forces significantly determine the way migrants touch and feed their children, toilet train them, bring them up to get along with one another and themselves as they grow and develop.

As much as anything our task was to see how these "external" facts became translated into internal ones, of fantasy, dream, action and personality development. Any introduction, therefore, to such psychiatric research must somehow make proper mention of its necessary and affirming kinship to sociological and anthropological observation as well as historical knowledge (9, 10, 11, 15, 18, 19, 36, 37). It is not simply a matter of seeing the impact of a social system on people. It is one of seeing how, out of historical events in a given political and economic system, a social system has developed, with its own culture and frame of mind. Migrants, then, have a subculture even within that of the poor, including their own nonmigrant relatives.

#### ORIGINS OF THIS STUDY

Our interest in these people was aroused in the course of a study of the adjustment of Negro and white school children to school desegregation in the South (5, 6, 7). Several of the Negro children and one white child had been born in sharecropper cabins in Mississippi, Alabama or South Carolina. Their early years had been spent on farms, and their parents had only recently moved into New Orleans or Atlanta,

where they came upon the crisis of a serious social struggle that affected them and the education of their children. In the course of taking family histories we learned that in five families (four Negro and one white) there were uncles, aunts and cousins who had left those same fixed if no longer sustaining farms to join the migrant labor force rather than the tide going steadily toward cities of the North or, in our cases, the South.

We initially wondered what made for such different choices, and what happened as a result of them to such differently lived lives. Through one Negro family in New Orleans we established preliminary contact with their relatives and other Negro families who harvest winter crops in Florida and move up the Atlantic states in summer and autumn doing likewise. We were unable to trace down the migrant relatives of our white family, but in the attempt met with other white migrant families in Florida and established effective communication with them. In preliminary visits we interviewed at length public health doctors and nurses who have long been concerned with the severe medical problems which afflict the bodies of these people (3, 8, 16, 24, 33, 35) and the related sanitary problems which arise from their living and working conditions (contaminated drinking water, inadequate drainage and sewage facilities). We worked as a general physician in the mobile public health clinics which attempt to reach migrants (known to be suspicious and isolated) by seeking them out directly. We accompanied nurses on their "postnatal rounds." We did likewise with dietitians whose job it is—often against stubborn emotional resistance—to try to educate people whose diet is woefully unhealthy about ways of improving health through modification of food habits. (The irony of people surrounded by fresh fruit and vegetables, yet shunning them for themselves and their children in the face of medical advice to the contrary, was one of the first reminders we encountered that more than simply "material deprivation" was at work in these families.)

We also talked at considerable length with the farmers who employ—and often

provide living quarters for—migrants and have had considerable experience and difficulty with them and their habits of living. We spent a good deal of time talking with county agricultural agents in Florida and some northern states, learning the history of agriculture (and hence migrations of people to support it) in the various counties and states. We talked with some school teachers who must try to educate migrant children and visited schools where they are taught(12). We also talked with certain social workers who come into significant contact with these people and with those from church groups who, again, have come to know and tried to help these people while others of us have scarcely heard of them and their kind of existence.

Eventually we selected ten families for more intensive study. Six of them were Negro and four white, all part of the eastern seaboard migration. We interviewed these mothers, fathers and children over a period of two years. Some months we visited them weekly at home. On later occasions we followed them in their migration northward, traveling in buses and trucks with them or in two instances in family cars. We lived with two Negro families and one white family for two weeks each. We tape-recorded our interviews and with young children both played games and placed heavy emphasis on drawing and painting pictures. We photographed homes and their interiors, fields and the way bodies and hands must posture themselves in them to harvest their crops, or buses and trucks with their dense "loads," so that we might document such conditions of existence and study their meaning to the people who live under them, work under them and move about under them.

#### MIGRANCY : A STYLE OF LIFE

Our primary interest has been with the relationship between the "outside world" and the growth and development of the migrant child's mind. Migrant farmers live a kind of life that asserts itself upon their infants and children and emerges once again in adults able to live with its demands. Just as we noted in our work with Negro children under the severe and threat-

ening stresses of school desegregation(5), we must emphasize that the extreme poverty, the cultural deprivation and social fragmentation, in sum the uprootedness which characterized their lives falls not suddenly upon them (as it does upon the observer who tries to comprehend their manner of survival) but as a constant fact of life from birth to death, summoning therefore a whole style of life, a full range of adaptive maneuvers. Perhaps if we take a migrant child at birth and follow his life along we will best combine the telling of the migrant's life with the psychodynamic developments in it of primary concern to us as psychiatrists.

