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CORRELATES OF PREJUDICE: DATA FROM MIDWESTERN COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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KATHERINE FENNELLY

CORRELATES OF PREJUDICE: DATA FROM MIDWESTERN COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

Many rural communities in the American Midwest have experienced relatively rapid demographic change from predominantly white, European-origin populations to ones with sizeable percentages of immigrants. Such change creates a natural laboratory for analysis of prejudice and threats. In this paper we present state-wide survey data from Minnesota on white residents' attitudes toward Hispanics in January, 2001, and then use qualitative data gathered seven months later for a close-up view of relations between US-born and foreign born residents in a rural town with a large meat processing plant. Comparisons are made of perceptions of symbolic and economic threats from immigrants on the part of three groups of Euro-Americans: community leaders, middle class and working class residents. Participants' own explanations of their attitudes are used to describe nativist sentiments within the context of reported personal experiences and changes in the rural community. In the third section of the paper we listen to the comments of immigrants and refugees in the same community about their relationships with white residents. Taken together, these studies shed light on the nature of prejudice against immigrants and the kinds of public policies that may foster empathy.

Keywords: prejudice, racism, immigrants, United States, attitudes toward immigrants

Introduction

Literature on contemporary immigrant-host relations in the U.S. has generally focused on large urban areas, yet during the past ten to fifteen years, rural communities in many states have experienced a large influx of immigrants attracted by job prospects in food processing (Fennelly and Leitner 2002; Stull 1998;

Griffith 1999; Fennelly 2004)¹. In the Midwestern United States the relocation of meat and poultry processing plants out of urban centers to rural towns has spurred diversification of formerly white, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian origin communities. The movement has been accelerated by business tax incentives, the proximity of water and grain supplies and the opportunity to recruit non-union, low wage workers (Benson 1999; Cantu 1995; Fennelly and Leitner 2002; Griffith 1999; Yeoman 2000). In this region most workers employed on meat and poultry industry ‘disassembly lines’ are documented and undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America, but many towns also have groups of refugees and their families from Africa and Asia. During the 1990s these residents moved to rural communities in such numbers that they contributed to a reversal of the population losses of the previous decade (Minnesota Planning 1997). In some cases the arrival of large numbers of culturally different residents has revitalized rural communities and led to the formation of pro-immigrant coalitions of local citizens and non-profit agencies. It has also led to xenophobia and prejudice on the part of some native-born residents who perceive threats over competition for resources and majority group identity and power.

The relatively rapid change from predominantly white, European-origin populations to ones with sizeable percentages of immigrants creates a natural laboratory for analysis of these threats. In this paper we present state-wide survey data from Minnesota on white residents’ attitudes toward Hispanics in January, 2001, and then use qualitative data gathered seven months later for a close-up view of relations between US-born and foreign born residents in a rural town with a large meat processing plant. Comparisons are made of perceptions of symbolic and economic threats from immigrants on the part of three groups of Euro-Americans: community leaders, middle class and working class residents. Participants’ own explanations of their attitudes are used to describe native’s sentiments within the context of reported personal experiences and changes in the rural community. In the third section of the paper we listen to the comments of immigrants and refugees in the same community about their relationships with white residents. Taken together, these studies shed light on the nature of prejudice against immigrants and the kinds of public policies that may foster empathy.

Background

Prejudice, broadly defined, is the acceptance of negative stereotypes that relegate groups of people to a category of the ‘Other’ (Sniderman et al. 1993), while racism is the extension of prejudice into an ideology or belief system that ascribes inalterable characteristics to particular groups. Such belief systems are used

to justify negative attitudes and social avoidance of out-groups (See and Wilson 1989). Prejudicial beliefs can also enhance a sense of positive group distinctiveness on the part of the majority population (Sniderman et al. 1993). Conversely, perceived threats to cultural unity are both a product of prejudice, and a source of reinforcement of prejudicial beliefs.

