

**Mexicans, Meat and Meth:  
COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO INCREASING ETHNIC DIVERSITY**

**By Cornelia Butler Flora,  
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development**

**<http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu>**

**Jan L. Flora, and Ruben J. Tapp**

**Department of Sociology**

**Iowa State University**

**Ames, Iowa 50011-1050**

**This article has been posted on this website with the permission of the authors. A similar version of the article has been included in The Journal of the Community Development Society, Penn State University.**

## **MEAT, METH, AND MEXICANS:**

### **COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO INCREASING ETHNIC DIVERSITY**

In many rural communities of the Midwest, traditional economic development has created a more ethnically diverse population than community leaders anticipated.

Community builders can use the stories that are created by different segments of the dominant community to forge new alliances and build practical programs that provide a positive environment for the new migrants and long-term community residents.

We discovered two very different interpretations of increasing diversity by listening to stories that residents told about the changes in the community. We call the bearers of these interpretations *Pluralists* and *Legalists*. Their stories shared a common past, but implied very different mental causal models regarding current problems. Yet, there were elements of commonality in the desired futures expressed by each group. By bringing together holders of both interpretations among members of the community representing state and local government, the economy, and civil society, alternative programs were designed to unite both interpretations in common action. Community developers can improve their effectiveness by understanding the diversity of perspectives in the dominant community, as indicated by listening to the different narratives, and by supporting advocacy/action coalitions that incorporate common elements of what appear to be different desired futures. That understanding can also help minority communities plan their own actions in order to be more effective.

**Keywords: common futures, community organization, community stories, Mexican**

**immigrants**

**MEAT, METH, AND MEXICANS:  
COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO INCREASING ETHNIC DIVERSITY**

The current rapid increase in diversity in many non-metropolitan communities is the logical result of rural development models based on the creation of low wage jobs, often instigated by local and state authorities as industrial recruitment and job creation. Individuals and families from other countries and of different racial and ethnic backgrounds fill the jobs, which are too low paying or too dirty or too strenuous for local residents, who may themselves leave the community to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Non-metropolitan communities across the country must deal with the contradictions of superimposing a policy of job creation over a situation of a labor shortage. How the issues are framed, how problems are defined, and how desired futures are expressed help communities respond to the challenges of increased diversity. This collective framing by groups also helps define spaces where community developers can play a positive role. These stories and their retelling are part of the struggle for community -- who defines its identity and what concrete actions are collectively implemented. Thus, community developers need to be aware of different desired futures and their implications for community cohesion and conflict and the welfare of the immigrant groups. It is particularly important that CD specialists understand those perspectives whose values they do not share. Suspending disbelief while doing such research does not imply feigning neutrality in the practice phase.

On the organizational level, community building can be understood by examining relationships among three institutional sectors: market, state, and civil society. Appropriately balanced and linked, these sectors can reinforce one another and promote inclusion and equality.

Relations among these three sectors are researched using an advocacy/action coalition framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Organizations, agencies, and firms coalesce around concrete issues to achieve common ends. Mental causal models involve specific perceptions of the relation between means and ends (desired futures): most organizations have a predisposition to accept information that is supportive of their interests or values. However, that information is not incorporated directly, but is woven into stories that are told, revised, and retold.

### **COMMUNITY NARRATIVES AND DIVERSITY**

Community narratives create a shared past, define the current situation, and suggest alternative futures. Communities of place are not internally homogeneous, but are made up of diverse patterns of interactions. Different stories surrounding similar events can be a critical tool in bringing a variety of community groups together to work for a mutually defined collective good.

Narratives provide intelligibility and meaning. Individual and collective lives are experienced as historical and purposeful, building on the past and moving toward the future in a meaningful way (Johnson, 1993). Researchers have examined narratives as social constructs that give meaning to past action and shape future action (Peterson, 1997; Somers, 1992, Steinmetz, 1992). The stories involve characters, plot and an ending. The plot is seen as leading to the ending (Ricoeur, 1984). Further, narratives must be appropriate to the audience, circumstances, and goal. They have a context and an audience and are often constructed by participant-authors (Hart, 1992). The stories evolve with the telling and circumstances. They are "told in being

lived and lived in being told" (Carr, 1986:126). MacIntyre (1981) points out that even direct participants are never more than "co-authors" of the narratives.

Narratives take place in a context: historical, economic, political, cultural, and social. Although these external forces shape action, they are mediated by people's understanding of how things are and how they should be – by their models of and for society. These understandings are collective and therefore social. Narratives are not only descriptive but also prescriptive (Hart, 1992). They are constructed and told not only to make sense of events but also to shape them via ethical claims embedded in the narrative itself. Many of these narratives are collective, providing a collective memory or framework with which to interpret both individual and collective experiences (Steinmetz, 1992). While they may end in the present, they project the event into an anticipated future. Narratives are important dimensions of identity and mobilization. Narratives do not reveal "the truth," although they may be viewed as such by those who share the values implicit in the narrative. Narratives reveal perspectives on past events that can inform future collective action and the tactics chosen by community organizers.

We analyze different narratives told by residents of a town in the Midwestern cornbelt that has attracted a large number of Latino migrants. Those narratives provide the basis of negotiation for alternative ways of receiving migrants into the community. We found two clusters of stories and story tellers: the Pluralists, who focused on the benefits the new migrants brought to the community, and the Legalists, who focused on how the new migrants did not conform to the rules of local society. By hearing both sets of stories and finding commonalities in what were perceived as polar groups, Cooperative Extension was able to serve as a co-convenor that increased interaction within the community of groups with different perspectives to plan

community action in areas of common purpose.

The stories develop at different stages of the process of cultural diversification

1. Recruitment
2. Frustration
3. Confrontation
4. Negotiation
5. Accommodation

Our analysis makes clear that recognizing the differences among the receiving Anglo community is as important as recognizing the differences between the in-migrant community and the receiving one. The battle for the community identity represented by different factions makes a great deal of difference on the way in which the migrant community can safely organize in its own interests.

## **METHODOLOGY.**

. We interviewed four groups in a town, which we call Industria, with recent Latino in-migration: long-term Anglo residents who viewed the new migration as positive for the community (we term these people Pluralists); long-term Anglo residents who had serious reservations about the in-migration of Mexican manual workers (we term these people Legalists); medium-term Mexican-American migrants (in the community more than five years); and new migrants. The new migrants tend to be Mexican citizens, arriving directly from Mexico or via Chicago or Los Angeles. Analysis for this paper focuses on the two Anglo groups.