*Infancy.* In only two of the ten families we studied were the children delivered by doctors(24). The rest of the mothers relied upon midwives or simply relatives and friends. Frequently a pregnant mother returns "home" (where relatives—parents, brothers and sisters, even cousins—maintain a permanent residence) to deliver a baby. In many instances this is not possible and children are delivered wherever the mother happens to be, often enough "on the road," that is, in the course of traveling for working purposes. We were struck by the casual attitude toward childbirth displayed by these mothers and their common knowledge of how to deliver children, remove the placenta, tie and sever the cord.

Many of them are quite afraid to deliver their babies in a hospital, fearful that the child in some way will be "hurt." For example, one of our mothers remarked that, "They say it's cleaner there and safer, but I tried it once and I got scared to death and my baby didn't behave good. He cried more and didn't take my milk so easy." While many also complain that they simply have not sufficient money to pay for good medical and obstetrical care, it seems clear that even were such facilities free to them, their substantial fear, suspicions and superstitions would have to be overcome—and perhaps some accommodation on the part of the doctors and hospitals be made in keeping with the migrants' cultural attitudes towards child-bearing and rearing.

Thus, migrants seem much less self-conscious about pregnancy and childbirth

than not only middle-class families but many of the urban poor we have met in the South, both Negro and white. Though we observed some discrepancy between white and Negro families in this regard—the Negroes less shy or embarrassed—we also observed some discrepancy between poor whites we knew in Atlanta and New Orleans, or indeed on small farms in Georgia and South Carolina, and the white migrants we studied.

During the prenatal period the mothers constantly refer to their pregnancy even well before it is obvious. Other children are told about the fact as soon as menstruation stops. We heard one mother tell her four children, "We is getting a baby again, 'cause I don't bleed no more." As her abdominal wall swelled in later months the children would often come up to touch and fondle it, even to talk to the baby inside. We saw similar behavior in the other families we came to know. Moreover, likely as not, the mother would wear little or no clothing in the early morning and evening hours. The mothers frequently wear heavy clothes during their work in the fields—pants, rubber boots and rubber guards on their knees to protect them during stoop labor—and are sometimes relieved to be rid of all clothing at home. Thus, the unborn child is publicly "seen," felt and followed along as he grows in the womb.

Many Negro migrant women—we did not notice this in whites—at this time become more religious, going with special frequency to the various churches that flourish among them. Names such as "The One and Only Church of God" and "God's True House of Faith" describe the more evangelical and customarily passionate among them. In addition more conventional denominations send ministries to migrants, and these ministries come perhaps into closer and more directly helpful contact with them than any other segment of "our" population with the exception of certain public health service doctors, nurses, social workers and dietitians.

The increase in church attendance was attributed by several mothers to a desire to ensure a baby who would survive pregnancy, be born without complication *and live*. The loss of children due to miscar-

riages, the mishaps of difficult deliveries or the various untreated diseases of the first days and weeks of infancy are very much on the minds of these women.

Likely as not the child is born at home, in the presence of his brothers and sisters, or if a first child, his "father." (Many Negro migrants do not formally marry, or may do so after several children have been born.) Of course, there may be several "fathers" to a given family of children, though the current husband is almost always called "father" by all children and his name is assumed. Since residences and schools alike constantly shift, this is an easier practice to follow than in the cities or rural areas where some of these same customs hold for nonmigrants, but with less formal cooperation from the society. White migrant families are much more likely to have a common father.

From the first day of birth the new child eats and sleeps with the rest of the family. Migrants quite often live in one-room houses, small shacks which are built to cover people with a roof rather than help them divide their activities and time with one another in certain ways. The children are breast-fed, and so fed for a year or more without any other food, except perhaps soft drinks which are introduced in the first months. There is little of the modesty one sees in our predominant culture, and again even in the poorer sections of it. Children of five and six may fondle both baby and breast during the feeding period. There is no concept of a schedule of feeding. Infants are often brought to work, watched over by their brothers and sisters or grandmothers; their mother is summoned when the child cries, there to be fed with little interest in covering the breast from anyone nearby.

The infant sleeps with his mother for the first few months, then is entrusted to the considerably older children, if there are any, rather than any siblings one or two years older. In such cases girls of five and six become quite occupied with introducing food to the child, playing with him, clothing him. If there are only very young children, the infant still will likely go to the oldest of these almost as a gift or birthright. We have seen families with-

in families, younger children "belonging" to various older ones.

The young child sleeps with the other children—if he is a first or even second child he or she may sleep with his or her parents until enough children come to warrant a *second* bed or cot or sleeping bag. The infant thus grows and becomes a child in the midst of the constant physical presence of others—their noises, smells, actions and habits. He is constantly touched, held and seen by them and thus receives that sensory—especially tactile—stimulation, or we might say, metaphorically and literally both, that kind of nourishment.