Such *symbolic threats* to national identity have a long history in the United States. In the 19th and early 20th century they were kindled over concerns related to the integration of European immigrants (Castles and Miller 2003; Conzen et al. 1992; Nevins 2003). Ironically, more contemporary nativists compare the difficulties of recent waves of immigrants — particularly Hispanics — with the mythical *success* of previous generations of Euro-Americans. These contrasts feed a stereotype that contemporary immigrants lack initiative or talent. Both historically and in modern times, concern over perceived linguistic challenges to English as the national language are important components of symbolic threats — both as determinants of prejudice, and as justifications for pre-existing xenophobic attitudes.

A related symbolic threat is what we have termed ‘rural nostalgia’, the belief that demographic changes are a primary cause of the demise of pristine rural areas. Part of this nostalgia has to do with notions of ethnic solidarity, or what Tauxe (1998) describes as a ‘normative, self-reliant European-American community’. This sentiment is prevalent in rural areas where increases in numbers of immigrants coincide with other dramatic economic and social changes, such as losses of population, school closings, and the displacement of small and mid-sized farms by large agribusiness (Fennelly and Leitner, 2002; Amato 2000).

In addition to symbolic and linguistic threats and nostalgia, *economic threats* and perceived competition for resources are an important source of negative attitudes toward out-group members (Esses et al. 2001; Stephan and Finlay 1999). Economic threats are commonly viewed as ‘zero sum games’, i.e. the notion that resources are finite, and that gains by immigrants will necessarily be associated with equivalent losses by natives. Individuals from low socio-economic status backgrounds are most susceptible to the perception that immigrants pose a competitive threat (Oliver and Mendelberg 2000). National surveys, for example, show that lower income and less educated adults in the U.S. are especially likely to believe that immigrants are a burden to the country and that they take away jobs from native-born Americans (Public Agenda 2000). By contrast, individuals in higher socio-economic status categories may feel less threatened by economic competition from immigrants or other minority group members (Burns and Gimpel 2000). Perceptions of economic threat are also particularly strong among individuals who view the world as an arena for competition among groups for resources, and among adherents to the ‘Protestant Work

Ethic' who attribute the low status of out-groups to lack of self-reliance and hard work (Levy 1999; Reyna 2000; Esses et al. 2001; Oyamoto and Borgida 2004).

Study Site and Methods

By the year 2000 more immigrants in metropolitan areas lived in suburbs than in cities (Singer 2004), and large numbers had moved to non-traditional 'gateways', including Minnesota. Overall the foreign-born population in Minnesota rose by 50% during the 1990s. During the same period the Hispanic origin population increased by 166% —more than any other Midwestern state, and almost three times the rate in the U.S. as a whole (McConnell 2001). Mexicans have long come to the Midwest as seasonal workers, but in recent years a strong economy and the availability of jobs in food processing and manufacturing has led to a surge in their numbers (Fennelly and Leitner 2002). There were about 42,000 Mexicans in the state in 2000 (Migration Policy Institute, 2002) and over 137,000 Spanish speakers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Mexicans represent the largest percentage of foreign-born residents in both the U.S. (27.6%) and Minnesota (16%) (Migration Policy Institute, 2002).

In addition to Hispanics, Minnesota is home to refugees from Africa, Asia and the former Soviet states. Between 1979 and 1998 53,559 primary refugees came to Minnesota. The initial wave was made up almost entirely of Southeast Asians, but between 1995 and 1998 43% came from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states, and 28% from sub-Saharan Africa (Minnesota Department of Health, 2000). Eighty-seven percent of the refugees in the state have settled in the seven-county metro area (Minnesota Department of Health, 2000), but in recent years many refugees, like Hispanic immigrants, have moved to rural areas attracted by the prospect of jobs.