The authors conducted both structured and unstructured interviews between 1996 and

1999 with 20 Anglo respondents chosen by key informants in the community to be highly informed and to represent a variety of points of view regarding the migrant population. Three new migrant families were interviewed in informal settings. In each case, a series of questions about Industria generated the narratives that emerged. The conversational questions were aimed to gather past and present perceptions, as well as future hopes. We sought opportunities to allow community stories to be told. The more formal interviews in 1999 were taped and transcribed, and were conducted with a protocol. The earlier interviews were part of the reconnaissance effort carried out to inform the Extension community development effort. They depended on notes taken by the interviewers. The protocol was devised in 1999 for the more structured interviews. The interviews were chiefly for providing context, but a number of utilizable stories emerged.

The authors include two middle-aged Spanish-speaking Anglo college professors and community development extension specialists, one male and one female, and a younger African American male graduate student. The two senior authors know a good deal about Latin culture from their considerable experience living and working in Latin America. The junior author knows a great deal about living in situations of racial and ethnic oppression.

One of the authors participated in the Industria Diversity Committee<sup>1</sup>, which exposed him to narratives and allowed him to observe how the narratives emerged, conflicted with one another, and occasionally merged over time. As a participant observer, he took careful notes and gathered minutes of the Diversity Committee over a four-year period. In his capacity as community development specialist, he also worked through Cooperative Extension with the community and with an Extension field team that included the County Extension Education

Director (who served in the Peace Corps and speaks Spanish fluently) to design and implement a study on welfare reform and community response. One of the authors is a member of the American Friend Service Committee's Iowa Immigrants Rights Project governing board since its founding in 1995. The authors also participated in a variety of community events, from cultural celebrations to general diversity discussions.

The authors, all outsiders, brought various perspectives that inspired different stories from different segments of the community. In particular, the African-American author sought and obtained more stories from the Legalists than did the Anglo authors, although some of the stories were told to all three of us at different times in different places. It appears that someone who is clearly a member of a minority group (there are few African Americans in Industria) who asks general questions and listens with interest and courtesy can inspire confidence and inspire the telling of stories that are generally told and retold among individuals who share desired futures and mental causal models.

### **THE SETTING**

Industria, Iowa, with a population of about 25, 000, has a history of a strong meatpacking industry and other industrial production. It has a tradition of organized labor. Local people were employed as meatpackers, which was viewed as a job to which high school graduates from Industria and the surrounding small towns and farms could aspire.

The meatpacking industry changed with the coming of boxed pork and kill-and-chill plants, where the most skilled work of bacon and sausage making was moved to other value-added plants (Fink, 1998). The plant changed hands several times since local people established it in the 1930s. Each change resulted in the de-skilling of labor and the lowering of wages (Grey,

1999).

At the end of the 1980's, transnational corporate management decided to expand the plant. They asked the City for permission and support. Coming out of the recession of the 1980s, local elected officials looked favorably on this promise of new jobs. The City made changes in zoning restrictions and built sewage and road facilities to assist plant expansion. Some of the stories told stated what was expected by the favorable action of the City compared to what actually was delivered.

Industria had worked hard to keep its other main industries, manufacturers of industrial controls and monitoring devices, of electrical equipment, and of heating and air conditioning equipment. Unlike in many rural communities, Industria's manufacturing labor force is largely unionized. Local entrepreneurs started the firms and local people managed these firms until recently. All underwent change in the past ten years, becoming parts of larger transnational conglomerates. The town fought successfully to keep the skilled manufacturing jobs and to keep the heating and air conditioning plant, which threatened to move. With the expanding employment base, labor shortages began to appear.

Like other meatpacking companies (Stull, 1990; Broadway, 1990), the plant advertised in Latino communities. They sent recruiters to California and Texas. Once the migrant networks were established, formal recruiting activities gave way to the use of informal networks for replenishing the work force (Griffin and Kissam, 1995; Gouveia and Stull, 1995).

### **STAGES OF MIGRANT ENTRY TO INDUSTRIA**

The first new plant workers were single males, as is the pattern in many places, with the

meat packing jobs providing a rite of passage and the opportunity to send money home to Mexico (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Eager to save money, men without wives or families moved in, six and seven to a room. Local landlords found they could make more money by charging per person rather than per rental unit. Like other single men living in tight quarters, they entertained themselves by drinking, hanging out on the street, and driving their cars around town. The activities of these single men provided important sources of narratives that differentiated Pluralists from Legalists.

While some of the young men soon moved on to other towns or back to Mexico, many soon brought their families to Industria. Wives and children came, along with brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. This pattern is typical of Mexican migration to the U.S. (Mullan, 1988, 1989, Zoomers, 1986). The migrants viewed Industria as a safe place.

The new family members who came were also thrifty. Instead of sending their earnings back to Mexico, they now saved and invested locally. For example, Diego, age 48, came to Industria from Mexico in 1994,<sup>1</sup> two years after his brother was drawn to Industria when he learned that the meat packing plant was expanding. A year later Elena, Diego's wife, moved from Mexico to Industria and also got a job at the meatpacking plant.

The first year they were both there, they earned \$6.00 an hour. By living frugally, they saved enough from those wages to buy a house. Granted, the house was in the old part of town near the packing plant, which sometimes produced extremely offensive odors, but it was *their* house. They were able to buy it with a \$1,200 down payment. Local bankers facilitated their qualifying for the first-time homeowners' program and mortgage plan.

They continued to pay the mortgage on the house and to save. By 1996, they owned a

second home, where Elena and Diego's two sons, two daughters-in-law, and six of their 22 grandchildren live. Their sons work in the plant, while their daughters-in-law stay home with the children.

As Latino families moved into the community following the single men, the number of Latinos in the schools increased. The schools were challenged to develop programs for students with limited English and to hire bilingual teachers. The school near the plant, in the neighborhood where Diego and Elena live, took on that responsibility, with solid support of the superintendent of schools.