The growing child of one or two responds to such an environment by talking and moving about with ease. He is often naked, allowed to be so and encouraged to be so. Since his parents follow the sun in pursuit of work made possible by the sun, he is usually quite comfortable without clothes. He is not toilet trained until he is well able to walk outside his house—usually in the second year, though sometimes well into the third year. The outside world is often his toilet, the nearby land of trees, thickets and grass. Many of these children have never been in a house that has a bathroom, never seen a bathtub or sink. The mothers tend to be fairly firm once they have decided to train the child. They or one of their other children quickly carry him outside, where he can continue, or if he is finished he may be left there a bit alone, told not to come in and prevented from doing so. That is a harsh fate, a cruel exile for children so constantly close to others. From what we can see, they rapidly seem to get the point. On the whole, then, toilet training seems to be accomplished quickly, without great self-consciousness on the part of anyone, indeed rather smoothly and effectively.

*Childhood.* The children are allowed great freedom in moving about—their very inheritance—as they leave the infant and baby years to become walking, talking boys and girls. They are extraordinarily responsible for one another. They feed one another, clothe one another, sleep together and often work together, following their parents at picking in the fields as they be-

come seven, eight or nine and thus old enough to do so.

These homes have practically no printed matter. Many migrants are illiterate. They do not read newspapers. They do not even receive mail. Their children fast pick up their parents' words, but they come to school with little preparation for books, maps or pictures. The walls of their homes are barren. Some of them, however, have seen a good deal of television. On the road they often cannot have it, because they are in homes unequipped for electricity. In Florida the same may hold; but it may not if they live in certain camps or housing compounds. The first thing purchased is a television set; and the children become utterly taken up with it for a while. After a while the enthusiasm seems to subside and then stop altogether, enough so that the set is ignored for long spells. We wondered how the children—and for that matter their parents—responded to the comfortable world of America as it entered *their* world. We soon learned that they seemed to respond to it as "our" children do to adventure stories, science fiction or plain comic strip stimulation of dream and fantasy.

For example, one child of six told me he would some day board a rocket to the moon, and on the way "get off to see the cities up there." Questioned earnestly by us about the existence of cities on the moon, he explained to us that he meant the cities and the life in them he saw on television and passed by—at small but significant distances—in his travels with his parents.

Particularly revealing are the drawings these children do at five and six or eight and ten. They compare markedly with drawings we have seen from Negro and white children in middle-class child guidance clinics or poorer homes in the South. When asked to draw pictures of themselves they consistently sketch their brothers and sisters *with* themselves. When asked to limit themselves to a drawing of themselves, they hesitate, seemingly confused or paralyzed, or use the crayons in helter-skelter fashion that results in no picture at all. They seem very much afraid of being alone, of asserting on paper or in the

games we played the kind of individuality rather commonly sought by children from different backgrounds.

For example, a seven-year-old boy was asked what would happen to a soldier we isolated from other soldiers in a game we played together. He said he would die of starvation. ("He'd better get back fast or he won't eat and that'll end him.") All such games showed the children anxious to have groups of soldiers close together. There were no isolated leaders, and when we tried to establish their presence the children wanted them back with the others, or feared for their lives. They seemed unable to command their imaginative resources for situations that found people on their own.

The games and drawings also gave us some indication of how these children felt about themselves in relation to nonmigrant children. They are, of course, well traveled; though they do not move on the main highways or the planes and trains the rest of us use. Still, with their parents they see the land and its people, and from their parents they get a series of notions about others. "I tells my children we feeds the rest of the children," one mother told us. Another mother constantly told her children that the alternative to their kind of life was "trouble" or "no food and going to jail." Several parents frequently remarked upon the good fortune of being able to get what work they did as harvesters. The children were reminded that they had cousins whose parents didn't work at all, and "they takes to drinking and fighting all day long."

The children thus sense that they and their parents do something important for others, that those others have a better but distantly unobtainable life, that the alternative to the migrant life is not that better life but one even worse than the one they know, full of danger and pain, and that their present life (whatever its trials) serves to keep them and their families from not only external hardship but internal disintegration.