State-wide Survey Data

Data on the attitudes toward immigrants on the part of Minnesota residents in metro- and non-metro areas come from a state-wide telephone survey of 800 adults over the age of 18 conducted by the Minnesota Center for Survey Research between October of 2000 and January of 2001. For this survey household telephone numbers were randomly selected from all exchanges in Minnesota, according to the specifications described in the notes (Center for Survey Research, 2001)². In addition to background variables and a series of political questions, the survey included questions about attitudes toward Hispanics — the largest group of immigrants in Minnesota. Our analyses were done using a data file weighted to represent individual opinions. We selected a sub sample of non-Hispanic whites and analyzed responses to the questions on attitudes

toward Hispanics.

In addition to the cross-tabular analyses we performed a logistical regression analysis to determine whether white, non-metro area residents of Minnesota were more likely to perceive Hispanics in Minnesota as a 'burden' than metro area residents, net of differences in income, education, gender and opportunities for contact with Hispanics. For this analysis individuals who stated that they had no opinion were excluded, leaving 593 white respondents for the logistic regression of the response variable coded: 1 (Hispanics perceived as a burden), or 0 (Hispanics not perceived as a burden) on the following predictor variables:

Non-metro residence (residence outside the 7-county Twin Cities Metropolitan area)³

- gender (male)
- income (self-reported income in 1999 coded in dollars)
- college graduate
- weekly contact or more with Hispanics (in response to the questions "Do you know any Hispanic people in Minnesota?" and (if yes) "How often do you interact with Hispanics in Minnesota?")
- an interaction term for weekly contact and metro/non-metro residence

We established a condition that the final regression model only retain variables that changed the parameter estimates by more than .001. This criterion eliminated all but two predictor variables in the final equation: non-metro residence and college graduation.

Euro Focus Groups

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the causes of prejudice against Hispanics and other immigrants in a diverse rural community we scheduled a series of focus groups in a town selected to meet the following criteria: a) the presence of immigrants of diverse origins, races and ethnicities; b) diversification within the past ten years; and c) existence of a large meat processing plant. The community that we will call 'Devereux' fulfilled these requirements. It is a Midwestern community of 20,000, mostly white residents of European ancestry with a large meatpacking plant that has expanded over the past decade, attracting hundreds of Hispanic, Asian and African workers. The meat plant in Devereux is one of the major employers in the town. In the mid 1990's most of the 'Euro' blue-collar workers left the plant after it was shut down and re-opened as a non-union shop⁴. At the time of our interviews 96% of the employees on the plant disassembly line⁵ were immigrants. The foreign-born population of the town included over 3000 Hispanics — predominantly from Mexico, about 250

Somalis, a similar number of Nuer people from Southern Sudan, and over 400 Asians — principally Cambodians and Vietnamese⁶.

The data on ‘Euros’ in Devereux come from focus group conversations with three groups of older, white, U.S.-born residents who had lived in the community for at least ten years⁷ — long enough to have observed the demographic changes that are the subject of the study. Older residents were selected for the Euro groups because they represent an increasingly large proportion of rural communities as Minnesotans age, and as younger white adults leave rural areas to seek employment in the cities.

Participants were assigned to one of three groups: community leaders (CL), middle class (MC), and working class (WC) on the basis of their employment and status in the community (see Table 1). Members of the community leader group were recruited through a list of town leaders provided by the chair of the Chamber of Commerce; middle class group members were recruited through community organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, PTA and Rotary Club; Working Class participants were referred by a townsperson who had run job retraining programs for former meat plant employees and by former employees themselves. The characteristics of individual members of each group are shown in Table 1, and summarized across groups in Table 2.

Table 1: Characteristics of ‘Euros’ in Focus Groups

Community leader Group

Joe: White male in early 70’s; some college; retired from business management job; born and raised in Devereux. Married to Elizabeth. Has an adopted daughter born outside of the U.S.

Elizabeth: White female in early 60’s, retired from white collar job; some college; lived in Devereux for most of her life. Has an adopted daughter born outside of the U.S.