With a large minority enrollment, the school began to involve the parents in a variety of activities that provided a better education for all of the students in the school. According to the Legalists, some Anglo families left the neighborhood because of the increasing concentration of Mexicans. According to the Pluralists, movement out of the neighborhood was part of normal social mobility. By 1999, the proportion of enrollment that was Latino was so high (about 50%) that state law required that busing be initiated to reduce it to 38 percent (20 percent above the Latino enrollment throughout the Industria Community School District). With busing, the school may lose much of its neighborhood character -- and easy access by mothers who do not drive.

The addition of the second shift at the packing plant helped many families incorporate two workers in the labor force. A husband might work one shift, and the wife the other, thus ensuring continuous child care.

Many of the Mexican workers come from a single area in Michoacán and maintain ties there (Grey, 1999). They often return to Mexico, particularly in the first year of work and before more family members have joined them. When they go back to Mexico, they lose their jobs. If

---

<sup>1</sup> The senior author gathered the details of this family's stay in Industria in an interview on June 18, 1997.

they come back to the plant, they must begin at the bottom again. Yet many go and come, despite the expense and difficulties (Grey, 1999; Lowell, 1992).

Latino family networks gradually became denser in Industria. Mueller and Sofranko (1999) found this to be true in Latino populations in small towns in Illinois. Family ties are most critical to a sense of community and a sense of place for Latino residents.

Many of the first migrants migrated in stages, coming first to U.S. large cities in California, Texas or Chicago and then looking for a safer place to live. They have been joined by a smaller group of Chicanos,<sup>2</sup> some of whom, because of their education, English skills, and familiarity with Anglo culture, tend to occupy professional “cultural broker” positions in the community.

The town responded in several ways to the new migrant population. The inter-faith community, particularly the Catholic, Lutheran, and American Baptist churches, put together outreach and support programs. For instance, the Baptists sponsor adult English classes that are successful because church volunteers provide transportation to the classes. The business community tried to figure out ways to market their goods and services to the Latino community. The schools established programs in English as a Second Language through the community college and in the local school systems. The library purchased Spanish language materials and circulated brochures in Spanish on the services offered. A new police chief was hired, as were more policemen. An increase in crime rate is often associated with the establishment of meatpacking plants (Broadway, 1990, 1994; Grey, 1997; Flora, et al., 1999).

With encouragement from the State Civil Rights Commission, a “diversity” group was

---

<sup>2</sup> As described by one interviewee, herself a Chicana, you are a Chicano if you have “Mexican parents, yet you know English and you were born in the United States...”

formed in 1993, bringing together parts of civil society (members of the faith-based groups) and of the market sector (local businesspersons). While that helped businesses to be somewhat more responsive in providing Spanish language services, the effort was less effective than it might have been. Members of faith-based groups were able to point out many injustices experienced by the immigrants, but were unable to go beyond denunciation. Over time, fewer and fewer people met less and less often. When the city government became involved in 1995, the Diversity Committee was revitalized. The partnership among local governments (particularly the city and the school system), market-oriented firms, and civil society (social justice and faith-based) organizations that began to emerge in the reconstituted Diversity Committee proved to be relatively effective. The committee meets monthly, fostering concrete programming and building linkages within and outside the community. However, sustained Latino participation is limited to a handful of social services professionals.

One of its first areas of concern was housing conditions. The migrants tended not to complain because they did not know they had a right to do so. However, others in town were concerned about the rundown conditions, the fire hazards, and the gross exploitation of the new residents. They pressured the city to institute a housing code and to enforce it: the fire department forced landlords to bring their buildings up to code or to shut down. Enforcement was regularized, despite increased demands on housing. Some low-income housing was constructed. The city opened negotiations with corporate headquarters of the Pork Pride Packing Plant and its parent company. They discussed two major issues. One was the odor of the plant, which could be quite appalling on a warm day, particularly for those who lived in the part of town near the packing plant, where residents were increasingly new immigrant homeowners.

After the city threatened to rezone the plant so it could not expand anymore, the company installed scrubbers, substantially reducing the odor (Interview with city official by senior author, June, 1997).

The city, the merchants, and faith-based groups (the emerging Pluralists) defined a second major problem as the high population turnover, rather than Latino migration per se. Thus, they tried to work with the plant to make it easier for workers to become long-term residents of the community. The Legalists also see high labor turnover as a problem, as it keeps people from learning English and encourages the recruitment of illegal aliens.

Labor shortages were increasing around the state, as rural midwestern unemployment rates fell below 3% in the late 1990s. Studies generated by the plant human relations officer and by anthropologist Mark Grey attempted to show the cost to the company of a high rate of turnover (Grey, 1999). However, it was the difficulties in attracting labor that led to increased wages and institution of the fast-track system. Under that system, starting pay was \$7.00 an hour. Once a specific skill level was reached, pay jumped to \$9.00 an hour, with regular small raises after that.

Negotiations began to develop policies so that workers in their first year could take a leave without pay and come back to the same position. The effort was complicated because of workers crossing international boundaries. It appears to be easier to manage the international flow of capital than the cross-border flow of workers. With support of the new police chief and the Legalists, an INS raid occurred in August 1996. Armed troops surrounded the factory, went in to check documentation, arrested all who did not have it, and took over 200 people to the local armory. Armed INS officers surrounded the armory and those who went to inquire about their

relatives faced the possibility of being incarcerated as well if they did not have their papers with them.

Those held at the armory that could not immediately show their "green cards" were shipped back to Mexico. A total of 168 individuals were returned, including persons whose papers were in the process of being legalized. Wives and children remaining in Industria sold their belongings to support themselves. Latino businesses, including restaurants and stores, temporarily lost many customers. This raid shocked much of the population and the Diversity Committee gained support. The Latino community became more closed and more separated from the Anglo community.

Two smaller raids followed. Other Mexicans who did not have their papers in order left. The Latino population was considerably reduced. To keep the disassembly chain running at full speed, Pork Pride had to bus workers at substantial expense from Des Moines, 50 miles away, where a beef packing plant had recently closed. Because the former workers still liked Industria, many gradually came back. This time, they worked in construction and nurseries, where there was less chance for INS raids and an opportunity to legalize their status. The raids instilled a lingering sense of fear in the Latino community. In the Anglo community, tensions grew between those supporting and those opposing the raid.

