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Abstract

Since the beginning of their existence, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have faced many political and social issues that led to migrations to the United States. Most of these migrations were provoked by violence/civil war and a lack of economic opportunities. Through these extensive migrations, Central Americans brought their food and culture to the United States. Although underrepresented in the media, these countries' food and drink continue to have a significant impact on the cuisine of the United States from the expansion of fast-food chains, the exportation of coffee, and various festivals held across the United States. For this presentation, I will be exploring the previous research from the University of Texas A&M, Esteban Brenes, and A. Damián Ríos Vargas to demonstrate how violence and economic uncertainty in Central America led to historic migrations to the United States and how the cuisine brought from these Central American countries has influenced the United States.

Objectives

This study seeks to understand Central America's political and economic situation, why that provoked migrations to the United States, and how it led to them bringing their food and culture.

The presentation seeks to explain how the food of Central America has influenced the United States and provide specific examples of this influence.

This presentation seeks to provide an example of a successful Central American food franchise in the United States and its current status.

This study seeks to understand the Central American Coffee industry, its current situation, and the influence that it has on the United States

History

The research of A. Damián Ríos Vargas shows that all of these countries have a history of violence and economic instability. Honduras, in particular, was relatively free of political violence until the 1970s and 1980s. The tensions between the El Salvadorian civil war and the communist government of Nicaragua spread to Honduras. Catacamos, Olancho was the base of the battle of engineers in the 1970s. It was abandoned until the 1980s. In 1983, the Sandinista military declared war on the Nicaraguan contras (who were supported by the united states). The Sandinistas were a left-wing communist group that caused guerilla wars in both Nicaragua and Honduras and increased the danger of conflict between the countries. Many killings occurred because of this war. This left the Honduran government without a fixed direction and economic turmoil, which provoked immigration to the United States.

In 2013, a trial was started against the ex-president and dictator of Guatemala, Efraín Ríos Montt, he was accused of genocide and crimes against humanity from 1981 to 1983. During this time 350,000 to 1,350,000 Guatemalans were forced to flee from their communities, some to the interior of the country, but many to foreign countries like the United States. The number of deaths and displaced persons is unidentifiable from the more than 40 years of armed conflict (1954-1996) that occurred in Guatemala. In 1996, a peace agreement was signed. This advanced Guatemalan society, However, the violence and economic situation continued to worsen.

From 1979 to 1992, the civil war of El Salvador. The immigration rate from El Salvador grew rapidly between 1979 when the civil war began, and 1981, after 2 years of killings of political figures. In 1981, 46 of every 1,000 Salvadorans had immigrated to other places, especially to the United States, more than 11 times higher than it was 6 years earlier (Vargas). The war was between the government and military against the leftists and civilians who rebelled against the government. Great violence was produced as a result, primarily by the military. Entire villages were destroyed and thousands of people were displaced. Anyone who was perceived to be conspiring against the government was killed. Many human rights violations were committed by the Salvadorian government.

Coffee Industry of Central America

Coffee is the top export of the majority of Central American countries. These countries provide arabica coffee beans for all of the world and even major corporations like McDonald's, Starbucks, and Dunkin' (who source coffee beans exclusively from Central and South America). Each year the Central American region produces billions of pounds of coffee beans. Three of the world's top coffee-producing regions are in Central America. Honduras on its own produces 5% of coffee all over the world and around 750 million pounds of coffee beans annually (Texas A&M).

However, the coffee industry has been struggling for the past few years. Farmers have been losing money from lowering prices and competition from Brazil. The farmers have also been fighting illness in the plants, caused by recent hurricanes. Although the arabica plant is regarded as the richest-tasting coffee, the plant is extremely sensitive to disease compared to the robusta plant (which is what Brazil produces). The fall of the coffee industry has produced drastic migrations to the U.S. in search of better economic opportunities, further damaging the industry. The University of Texas A & M has recognized this issue and is actively assisting Central American countries (mainly Honduras). One method that has been put in place is the introduction of hybrid plants. The plants maintain the rich taste of the arabica coffee bean and also make them more resistant to diseases. Another tactic was the creation of an academy for coffee farmers. This goal is to decrease unemployment and improve the Honduran economy, which in turn would decrease immigration and revive the coffee industry.