Gary: White male in his early 50’s; small business owner. Married to an immigrant.

Cheryl: White female in her early 50’s; small business owner. Has lived in Devereux for over 30 years.

Phyllis: White female in her early 60’s; college graduate; small business owner; lived in Devereux for most of her life. Married to a European immigrant.

Ron: White male in his mid-60’s; some college; business manager; born elsewhere in the Midwest, but grew up in Devereux.

Matthew: White male in his mid 50’s; white collar service job; some college; born elsewhere in Midwest; long-term resident of Devereux. Worked in meat processing plant while in high school.

Middle Class Group

Sue: White female in mid 40’s; college graduate; office worker; born elsewhere in Midwest; long-term resident of Devereux. Has taught English to immigrants.

Dale: White male in late 60’s; some college; born and raised in Devereux. Currently works part-time in retail.

Herb: White male in mid 60’s; small business manager; HS graduate; born and raised in Devereux; parents were immigrants from W. Europe.

Jeff: White male in mid-70’s; some college; born and raised in Devereux; retired from a White collar job; mother was an immigrant from W. Europe.

Sally: White female in mid-60; no high school diploma; worked in meat plant for 15 years and in childcare; currently retired; born and raised in Devereux.

Vicky: White female in mid-70; high school graduate; currently retired from work as secretary; born and raised in nearby town.

Ed: White male in early 50’s; college graduate; owner of retail business; born elsewhere in Midwest; long-term resident of Devereux. Married to Heidi.

Heidi: White female in late 40’s; college graduate; school teacher; born elsewhere in Midwest; long-term resident of Devereux; married to Ed.

Sharon: White female in early 50’s; college graduate with some graduate school; part-time store clerk; lived in Devereux most of her life.

Working Class Group

Lilly: White female in early 60’s; did not graduate from HS; has worked various low wage, part-time jobs; born and raised in nearby town; long-term resident of Devereux; worked at meat plant for 20 years; currently retired.

Leanne: White female in late 30’s; has an associate degree; blue collar worker; born and raised in Devereux; Worked for many years at meat plant; Lives in trailer court; has relative married to a Mexican; sister of Andrea.

Andrea: White female in early 40’s; college graduate; commutes to small town outside of Devereux for blue collar work; born and raised in Devereux; lives in trailer court; sister of Leanne.

Deborah: White female in mid 50’s; some college; commutes to another town for blue collar work. Born elsewhere in Midwest; long-term resident of Devereux.

Daniel: White male in early 60’s; did not finish high school; born and raised in nearby town; moved to Devereux 6 years ago; currently unemployed; previous work in food processing plant supervising Mexican and Asian workers.

Each focus group was assigned two trained moderators — one to serve as the facilitator, and the other as note-taker. The moderators prepared verbatim transcriptions from tape recordings of the sessions. The transcripts, intake questionnaires, debriefing notes and observations were entered into the NU*DIST text analysis program, which was used to complement repeated close readings of the transcripts. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Statements about immigrants and diversity were analyzed in several ways. In the initial coding we evaluated each statement made by a Euro about an immigrant or groups of immigrants categorized the nature of the comment (language, values, physical characteristics, etc.) and coded statements as ‘positive’,

Table 2: Comparison of Members of the Three European-origin Focus Groups

Variables	CL	MC	WC
Education^{ns}			
High School or less	14.3%	44.4%	40.0 %
Post high school ed*	85.7	55.6	60.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Income^{ns}			
< \$50,000	40.0%	55.6%	80.0%
≥ \$50,000	60.0	44.4	20.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Marital Status^{ns}			
Married	77.8%	100.0%	80.0%
Divorced/Single	22.2	0.0	20.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Gender^{ns}			
Male	57.1%	44.4%	20.0%
Female	42.9	55.6	80.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Mean age^{ns}	59.7	60.0	51.6

ns = not statistically significant

* Includes technical school, some college and college degrees.