How do the children tell us such ideas? They are obtained, of course, over time from their parents and from their own developing sensibilities. After knowing us for several months one child was finally

able to formulate (and confide that formulation of) her impression of the life of city children. She drew a house so large as to cover almost the entire paper, then filled it with furniture. There was only one small window. The furniture seemed so abundant as to be a logjam. I had a sheaf of her drawings showing her *own* house; it had many windows and walls so drawn as to leave spaces that ranged from crevices to gaping holes. She invariably filled "her" houses with six, seven or nine people, but never any furniture. (She was one of six, her mother was pregnant, and of course with her father there were nine in the family.) We noted that the walls on the city home were scrupulously and thickly crayoned—and in red, instead of brown and black. The girl was telling us that she knew that other children lived in more solid, perhaps brick houses, less exposed and open to the wind or rain, filled with tables, chairs and beds she knew she did not have in her own. When we asked about the people who lived in the urban home, they slowly took on shape at her hands; parents and two children, all bigger and stockier than her own family. She had to draw them, incidentally, on another piece of paper, there being no room for them on the first piece. The house and furniture had monopolized all the space.

We have consistently similar drawings from other children, and as they become nine and ten, they can speak their observations more readily. One little white boy of seven emphasized his own kind of living (its rootlessness) by spending considerable time on the kind of foundation (including an elaborate cellar) he gave to the houses he imagined nonmigrants to have. A migrant child of nine explained the differences between his family and many others as follows: "We has to keep moving or we don't eat except from relief, if they give it to us . . . They have the work near their houses, and they has it all the time . . . They takes the pictures on TV in their homes, because most people can recall them and there aren't but a few of us, so we aren't there on the picture."

As migrant children become four and five they learn their mothers' wishes and develop the controls necessary for their

later life. The power of police, traffic lights and other rules of the road are recited by their parents to them as they move along. Children are physically punished—hard and mean at times—for taking food not theirs, for squabbling with one another or failing to execute assigned tasks promptly—fetching water from a pump, holding the baby, feeding the dog. (Stray dogs abound in migrant camps, and are by no means ignored. One public health doctor said to us, “They may symbolize what they think of themselves, because they sure take care of them and feed them whatever they have to eat.”) Older children are trained to follow after their parents, harvesting in the fields. They must learn how to pick tomatoes or pluck beans, and if they become slow or careless they are hit and shouted down. We have noticed that when punished in the fields they are very often hit by hand on their legs. It is leg work and hand work that makes for harvesters.

By the time a migrant child goes to school he has been taught his do’s and don’ts, to fear certain others, to get along with people in certain ways. Impulsiveness, self-assertion, rivalrous expressions and envious feelings tend to be strongly discouraged at home, but allowed children as groups, that is, in conjunction with brothers and sisters. Thus, groups of children can fight other groups, or envy one another openly so long as it is done collectively. Mothers show great warmth and open affection, kissing and fondling their children, rubbing the skin on their arms, but also quick anger toward them and severe punishment, most often slapping accompanied by shouting. Rarely is one child punished alone; often the mother will remind the others that they, too, have done similar wrongs in the past—and will in the future.

Very significant, we thought, was the absence of grudges in parents. A punished child will likely as not be embraced seconds or minutes after being punished, almost we sometimes thought as *part* of it. The result seems to be a sharply defined sense of limitation or restriction, one that does not spread into general shyness or inhibition. This may explain what many observers of migrants notice, their capacity

to change moods and behavior so rapidly: they can be fearfully, grimly silent (especially before the “strangers” of our world) and then quickly joyful and talkative with one another. “Their moods don’t last,” a nurse told us. We suspect that their early training sets the stage for what they will later need, a highly developed sense of flexibility in their personalities, an ability to manage the constant restrictions of the external world, but still not succumb to the apathy and despair that would fatigue and immobilize them. In a sense, then, there is a “bounce” to the way these children are punished that teaches them fast recovery from a slap as well as specific, responsive obedience to it.

Much of the hardest punishment goes into confirming the child’s sense of submission to the nonmigrant world, or passivity before it. There is a striking difference in the relationship between the child and his family “at home” or in travel, and the child at school, in the fields, even on the streets. At home the children play together easily and warmly. They are very free with their parents, and their parents with them. Open expression of love and demonstrations of it are seen. In children of eight and nine when one might expect otherwise, we hear boys talk openly of wishing to marry their mothers, girls of wishing to marry their fathers. There is, later on, a substantial incidence of step-father-stepdaughter sexual liaison, and those between fathers and daughters have been noted by social workers who observe both white and Negro migrants. Two mothers told us that such happenings were not rare, but were frowned upon and reported about as the “events” they apparently are: “It goes on sometimes, I think ‘on the road’ if the mother is getting ready to have a baby, or something like that . . . I don’t think it goes on a lot. No, it shouldn’t, but it does sometimes; maybe on account of drink, and you kind of get frustrated.”