## **OPPOSING NARRATIVES**

Two sets of common narratives emerged among Anglo residents to explain what had happened and why. One set emerged from some business, faith-based, and public-service groups. They stressed the benefits the new migrants brought to the community and ways to

integrate them to reduce worker turnover. This *Pluralist* group stresses new migrants' economic and cultural contributions to the community.

Another set of Anglo narratives emerged, which included the law enforcement community and some of the business community, particularly those that competed with new Mexican businesses. This group stressed the problems that arose because the new migrants consistently broke certain laws or did not conform to custom. Their desired future for the community hinged on ways to make the new migrants more aware of the laws and rules and on removal from the community of those that broke the law. This group of people we call *Legalists*. Legalists point out that wages paid to Mexican workers are sent back to Mexico. Further, they say (erroneously), the new migrants use services but don't pay taxes. A key issue separating the Pluralists and the Legalists is their differing view on whether Mexicans are the major purveyors of methamphetamines<sup>2</sup> in the community (Burke and Goudy, 1999).

Two Pluralist Anglo narratives concerning the Mexican immigrants emerged in tandem. One involved the social justice/social services group within the community. While the social justice advocates sometimes view the new Latino migrants as victims and some of the social service agencies viewed them as clients, a subgroup of those in social services, particularly in the schools, viewed the new migrants as a resource.

The other pluralist narrative includes businesspersons and key city government personnel. This group viewed the new Mexican immigrants as potential customers. City government, through the mayor and city manager, solidified the Pluralist narrative. While all Anglos in the community tell the story of the amounts of money the thrifty Mexican workers send back to Mexico, businesspersons (a good proportion of whom are Pluralists) want to keep more of that

money in Industria. They determined that making it easier for in-migrants to purchase their goods and services made a great deal of sense. The banks and savings and loan companies set in motion programs aimed at helping the Mexican plant workers buy homes utilizing Iowa's generous terms for first-time homebuyers. To do that, they sought Spanish-speaking loan officers. In contrast, the Legalists viewed with alarm the money going out of the community.

### **PERCEPTIONS REGARDING MEXICANS AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY**

Both Legalists and Pluralists use a basic tenet of "Americanism" to present a rhetoric of moral certainty in their efforts to move the community to respond to the event that had major implications for the Anglo community: the expansion of the hog Pride Pork Packing Plant<sup>3</sup> and the accompanying labor force that allowed that expansion to take place.

The Legalists tend to blame the packing plant for misleading the community when it supported plant expansion (see Hedgers, Sept. 23, 1996, for a similar response in another Iowa meat processing community):

...[W]hen they did the expansion, ... they made the city three promises: that they would hire local people, they would expand, and they would control the odor.

The only thing that they done was expand. They didn't hire local people. They didn't control the odor. So they only kept one promise out of the three. And I think the City Council and the Chamber of Commerce at that time were sold a bill of goods that they were getting a golden egg. When the goose got here, it [the egg] was rotten (Legalist official, interviewed by third author, July 1999).

Another government official gives the Pluralist interpretation of the economic role and social contributions of immigrant workers and families:

Let's face the reality of the situation. We don't have enough workers in the U.S. to fill all the jobs that we currently have available and there is a need for these workers. They are filling a role here that we cannot fill otherwise and they are good workers. They have a good reputation as far as working hard. They're eager learners from what the people at Pork Pride have indicated and many of them-- and not all by any means, but many--decide to educate their young here, give birth to new children here, decide to stay here, and I think we've seen many families become active families in the community and have become good community members, so you know that's not bad for us (Pluralist local official, interview with third author, July 1999).

### **CULTURAL DIVERSITY OR HOMOGENEITY?**

Using an asset-based approach to inclusion, the Pluralists are working to develop situations where the new migrants can give to the community, through schools or civic events. One of the things that new migrants can give is to share their culture. The Diversity Committee and the Industria Heritage Celebration are now two major mechanisms that the Pluralists use to retell their story as a means to bring about a more desirable future.

Legalists object to the Pluralist narrative. They feel the emphasis should be on cultural homogeneity, not diversity:

There's a group called a Diversity Committee that's been going for quite some time *and I really do have a problem with the name...* I would think to... use "Unity Committee." That would be bringing people together... Diversity to me means split and that's not the purpose, you know. You want unity (Legalist

official, interview with third author, July 1999; italics added).

Another Legalist, a journalist, put it much more bluntly in an article in a local newspaper:

The Diversity Committee should disband. Now. And the misguided officials who have been swept into this silliness<sup>4</sup> should join with the constituents they serve and do something worthwhile for the salaries we're paying them.

For starters, how about forming a Unity Committee, a societal force to bring all English-speaking, non-criminal [i.e., excluding those in the U.S. illegally or those dealing drugs] citizens of all races together, rather than a... divisive force that is only tearing us apart... (Industria Times, February 1999.)

Legalists argue for universalistic (rather than particularistic) norms and rules as a means to integrate the newcomers. Their view of integration is that the Mexican immigrants become Americans – which to them means adopting Anglo values and behavior. Emphasis on differences, such as language and culture, will, in their minds, delay that integration.

Following the INS raid in 1996, the Diversity Committee asked the police chief to a meeting to discuss the police department's role in the raid. While differences of opinion were salient, a respectful air existed throughout the meeting. No minds were likely changed, but the meeting was an opportunity to dispel rumors and to appreciate the other point of view. In the spring of 1999, the police chief was invited back to discuss methamphetamines in Industria, which had been cited by a national newsmagazine as a distribution point for the entire Midwest a year earlier (McGraw, March 2, 1998). (One member of the police force regularly attends the Diversity Committee meetings in uniform, although he rarely speaks.) Despite the occasional

participation of the human relations officer of the Pork Pride packing plant in the Diversity Committee meetings, the faith-based social justice folks and the business/government participants see the company as deficient in fulfilling its responsibilities to the community. This perspective crosscuts the Pluralist-Legalist dimension.

After the raids, the Diversity Committee felt it was important that everyone understand and celebrate their migrant roots. Beginning in 1998, the Fourth of July celebration was transformed into a Heritage Celebration. Residents of Norwegian, German, Danish, French, Korean and Mexican descent have an opportunity to participate in a fashion show, do native dances, and share traditional foods while bands play music of different cultures, and people visit demonstrations and crafts that show the cultural linkages with residents' homelands.