‘negative’ or ‘neutral/mixed’. Two co-investigators and a graduate student did this coding independently and later discussed and reconciled discrepancies. We also kept coded information on participants’ background characteristics.

After the initial coding one of the investigators went back over the transcripts to make more refined distinctions among the Euro statements. This included coding ‘interjections’ — instances in which participants voiced the first positive or negative comment about immigrants in response to a neutral question, or which presented a view that differed from the previous speakers’ comments about immigrants. We did this because one of the risks of focus group discussions is the likelihood that individuals will be influenced by preceding positive or negative comments. We surmised that participants who volunteered the first positive or negative statement about immigrants in response to a neutral question were most likely to be voicing their own attitudes, rather than merely assenting to those of previous speakers. The same could be said of participants who interjected opposing views to those of the previous speaker. For example, early in the

Table 3: Comparison of Foreign-Born Focus Group Participants on a Variety of Variables; Faribault, MN 2001

Variable	Mexicans n = 14	Central Americans n = 12	Somalis n = 15	Sudanese n = 16	Cambodians n = 17	Vietnamese n = 5
Median age at interview	31	38	29	24	43	57
Median years in US	15	9	3	6	16	26
Median years in Faribault	3	4	2	1	16	26
Median hourly wage	\$9.88	\$10.00	\$9.00	\$9.00	\$9.50	\$10.00
Number coming from a different state	10	9	12	12	7	2
Most common states	CA, TX	CA, TX	Mixed NJ, TN, TX, WA, AZ, CA, FL, MO, NC	Mixed AZ, CA IA, IL, NY,SD, TN, TX	Mixed CO, IL, KY, MA, TX	Mixed CA, TX
Number who speak no/little English	11	7	13	7	13	3
Number with no high school diploma	6	6	9	8	14	3
Number with spouse in Faribault	7	6	11	8	10	4
Number employed	11	8	8	12	13	4
Number with children in Faribault	11	7	5	11	15	4
Predominant religion	Catholic 11	Catholic 5 Protestant 5	Muslim 15	Lutheran 11	Buddhist 11	Buddhist 3

Middle Class group, several individuals described their fear of going downtown because of the presence of immigrants. After several comments one member disagreed, said ‘I think it’s your perception’, and argued that immigrants congregated on the sidewalks downtown because they didn’t have suburban yards. ‘That’s where they live. They’re, you know, either that, or your choice is inside.’ In the middle of his comment, a woman interrupted and said, ‘I live down at the north end of town and it’s scary down there... Sometimes... groups of maybe 10 go by my house and scream and yell and it’s very scary.’ We coded the man’s statements in the preceding dialogue as the interjection of a positive comment about immigrants, and the woman’s as the interjection of a negative comment.

Immigrant Focus Groups

Ten of the thirteen Devereux focus groups conducted in 2001 were with foreign-born Mexicans (2 groups), Central Americans (1), Cambodians (2), Vietnamese (1), Sudanese (2) and Somalis (2). Participants were recruited for the one-to-two hour conversations by key informants, and through local churches and employers. The groups were designed to include male and female participants of varying background characteristics, ages and lengths of time in the community. The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 3.

Each group had a bilingual, bicultural facilitator and a note-taker; no one else was present during the session. Topics covered included motives for coming to the town, work experiences, perceptions and interactions with other foreign-born and U.S.-born groups in Devereux. Translated transcripts were analyzed for content (Quinn Patton 2001) and coded independently by three researchers, according to topics in the interview protocol. In the analysis all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

In this paper we discuss responses regarding relationships between immigrants and Euros. (For other discussions of the focus groups see Fennelly 2005 and Fennelly and Ford 2005).

Findings

State-wide Survey

We began our analysis by comparing attitudes toward Hispanics — the largest immigrant group in Minnesota — on the part of metro and non-metro residents in the Minnesota State Survey of 2000.