In point of fact the rigid incest barriers that hold for middle-class families seem less sturdy with these families, often fathered by several men, in constant movement, living and sleeping practically on top of one another despite their invariably large size.



Their children are much less secretive, resort to much less furtive and symbolic maneuvers to express their attachment and direct love for their parents, and also their anger. Yet, in contrast to such physical intimacy and propinquity, openness of feeling and of anger, closeness of relationship between children, when migrant children meet many people on the "outside" (as their parents are apt to refer to anyone from a teacher to a farm manager) they often appear isolated, guarded, withdrawn, suspicious and apathetic or dull.

Thus, in many respects migrant children are brought up to have two rather explicit ways of responding to the two worlds of their family and "others." Though of course all children learn a version of that kind of distinction, there is a *contrast* to the two-fold behavior in migrant children, a sharpness to that differentiation, that is quite special. It is at times uncannily as if they had two sets of attitudes, two personalities, one for their family, one for the rest of the world.

*From childhood straight into adulthood.* Migrant children become migrant adults with no ceremony, or time to be not quite either, so as to consolidate the one before taking up the other. If ever we as psychiatrists need to realize how much "youth" is a social and cultural concept as much as a matter of strict chronology, our acquaintance with migrant children is to be recommended. There are two elements that mark the beginning of adulthood in the migrant, and when both are fulfilled, he or she is an adult, and so treated by parents, brothers and sisters and neighbors. These are experience in working the fields and the onset of puberty.

By ten many migrant children—all of those we came to know—have put in considerable time at harvesting whatever crops their parents have worked at. In some southern states school times used to be adjusted so that children could help with cotton or other crops, and by no means has that practice yet vanished for many sharecropping regions. With migrants there is an even greater possibility for school schedules to yield to the needs of work: though states may insist that children within their territorial limits attend school, mi-

grants tend to shuffle in and out of towns, counties and states, making it hard indeed for any regulatory agency to keep track of them. The children may spend most of the winter and spring in one Florida school, or they may move about from one school to another, or not attend any school for very long. Dropouts among even the more "stable" migrant population—those who do less moving about—tend to be high in the junior high years.

At 10 to 12 the children start becoming adults physiologically; many of them have already been working for several seasons. It is not long before they marry and have children. Brides of 14 and 15 are common, and their husbands are likely to be the same age or not very much older.

Before actual marriage the young men and women may live with their families and travel with them, but clearly at 12 to 14 they are "on their own time," as several mothers described the fact that their sons and daughters were going out at night, and often staying out. They were also earning money and keeping it rather than turning it in to their mothers. We noted that sexual maturation seemed to trigger the social and economic independence of the child with great speed. We wondered about the "defensive" nature of this fast departure, whether the highly crowded living conditions made a sexually aroused young man or woman "too much" for his parents to bear. The parents told us that they felt that migrants tended to "marry earlier" than sharecroppers, and certainly *part* of the explanation is the ease with which older migrant children can often make at least *some* money, and the fact that migrant farmers need their children rather less than do sharecroppers, whose children must help their parents work the land even when married, often for no money at all.

*Young adulthood.* Married couples and parents, workers and housekeepers, young migrant men and women (at 16 or 18, for example) *do* have their "platter parties" when they can join record machine with a source of electricity. On their way to work at six in the morning they can be seen literally dancing in the streets or pathways, often with a beer or two before they get on the buses which take them to the fields.

Often their first child is given to the maternal grandmother as a kind of "present," though slowly the mother accepts responsibility for the baby, and with it for adulthood itself.

Many of the younger migrants try very hard to break out of the migrant stream to venture into cities for jobs, or at the least buy a car on time, which means they can travel by themselves rather than in the crowded trucks and buses that many of their parents may have to use—tired as they may be of depositing money for used cars that soon break hopelessly down. In large numbers they seem headed for disappointment. In our observations, it is not only their lack of education and the unemployment which afflicts their segment of the economy—serious problems indeed. They themselves are at once afraid when they approach the city, many of them unaware of just how to obtain work there. Moreover, we have talked with many earnest young migrant workers who are repelled by the prospect of sitting week after week waiting for jobs that do not in any case seem forthcoming. They are made anxious by the sight of relatives, friends or simply fellow human beings drawing relief (as migrants they are ineligible for it until they establish criteria for residence). Part of the explanation for their common anxious reluctance to join the ranks of the urban unemployed is perhaps based on fear of the city and its pervasive "authorities," and a developmental reliance upon the movement of travel, and farming done during it, for a sense of their own identity and self-respect.