Both the Pluralist and the Legalist narratives emphasize the cultural differences between Mexicans and (Anglo) Iowans in terms of trust of government, particularly the police:

They have an inherent distrust and fear of particularly police and government and so in our attempts to... acclimate them to where we are and them knowing what it is we expect of them, too, as far as living in our community, it becomes difficult because they shy away from even just meeting you. I've had a couple of them, you know, come in and talk to me here. Just to come in to this office and sit down here like you've done and sit down and talk is difficult for them. They've just had a fear of doing that, so we've tried to reach out and go outside ourselves and do that but that part from my perspective is difficult. It's difficult for the police department. It's difficult I know for the city management in a sense. (Pluralist local official, interview with third author, July 1999).

Both groups acknowledge new immigrant distrust of local officials as a problem that needs to be overcome. Pluralist elected and appointed officials attempt to engage the new immigrants, but feel frustrated in finding entry points. The most effective connection with the new migrants to date has been the Hispanic Ministries of the Catholic diocese. Hispanic Ministries has focused on helping Latinos get their INS papers (commonly called *green cards*), with a particular emphasis on strengthening entire families' ties to the community.

In interpreting the behavior of the new immigrants, Pluralists tell their own family migration histories, tailoring them to focus on resistance to assimilation:

I can look back at my ancestors when I came here and my grandfathers, both my mother and father's side, they stayed very close to the group they came with, you know, and my grandmother on my father's side is German and she almost all but refused to speak English even though she could. So I mean that's what the pattern is—see, not a whole a lot different than, you know, for anybody else (Interview with third author, Pluralist local official, July 1999).

The biographies of the Legalists tend to stress that when their families arrived, by golly, they learned to speak English. The Legalists stress how good things were in Industria in the past – particularly the good jobs at the packing plant (although they fail to credit labor unions for that). They noted the high wages and that everyone got along. The Pluralists go back further in their historical narratives, reminding each other that initially the Danish, Swedish, Polish, Norwegians, and Germans “didn't get along very good.” One narrative describes moving from harmony to problems due to difference; the other describes problems of difference overcome.

## DIFFERING USES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE

Anglo-immigrant conflict involves the norms and rules of the small-town United States versus those of small town Mexico, the source of many of the recent immigrants. The set of norms that involves the use of public space and the rights each one has in what might be viewed as private space illustrate these differences. The Latino community tends to gather out of doors in large groups. This tradition increases their sense of community, particularly in a hostile environment. Benches and picnic tables are brought together in public parks so extended family groups can meet and enjoy time together.

That they speak in Spanish fills the Legalist Anglo population with dread, in part because they are not sure whether or not they are being talked about by that “different” group of people in their language, much as the Legalist Anglos talk about the immigrants—but in more hushed tones.

Language and space converge as symbols of exclusion. There is a vocal group in the community that firmly believes that everyone should speak English *now* and that no particular favors should be granted to those who speak a foreign language, particularly Spanish. Yet, those who supervise public space--the parks in particular--have found it extraordinarily useful to let Latinos know the rules. Since gatherings in Latin America are more likely to involve drinking alcohol than is generally true in the rural U.S., and since alcohol is only permitted in shelters, rules for shelter use have been posted in Spanish and in English to avoid potential problems.

Another public/private space issue involves the self-sufficiency. Mexicans are accustomed to slaughtering goats or hogs to then cook and eat at celebrations. Anglo neighbors were shocked to see butchering of animals in their front or backyards. So, the city quickly passed

a law making slaughtering animals in town--outside the packing plants--against the law and went about enforcing it:

... I had many calls where I went down and here the animal was in the basement or in the bathroom in the tub. They were getting ready to cut its throat, you know. That's the way they live down there. Well, it changes up here. Is that some of the things that a lot of people don't believe happen but I've seen it and this is what has scared a lot of the older residents of Industria... (Legalist local official, interview with third author, July 1999).

Another issue is music – its kind and its volume. Mexican bars have been closed for playing music too loud. Neighbors both negotiate and call the police when they feel the party next door has gotten too loud. This occurs, of course, in other communities among Anglos, but the fact that the music is in a different language exacerbates the Anglo residents' sense of audio invasion. Among Latino residents, loud music and joyful shouts of accompaniment are signs of a good party.

Recreation is a major source of both integration and separation within the community. Soccer is an important sport in Mexico and all of the packing plants had soccer teams that played on weekends in a radius of nearly 200 miles. However, they gradually lost access to public soccer fields due to the drinking that occurred during the soccer games. Mexican youth play pick-up soccer on the public soccer fields in Industria, but they do not join the after-school leagues. A recreation official pointed out that, while new resident Latino participation seems proportional in in-school activities, the out-of-school activities that require more parental involvement and more risk of being noticed when making a mistake have few Latino

participants. Both Legalists and Pluralists agree that youth are the key to inclusion of Mexicans into community life. Still, Legalists emphasize sports integration on Anglo terms. A Pluralist comments with tongue in cheek:

[Y]ou've got the contingency that says these aren't the good immigrants like we were. How dare these people keep their social traditions! It's just outlandish.

There was an editorial in the paper the other day--can you imagine a bunch of kids from the middle school forming a team in one of the leagues and called it the Mexicans? And they were just horrified like that. Next thing you know, you're going to have ones [called] Fighting Irish or Celtics or the Vikings (Pluralist administrator, interview with third author, July 1999).

Volunteer coaches and city recreation personnel have tried offering scholarships, making used equipment available, and a variety of other tactics to encourage Latino participation but have not found a successful way thus far of involving them in the youth recreation programs. In addition, Latino students tend to drop out of school at age 16, no matter how well they were doing in their classes, in order to go to work to earn income. This is of concern to both Legalists and Pluralists.