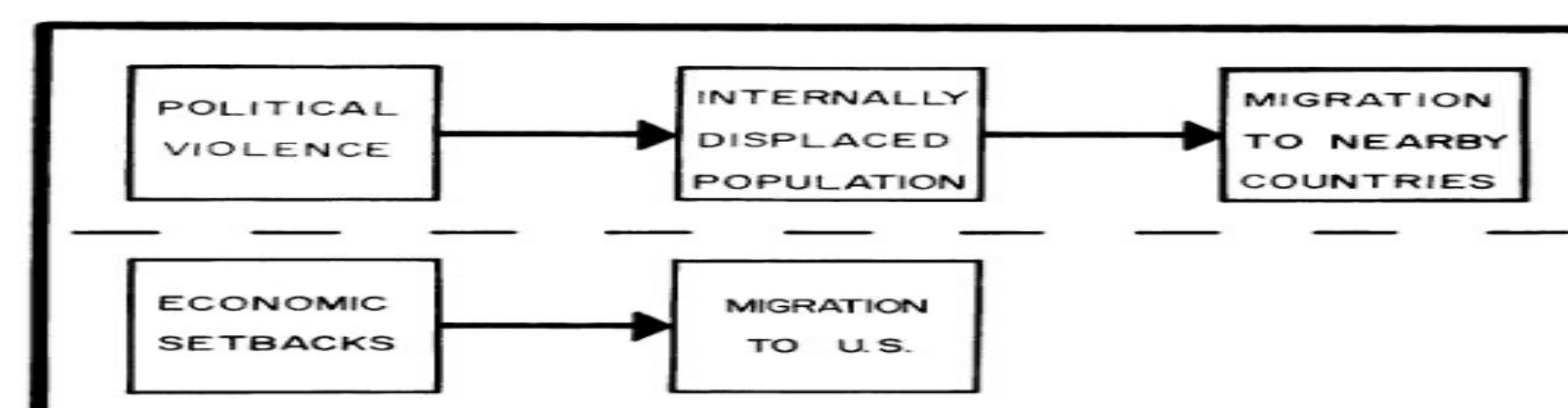


TABLE I—VARIABLES

DEPARTMENT & POPULATION ^a	LPD ^b	VPI ^c	IDP ^d	MDR ^e	MDB ^f	IES ^g
San Salvador (1,161.0)	1.03	32	4,531	3.88	3.36	18
Morazán (204.0)	2.46	20	30,980	1.96	2.94	10
Usulután (418.7)	1.29	12	5,374	1.91	2.39	14
Chalatenango (230.0)	2.39	11	9,435	0.87	1.74	3
San Vicente (208.0)	2.27	9	13,798	0.00	0.96	5
Cuscatlán (206.6)	2.45	8	9,584	2.42	2.42	6
San Miguel (443.4)	1.22	7	2,526	4.51	6.09	12
Cabañas (181.7)	2.14	6	5,338	0.00	0.55	2
La Unión (329.7)	1.18	4	1,365	5.16	3.94	12
Santa Ana (435.3)	0.92	2	528	2.07	2.53	1
La Paz (253.2)	0.00	2	2,923	0.79	1.58	3
La Libertad (400.7)	1.22	1	4,193	0.25	0.25	3
Sonsonate (336.7)	1.05	1	832	0.30	0.00	2
Ahuachapán (243.7)	0.00	0	616	0.82	0.82	1

TABLE II—VARIABLE LINKAGES^a

VARIABLE	CORRELATION COEFFICIENT (r _p)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Political deaths (1)	—	—	0.675 ^{bc}	0.087 ^c	-0.084 ^{cd}
Incidents of violence (2)	—	—	0.485 ^b	—	0.356 ^b
Internally displaced population (3)	—	—	—	—	-0.115 ^{cd}
Economic setbacks (4)	—	—	0.169 ^a	—	0.751 ^c
Migration to U.S. (5)	—	—	—	—	—



Examples of Influence in the United States

The food of Central America has shown its influence on the U.S. profoundly. The most widely recognized food from Central America is the pupusa, the national dish of El Salvador. The dish was brought to the United States in the 1980s, from the influx of people leaving El Salvador due to the civil war in the country. The DMV has the second-highest Salvadorean population in the U.S (more than 320,000). It has been determined that the second Sunday of November is the Day of the Pupusa in Washington D.C. by the director of the Latino Affairs of Washington D.C office (Rodriguez).

The various festivals of pupusa in the United States also show the prevalence of the influence of Central American food in the United States. The pupusa fest occurs in various states across the U.S: California, Arizona, and New Jersey, just to name a few. In Los Angeles, it has been three years since the last annual pupusa fest due to the pandemic. The festival was created in 2018, by Cynthia Gonzalez, a Salvadorean author, and writer, who was raised in California. Her goal is to positively represent the Salvadoran community from a platform dedicated to connecting and empowering Salvadorans of all backgrounds through events. She also wanted to bring more exposure to the Salvadorean community to other communities, which she regularly does through food festivals.

Another example is the Guatemalan franchise Pollo Campero. Pollo Campero is a Guatemalan fast-food company. It mainly sells fried chicken, but they also have a variety of other foods, including Guatemalan-influenced ex. tamales. Pollo Campero is very successful in the US due to the support of clients with Central American origins (Brenes). There are currently 77 Pollo Campero restaurants, in 12 states and in Washington DC. Mainly in locations with a high population of Central Americans. In 2002, Pollo Campero opened its first restaurant in LA through a franchise agreement with ADIR Restaurant corp. It was a tremendous success with a million sales in the first 22 days of opening. Later, the corporation decided to open a branch in Dallas, Texas due to its proximity to Guatemala and to improve its strategies for the US market.



Today's Current Status

Currently, the amount of influence that Central Americans have on American cuisine continues to increase as immigration numbers continue to rise. As of 2019, the Central American immigrant population was 3.8 million. This number is increasing every year as Central Americans continue to arrive to the United States in search of economic opportunities and to escape violence. When they arrive, many decide to start restaurants which expose many Americans to Central American cuisine. There are also fast-food chains, like Pollo Campero from Guatemala that have a goal of spreading nationally across the U.S. Today, the Central American influence in American cuisine can be seen in items like plantains, tortillas, and salsa. Also in seasoning, for example, adobo seasoning which is widely available in supermarkets. Coffee is also a major influence from Central America as millions of pounds of coffee beans are sourced from that region each year.

Conclusion

Central Americans are a highly underrepresented group that has significantly influenced the food and drink of the United States. Due to violence and economic uncertainty in these nations, millions of Central Americans have immigrated to the United States. From this immigration, Central Americans have brought their food and culture which have influenced the United States through festivals, holidays, food franchises, and the importation of coffee. Despite efforts to recognize this underrepresented group, more research and public awareness is necessary to properly acknowledge the impact that Central Americans has had for the United States.

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