One migrant (aged 17, with two children) told us his feelings as follows: "I tried the city for a job, and I moved in with a cousin, and no go. . . They was all on relief and I was supposed to get on when I could, after applying; but we got tired of waiting, and we just left one day . . . I'd rather keep 'on the season' and feel right than sit all day as they do and *do nothing*." There were several psychological themes in this and other interviews with him: his awe and confusion before the complexities of bureaucratic procedure; his fear of the city, its people, will and customs; his restive inability to accom-

modate himself to a passive, idle, "taking" posture in contrast to the one he grew up to know—the energetic, kinetic, changeable and active one of migrants.

Young migrants, like their parents, show few inhibitions over sexuality. They have grown up with it, heard and seen it from their first days. Their parents have never seen fit to restrict their love-making to private or relatively secluded places. (They are generally not to be had, anyway.) In the evening hours as the children play noisily with one another, their parents have sexual relations. We noticed, however, that many young childless couples preferred privacy from their parents for such times—not always available while in transit. The woods are then often used.

Finally, we noticed a gradual change in mood or spirit in youthful migrants. At 20, at 22, they are full-fledged adults—we would call them "older" migrants. They have lost much of their interest in the possibilities of another kind of life; they often move about by themselves, no longer attached to their families and little interested in seeing and visiting them even when near them or migrating with them; they are caring for their own children. They have settled into the curious combination of industry and initiative (needed to keep moving over such distances, to keep working at such back-breaking work), lethargy and despair (reflected in their faces, their gestures, their way of slow movement, flattened speech, infrequent merrymaking). "We keeps going," said the father of one of our ten families, "but it ain't a good time like we once thought."

#### THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF MIGRANT LIFE

Having discussed some of the more significant features of growth and development as it takes place in migrant farm families, we might now mention—in the limited fashion allowed us at this time—some of the medical and psychiatric problems particularly evident in these people. We have already noted the high infant mortality rate. From infancy through childhood a host of illnesses, uncorrected deformities and congenital abnormalities or developmental disorders face the children; any psychiatric study cannot exclude

such facts from a discussion of the sources of migrant psychopathology.

Striking to us is the evidence in our ten families, and in our work as a "general practice" physician beside the public health doctors, of tooth decay in children; of uncorrected disturbances of vision; of repeated ear infections that have resulted in faulty hearing; of valvular heart disease, congenital and rheumatic, associated with impaired circulation of blood; of continual parasitic diseases that produce diminished appetite, weakness and anemia; of vitamin deficiencies based on faulty eating habits, many of them from aversions as well as poverty or lack of availability; of chronic diarrheas, chronic fungal diseases of the skin, chronic tuberculosis; of untreated or poorly treated chronic and recurrent venereal diseases; of chronic kidney and bladder infections; of muscle pains and bruises, or bone injuries or back diseases brought on by working conditions; of nerve palsies.

We find it difficult to see how such illnesses can help but affect the minds of people regularly suffering from not one but in all likelihood many of them. Fatigue, insomnia, loss of appetite, trouble in breathing or walking, pain, itching, bleeding, blurred or double vision, hardness of hearing are some of the symptoms of these diseases, and their psychological effects upon people will be appreciated.

To view the more formally psychiatric disorders seen in migrants, we must see much of their behavior—as with all of us—as an attempt to adapt to (cope with) the particular kind of life which is theirs. We see little sense in taking middle-class social and cultural standards and transposing them to migrant families as measurements of their "normal" or "abnormal" behavior. While it is true that many migrants share an American citizenship with us all, their living conditions and habits have a quality all their own.

This said, we can, however, take notice of the breakdown of adjustment in these people, and try to indicate when it seems to happen and why. Migrant children generally start life with strong support from mothers who predominantly breast-feed them for long, unanxious periods over many months, and offer constant affection and

tenderness to them. Their toilet training is largely casual, basically unconcerned with time, frequency or specific place, though gradually firm on the distinction between house (or vehicle) and the "outside." Children learn to get along closely with brothers and sisters but scrap easily with other children; they are punished quickly but without prolonged residual hostility and allowed both to be openly affectionate and angry toward their parents. They are in contrast taught rigid controls before non-migrants, and fear of them also.

What we see in migrant children, to some extent as a result of this, is a preservation over the generations of a certain soundness of mind, self-confidence and self-esteem in one set of circumstances, in company with a rigid, anxious, fearful way of engaging with another set of circumstances. Thus, we have seen little to no childhood schizophrenia in migrant children, very few of the temper tantrums and bed-wetting complaints commonly seen in middle-class child guidance clinics. We have seen no specific "learning problems"—again so frequently seen in those clinics—because the entire culture of the migrants has a "learning problem" built into its whole way of life—work taking precedence over residence, let alone schooling, and parents basically tired and illiterate having no capacity to stimulate a taste for education in their young.