### **MEXICANS AND THE LAW**

The Legalists feel that the distrust of government and the police means that laws against simple misdemeanors cannot be effectively enforced. The prevalence of fake identification documents makes it very hard for arresting officers to do a background check, greatly increasing paperwork. Thus they focus on major crimes, particularly drugs. That allows them to rid the community of the most objectionable element. It also causes many of the Legalists to equate

drugs with Mexican migrants. Illegal drug use and distribution is a major symbolic area of potential conflict and divisiveness. Methamphetamines (meth) have become a major drug problem in Iowa. There is a tendency to demonize Mexicans as inducing drug use and smuggling meth from Mexico, despite the presence of numerous meth laboratories in central Iowa. Local law enforcement officers in Industria are convinced that meth is brought from Texas and California to Iowa by Mexican immigrants. The 1998 article about Industria in U.S. News and World Report alleged that Mexican drug cartels had chosen Industria as a distribution point for methamphetamines. The article was illustrated by a map of North America with a large arrow going directly from Mexico to Insustria (McGraw, March 2, 1998). The article does not focus on the fact that that the number of Iowa meth labs seized by the state grew between two- and five-fold each year between 1994 and 1998, when growth began to level off. The quantity of methamphetamines seized grew but not as dramatically. (See Table 1.) (One ingredient in methamphetamines is nitrogen fertilizer, which is quite plentiful in rural Iowa.)

[Table 1 about here]

In Industria, the police roster data, which is published in the local newspaper, appears not to over-represent Mexicans, according to the city manager. However, some Legalists claim the Diversity Committee encourages criminality by supporting settlement of undocumented workers in their community. The police chief is quoted as saying at a Congressional Hearing sponsored by Senator Grassley,<sup>5</sup> “Obviously, illegal immigrants are contributing to the recent availability of drugs, particularly methamphetamine.” (Industria Times, February 1999).

The social-justice and faith-based groups take a more confrontational approach to empowerment and legal issues. In response to an attempt to pass an English-only law in the Iowa

legislature, the statewide Immigrant Rights organization worked with people in Industria to mobilize a rally at the county courthouse in Industria in spring 1999. That rally drew about 300 people – mostly Latinos – and was considered a success by the organizers. Indeed, the law was not passed. The rally was also a response to the police chief's stated intention to arrest undocumented immigrants and transport them to the INS office in Cedar Rapids. The chief had already decided not to pursue the idea when he found that his department would have to pay the transportation costs. Prior to the rally, the decision was announced at a city council subcommittee hearing that was attended by over 100 concerned citizens, both Latino and Anglo. Pluralists suspected the real reason he dropped the idea was the mobilization of opposition.

#### SUMMARY: IS INDUSTRIA MAKING PROGRESS?

To assess progress on interethnic relations, we will examine the five stages of development of successful inter-ethnic relations: recruitment, frustration, confrontation, negotiation, and accommodation. Figure 1 shows the five stages along a timeline and the significant events. A notable feature of the figure is that--viewed from the level of the community--confrontation, negotiation and accommodation take place simultaneously. While, with respect to particular organizations or themes, “stages” may follow one another as expected, multiple sources of activity within the community tend to blur whatever differentiation into phases that may exist. Thus, for instance, we might argue that presently the Diversity Committee has moved out of the phase of confrontation, and into negotiation and accommodations. The organizational trajectory of the Mexicans in the community is at an early stage and may be concentrating on recruitment and confrontation, with a heavy dose of frustration. Frustration may be present for some time, since the high turnover rate at the plant means that many Latinos

cycle through the community, as well. As families buy houses and shift into employment outside meatpacking, a leadership cadre of migrants will develop.

[Figure 1 about here]

The existence of a particular phase may be in the eyes of the beholder. Nineteen ninety-four was a frustrating time for those who wanted the Diversity Committee to succeed. Beginning in 1998, frustration may describe how the Legalists' feelings, for it would appear that their numbers are depleted, and they are not well organized in comparison with the Diversity Committee. Lastly, there is no reason to believe that once something is done organizationally it cannot be undone. Thus, the longer the time frame, the less realistic is it to think in linear terms.

The INS raid was an event that was initiated from the outside, but it introduced internal confrontation and upset the tenuous internal *modus vivendi*. Other external interventions or internal crises could generate similar disruptions.

Support from outside institutions is critical in providing alternative futures and new causal models. Cooperative Extension, through local and campus-based community development practitioners, and Census Services of the Land Grant University (by providing the chair of the Diversity Committee, who is an Industria resident), helped include all sectors of the community around an asset-based approach.

The Immigrants Rights Project of the American Friends Service Committee has provided a focus around which to build the Latino community's public voice, as has the Hispanic Ministry team of the Catholic Diocese and similar organizations from certain mainstream Protestant denominations. Their state-wide coverage links immigrants in Industria with others around the state, giving individuals within the Industria Latino community self-confidence and a sense of

collective efficacy in interacting with the various factions in the Anglo community.

The fact that Legalists did not have a similar level of external support may have reduced the effectiveness of their agenda and allowed a more conciliatory orientation. However, their cause received a boost when the police chief was invited by Senator Grassley to testify before Congress in 1998. Perhaps the greatest limitation of our study was that we did not systematically research the organizational support for the Legalist perspective. We are sure there are no organizations that are parallel to the Diversity Committee, but very likely there are organizations with other objectives that provide ideological support and construct stories that strengthen Legalist views. The next step in this study is designing research more explicitly around an advocacy/action coalition framework that focuses on how discourse, which can be measured both at the individual and the organizational level, is related to institutional networks.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

What is generalizable about the Industria experience? Things have gone very wrong in other rural communities when meat-processing and other value-added enterprises have recruited large numbers of new migrants, and have encouraged (whether purposefully or inadvertently) high rates of labor turnover (Naples, 1994, 1997). Storm Lake, Iowa, is such an example (Grey, 1997; Hedgers, 1996). In Industria, the Diversity Committee functioned best when state, market, and civil society were included in the action-planning process. Only when the Diversity Community included the state (local government, the school system, social services), the market (local businesses, including the packing plant itself through the personnel director), and civil society (the faith groups and other groups organized to support the rights of the new migrants)

and moved beyond problem identification did it function effectively. By including the different narratives, areas of agreement could be established.

At the same time that the Diversity Committee met to find commonalities in desired future conditions, faith-based and civil rights groups worked with the Mexican community to strengthen their voice and legitimize their presence. In Industria, as well as other places, it was simplistic to think that individual members of the new migrant committee could immediately come to the table to participate in the Diversity Committee. Inclusion was necessary, but worked best through intermediary groups, such as civil-rights, school-based, and employment-based groups. The demonstration in 1999 against English-only legislation and against local law enforcement taking on INS duties suggests that there are organizational stirrings among recent migrants. Rather than joining the Diversity Committee, they are more likely to form their own organizations. The Diversity Committee may find it has a new role thrust on it: as interlocutor between more militant immigrants, on the one hand, and Legalist Anglos (and occasionally Pluralists as well), on the other.