On the whole these children, at five or six, seem cheerful, spontaneous, affectionate to one another and relaxed, in spite of their frequently poor physical health and the comparatively hard life they and their parents must live. We feel, therefore, that there are positive forces at work in their family life that give them initial psychological strength to face the world.

However, bit by bit over time this initial stamina faces challenges and threats. Physical health deteriorates—the first sight of some of the teeth, squinting eyes, infected skin and bent backs of "young" migrants in their 20's confirms that fact—but of course further diagnostic examination and tests are required to establish the extent of the deterioration. The tight-knit, isolated protection that migrant living offers children yields to the demand that the child, in

his early teens, establish his own livelihood, marriage and capacity to "keep going" (literally as well as metaphorically).

At this point migrants often develop a variety of "symptoms" or ways of thinking and feeling which indicate their response to the cumulative stresses of their kind of existence. They may drink heavily before or after work, using the cheap wine and beer they can afford to dull their senses in the face of, or in the wake of, their long hours of harvesting. They may become nasty and violent with one another, just as when children they were allowed to be toward neighbors. They often become careless and hurtful toward the homes furnished them by the farmers, destroying screen doors, stopping up the central plumbing facilities of a camp. Some may call such behavior "accidental;" but many farmers, in our opinion, are correct in sensing the barely submerged hostility and resentment at work in these people. Our interviews indicate that the migrants don't specifically "intend" to damage property, but are aware of feeling overworked and underpaid and carry those feelings around with them fairly constantly. When, after many months, we hesitantly "interpreted" for several of them a connection between those feelings and their way of *not* caring for property, we met surprise and denials, followed several days later by admissions from two of the five migrants that they did in fact consciously kick doors or walls at times—and thus might well do other similar deeds without even knowing why.

Apathy, gloom and severe depressions are seen in many migrants. We have seen a number of depressions severe and crippling enough to be considered psychotic. In fact we have seen seven cases of psychotic behavior recognized as such by migrants and reported to us by members of the ten families we studied. They are people who are called "different," yet they work and are generally tolerated. Incidents of wildly dangerous behavior, suicidal and homicidal, have been reported to us, but never witnessed. Rarely, except for criminal reasons, do these people see psychiatrists or even mental hospitals, even when grossly schizophrenic. We thought two of

our 17 adult informants (three of the homes were fatherless and without a continuing husband) psychotic, that is—in comparison to the others—guarded, depressed, hard to follow in thinking and inappropriate in mood. The hazards in such determinations, however, still puzzle us.

Migrants are particularly likely to use such psychological mechanisms as denial, projection and suppression. They favor conversion reactions (we saw paralyses and seizures which made no neurological sense) and tend to express a good deal of their anxiety or despair in somatic form (and language, too). "My blood is weak," or "my stomach is weary" may express depression and tension but also tell of episodes of bloody stools and gastritis. It is hard to separate the various causes and effects in such cases; but we have seen chronic complaints revive, summon a new interest in people whose reserve of energy had been depleted by a hard day or a disappointment—loss of a baby, breakdown of a car.

Of practical interest in a discussion of migrant psychopathology is their common refusal to eat oranges, grapefruit, tomatoes, cherries—the healthy foods they so desperately need. Even when they hear earnest and effective dietitians correlate in simple, stark language the relationship between their eating preferences and habits and their own and their children's ailments, many stubbornly refuse to make changes in their diets. Ignorance is surely one part of the explanation, but our interviews suggest that another part is a strong aversion to eating what they must live by and work upon. In several cases we saw real revulsion at the mention of eating or serving a tomato or orange—a real kind of fear, as if in some way all the anger they felt at having to harvest those foods for a living would eventually come to haunt them and live in them if they were consumed.

It is our impression that many migrants seem to have constructed a split in their personalities which results in two distinct personality styles. With their children and husbands or wives they will often be warm, open and smiling. At work, with strangers and often with one another while

traveling or even walking the streets, they are guarded, suspicious, shrewdly silent or sullenly calculating in what they do have to say; and sometimes clearly apathetic, humorless or even bitter, resentful and touchy. Such alterations in mood and attitude appeared to us as grim and striking examples of the capacity of the human mind to respond to its environment and keep itself intact by developing a high order of ability to divide itself severely and categorically. Nowhere in our years with these people did we hear this put better than by the mother of one of our ten families: "We switches back and forth, from being in a good mood to a bad one because you learns how to travel and you just make your head travel with you, so you gives yourself and the kids a break from the field."

The problem of *differential behavior in white and Negro migrants* had to be considered by us. There were definite differences between the six Negro and four white families studied along such variables as promiscuity (higher in Negroes), duration of breast-feeding (longer in Negroes), tendency toward open expression of anger toward one another, by word or deed (higher in whites), distance covered in yearly migrations (higher in Negroes), number of children (slightly higher in Negroes).

We felt that in the important respects of viewing the infant as a rare and thus specially valuable possession (to be nourished well indeed in the early months), of generally having a "permissive" attitude toward toilet training, of attitude toward education, toward the time their children became adults and toward themselves in contrast to the world, the two sets of families largely resembled one another. Other observers have told us that in some cases white mothers are not as warm with their infants, stricter with their children later and prone to more pervasive depression—including more overt antisocial violence—when so disposed. (Of course whites in the South can behave more aggressively "in public" than Negroes, regardless of class or occupation.)

Our observations, however, tend to indicate that migrants, including white mi-

grants, have developed certain characteristic attitudes *on the basis of their work and travel habits*. The constant movement, the threat of social chaos, the cramped living and traveling, make for common problems and remarkably similar responses to them which separate to some extent migrant behavior from that of the rest of the *poor* (4, 11, 14, 18, 19, 22, 25). Indeed, we are in general perhaps ill-advised to lump millions of poor people together—at least psychologically—on the basis of their common relative lack of income.

In our work with southern families caught up in the various crises of desegregation we have had occasion for a number of years to work with poor Negroes and poor whites, in both rural and urban situations (5, 6, 7). We certainly have spent a good number of months observing sharecroppers and small farmers, again of both races. Migrant farmers once were mostly poor farmers. They are still poor and they are still farmers, but they are also migrants. As such there is a specific social and cultural condition to their lives, and a specific psychological stress and challenge, too. If poor people have their own culture grounded in the life and laws of the slum or the rural village, migrants do not share in it—though they may of course carry some of it with them in what they do possess, a life of mobility that calls forth its own variation of habits and practices, surely resembling the way poor people live more than middle-class people, but also different from both.

#### CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of our observation we draw the following conclusions:

1. Migrant farm workers comprise—by the hundreds of thousands—a vastly ignored subculture whose work is essential to our well-stocked tables, but whose lives are often simply not known to most of us. There has, for example, been no psychiatric study of how these people manage such strains as constant movement with its social and cultural disorganization, economic hardship, political disenfranchisement and the personal and familial conditions of uprootedness in general.
2. This psychiatric investigation finds

that in order to adapt to such unusual facts of environment, migrants turn their isolated, mobile life inward, becoming guarded and suspicious toward outsiders but, in compensation for a rootless life, exceptionally close-knit with their young children. They tend to be unusually warm and stimulating with their infants and rather lax about disciplining them. They so treat them that there appears to be significantly less hostility between the children, much of it channeled toward other families as well as the world in general, which is seen as unfriendly and punitive. Families thus become separated from families, even within the migrant culture, so that the price for cohesion within the family is isolation and alienation from others.

3. Migrant children progressively learn a sense of their own weakness and inadequacy in comparison to the rest of the population, whose existence they comprehend and see from the distance of the traveler or television viewer. Their drawings and their play in games as well as their words indicate that they see themselves as smaller, less able to make decisions affecting their own lives and for some reason not clearly understood by them, stained, crippled or paralyzed.

4. Migrant children do not have the cultural accompaniment to physiological adolescence that we call "youth." They go directly into adulthood, with its work, marriage and parenthood, in their early teens.

5. Migrants tend to be not only distrustful of others, but even hostile toward many attempts to help them—with medicine, shelter or advice. They tend to avoid the very food they harvest, often in a phobic manner. Such behavior urges study of *why* it occurs and in what context of social and economic facts.

6. Migrants develop a variety of psychiatric illnesses. Especially are they susceptible to mood swings, violence toward one another, heavy drinking and a severe kind of apathy, with loss of appetite, aimlessness and indifference which may or may not go on to a more severe clinical depression, with suicidal preoccupations or paranoid thinking.

7. The physical health of these people is generally quite poor, with a host of diseases plaguing their skin, muscles, blood, vital organs and nervous system from birth to death. These diseases also affect the minds of those so afflicted, causing anxiety, fear, irritability and excitability, withdrawal and moodiness.

8. There is an urgent need for closer study of the lives of migrant farmers, and the problems in such a study are to some extent indicated. We can only conclude this study by remarking upon the extraordinary resilience shown by many of these people. The exertion of will they can muster—under the conditions of life they have as their very own—calls for further psychiatric study into how people manage stress and preserve, as well as lose, some of their psychological stability and human dignity.

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