Three areas of commonality between Pluralists, Legalists, and new immigrants were based around the following outputs necessary for the outcome of a healthy community. These altered circumstances suggest a shift from organization *for* Mexicans to organization *with* Mexicans.

- 1) slow labor turnover to decrease community disruption;
- 2) legalize the status of new migrants, including getting a green card, getting driver's license and filing income tax returns; and
- 3) increase English skills.

Of the three points, the least progress has been made on labor turnover. The “fast-track” program temporarily raised wages, but as labor supply became tighter, its impact on labor turnover probably dissipated. Corporate headquarters was not willing to develop a more flexible program on leaves. Moreover, packing plant managers gets involved in community affairs only sporadically, so it is difficult to develop an integrated strategy for reducing labor and population turnover.

Industria has been proactive in dealing with the most recent wave of cultural diversity. This has involved listening to the different stories--from the Legalists (as presented in the local newspaper and through local law enforcement officers), from the Pluralists (as presented in the early work to support the migrants and the organizations at the local and state level that responded to the raids), and from the new immigrants themselves. Sharing the stories of the new immigrants became part of the narrative of the Pluralists, through newsletters and public meetings. Those stories provided a voice that could be understood by all the community, in ways that confrontation cannot. When powerless people are brought directly into powerful groups, we have found two reactions. The first is to remain silent, due to fear of reprisal. These fears can be vague, based on general distrust of those with power, or very specific, such as the fear of being deported, losing ones job, or hurting one’s child in school by offending a teacher.

The second reaction is to be confrontative—to make demands on the powerful. This can build solidarity among the excluded group and was (and will be) used at times in Industria, particularly by civil rights groups concerned about moves toward English-only legislation at the state and local level. However, long term inclusion in the community involves the incorporation of that voice -- often through the stories that lay out the desired future state and mental causal

models of the various migrants. Stories, more than statistics, serve as evidence to those deciding on concrete action. If those stories are not told, decisions favor a return to the past as a desired future state, and mental causal models of the powerful are accepted by those without power.

By acknowledging commonalties in the shared past and the desired futures, community development strategies have evolved that can bring the Anglo community together to appreciate the Latino community. In Industria, leadership by city officials, businesses, and community organizations, with strong linkages with outside civil society organizations and agencies of the state, strives to bring about a desired inclusive future that includes unity and diversity, following old rules and honoring new customs.

## REFERENCES

- Broadway, Michael J. 1994. Beef stew: Cattle, immigrants and established residents in a beefpacking town in southwest Kansas. In L. Lamphere, A. Stepick, and G. Grenier (eds.), *Newcomers in the Workplace: New Immigrants in the Restructuring of the U.S. Economy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press:19-51.
- Broadway, Michael J. 1990. Meatpacking and its consequences in Garden City, Kansas in the 1980s. *Urban Anthropology* 19:321-344.
- Burke, Sandra Charvat and Willis J. Goudy. 1999. *Immigration and Community in Iowa: How Many Have Come and What is the Impact?* Staff paper, Sociology Department, Iowa State University.
- Fink, Deborah. 1998. *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Flora, Cornelia Butler, Juan Hernandez, and Chris Mayda. 1999. *Integrated Swine Production and Building Community Capitals*. Staff paper, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.
- Gouveia, Lourdes and Donald D. Stull. 1995. Dances with cows: Beefpacking's impact on Garden City, Kansas, and Lexington, Nebraska. In L. Lamphere, A. Stepick, and G. Grenier (eds.), *Newcomers in the Workplace: New Immigrants in the Restructuring of the U.S. Economy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press:85-107.
- Grey, Mark A. 1999. Immigrants, migration and worker turnover at the Hog Pride pork packing plant. *Human Organization* 58: 16-27.
- Grey, Mark A. 1997. Storm Lake, Iowa and the meatpacking revolution: Historical and

- ethnographic perspectives on a community in transition. In S. Stromquist and M. Bergman (eds.), *In Unionizing the Jungles: Essays on Labor and Community in the Twentieth Century Meatpacking Industry*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, pp. 242-261.
- Griffin, David and Ed Kissam. 1995. *Working Poor: Farmworkers in the United States*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hart, Janet. 1992. Cracking the code: Narrative and political mobilization in the Greek resistance. *Social Science History* 16,4 (Winter):631-668.
- Hedgers, Stephen J. 1996. The new jungle: IBP meat processing plant in storm Lake, Iowa relies on illegal Mexican labor. *U.S. News and World Report* 121, 12, September 23, p. 34ff.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. 1994. *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Iowa Department of Public Safety, Division of Narcotics. 2000. "Narcotics Trends for the State of Iowa: Ascendence of Methamphetamine."  
(<http://www.state.ia.us/government/dps/dnc/nartrend.htm>; updated April.)
- Sabatier, Paul A. and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith, eds. 1993. *Policy Change and Learning: an Advocacy Coalition Approach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lowell, B. Lindsay. 1992. Circular mobility, migrant communities, and policy restrictions: Unauthorized flows from Mexico. In Calvin Goldscheider (ed.), *Migration, Population structure, and Redistribution Policies*. Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado.
- Mueller, Benjamin and Andrew Sofranko. 1999. *Integration of Mexican Immigrants in Rural*

- Communities*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Community Development Society, Spokane, WA.
- Mullan, B.P. 1989. The impact of social networks on the occupational status of migrants. *International Migration* 27: 69-86.
- Mullan, B. P.1988. Social mobility among migrants between Mexico and the U.S. and within the U.S. labor market. *International Migration* 26: 71-93.
- Naples, Nancy A. 1994. Contradictions in agrarian ideology: Restructuring gender, race-ethnicity, and class. *Rural Sociology* 59:110-135.
- Naples, Nancy A. 1997. Contested needs: Shifting the standpoint on rural economic development. *Feminist Economics* 3:63-98.
- Norman, Jane. 1998. "Sioux City joins new campaign against meth use," *Des Moines Register*, January 15, p. 5.
- Peterson, Anna L. 1997. *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1984. *Time and Narrative*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. (Volume 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sabatier, Paul A. and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith. 1993. *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach*. Boulder: West View Press.
- Somers, Margaret. 1992. Narrativity, narrative identity, and social action: Rethinking English working-class formation. *Social Science History* 16:591-630.
- Steinmetz, George. 1992. Reflections on the role of social narratives in working-class formations: Narrative theory in the social sciences. *Social Science History* 16:489-516.

Stull, Donald D. 1994. Knock em' dead: Work on the kill floor of a modern beefpacking plant."

In Louise L., A. Stepick, and G. Grenier (eds.), *Newcomers in the Workplace: New Immigrants in the Restructuring of the U.S. Economy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 44-77.

U. S. Department of Health. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information. 2000. "'Quick Docs' on Methamphetamine/Ice." [<http://www.health.org/pubs/qdocs/meth/index.htm>]

"Why do we try to make [Industria] so hospitable for hardened criminals?" 1999. [Industria] Times, February 1999.

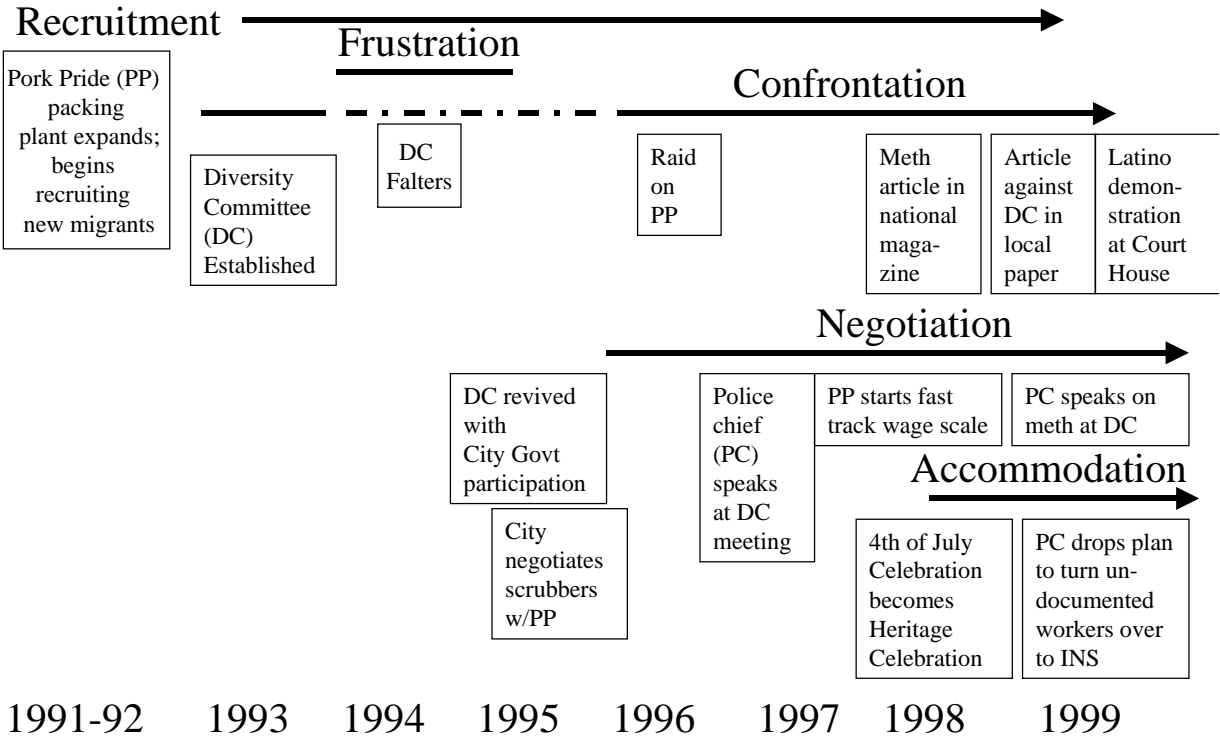
Zoomers, E. B. 1986. From structural push to chain migration: Notes on the persistence of migration to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie/ Journal of Economic and Social Geography* 77: 59-67.

**Table 1. Annual Amount of Methamphetamine/Amphetamines and Number of Methamphetamine Laboratories Seized, Iowa, 1994-1999.**

Year	# of Labs seized	Methamphetamine/Amphetamine seizures (kilograms)
1994	2*	11.4
1995	8	19.4
1996	31	33.0
1997	63	52.5
1998	320	78.7
1999	500	68.6

\* Data on number of laboratories seized in 1994 was reported by Norman, January 15, 1998, p. 5, although all data come originally from the Iowa Department of Public Safety, Division of Narcotics. See <http://www.state.ia.us/government/dps/dnc/nartrend.htm>; updated April 2000, for the remainder of the figures.

Figure 1. The Stages of Interethnic Cooperation, Industria, Iowa 1990s



<sup>1</sup> The Iowa Civil Rights Commission promotes the establishment and interchange among local Diversity Teams to promote racial and ethnic harmony in Iowa communities. Such 22 teams, mainly in urban areas or rural areas that have a meat processing plant. Generally, the teams operate independent of the Civil Rights Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Methamphetamines have been around since the 1970s, when they were known as “speed.” They are a stimulant, a chemical cousin of amphetamines, and an over-the-counter drug for weight reduction. Recently, methamphetamines have made a comeback. Today, the drug is variously known today as ‘meth,’ ‘crank,’ and in the smokable crystal form, “ice.” “The drug appeals to the abuser because it increases the body's metabolism and produces euphoria, alertness, and gives the abuser a sense of increased energy. But high doses or chronic use of meth . . . increases nervousness, irritability, and paranoia” (U.S. Department of Health, 2000). Over 90% of deaths from meth occur when used in conjunction with alcohol, heroin, or cocaine. (ibid.) According to the Iowa Department of Public Safety, methamphetamines have become “the drug of choice in Iowa. This is due to the ease in the manufacturing of the drug and complex drug cartels that have flooded the market.” (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Following Grey (1999), a pseudonym rather than the real name is used.

<sup>4</sup> The Mayor, the City Administrator, and the Superintendent of Schools are mentioned in an unfavorable light in parts of the article.

<sup>5</sup> Grassley, who sits on the Immigration Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, was seeking legislation to allow local law enforcement agencies to arrest undocumented workers and turn them over to the INS.