Regional differences in attitudes were sizeable; Twin Cities residents had more favorable attitudes toward Hispanics than those in “Greater Minnesota” (non-metro counties) on each of the survey questions (see Table 4). Conversely, ‘Greater Minnesota’ residents had less positive feelings about the presence of Hispanics in their communities and neighborhoods, and were less likely to view

Table 4: Attitudes Toward Hispanics: MN State Survey 2000/2001

Question	Greater Minnesota	Metro Area	Total
<i>Do you know any Hispanic people in Minnesota?*</i>			
Yes	59.2 %	60.6%	60.0 %
No	40.8	39.4	40.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>How often do you interact with a Hispanic person in Minnesota? **</i>			
At least once a week	51.6%	63.5%	58.1%
At least once a month	26.6	24.0	25.2
At least once a year	14.1	11.6	12.7
Less often	7.8	0.9	4.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>How do you feel about the presence of Hispanic people in your community? *</i>			
Positive	38.5%	50.4%	45.0%
Indifferent	52.7	44.2	48.0
Negative	8.8	5.5	7.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Do Hispanic people in Minnesota make a positive contribution or are they a burden to the state? ** *</i>			
Positive contribution	53.3%	71.9%	63.5%
Burden	34.4	17.4	25.1
Other	12.2	10.7	11.4
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>How important are the contributions of Hispanics to the Minnesota economy? **</i>			
Very important	20.4%	28.6%	24.9%
Somewhat important	57.1	54.6	55.8
Not very important	18.0	14.0	15.8
Not at all important	4.4	2.8	3.5
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Do you like or dislike having Hispanics as members of your community? ** *</i>			
Like	61.6%	66.1%	64.1%
Indifferent	31.6	31.8	31.7
Dislike	6.9	2.1	4.2
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Would you like or dislike Hispanics as co-workers or employees? ** *</i>			
Like	61.4%	71.3%	66.9%
Indifferent	31.0	27.1	28.9
Dislike	7.5	1.6	4.2
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Would you like or dislike having Hispanics as friends?*			
Like	68.8%	75.8%	72.7%
Indifferent	28.1	23.1	25.4
Dislike	3.1	1.0	2.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Would you like or dislike having Hispanics as next-door neighbors?*			
Like	65.4%	72.6%	69.3%
Indifferent	29.3	24.9	26.9
Dislike	5.3	2.6	3.8
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Would you like or dislike having Hispanics as members of your family?***			
Like	56.4%	67.3%	62.4%
Indifferent	26.9	26.4	26.7
Dislike	16.7	6.3	11.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

ns = not statistically significant

* chi square significance at p < .05

** chi square significance at p < .01

*** chi square significance at p < .001

the contributions of Hispanics to the economy as ‘very important’.

Most notable was the finding that non-metro residents were almost twice as likely to view Hispanics as ‘a burden to the state’. Because a number of researchers have suggested that frequency of contact influences attitudes toward out-groups, we controlled for whether respondents interacted with Hispanics at least once a week or less often than that (not shown). The result was that metro/non-metro differences remained, although this measure of contact *increased* favourable attitudes slightly on the part of metro residents, and *decreased* favourable attitudes on the part of residents in rural communities.

We selected the question on whether Hispanics in the state were perceived as a ‘burden’ for regression analysis for two reasons. First, it was the question in the survey that best quantified the concept of Hispanics as economic threats, and secondly, it was the attitudinal measure that best discriminates between metro and non-metro residents. Based upon the literature on prejudice described earlier we expected that college graduates and individuals with higher incomes would be more likely to perceive Hispanics as making a contribution to the state.

Results of the logistic regression are shown in Table 5. In our final model non-metro residence and having a college diploma were the only statisti-

cally significant predictors of the perception that Hispanics in Minnesota are a burden; taken together they correctly predicted the likelihood of perceiving whether Hispanics are a burden with 75% accuracy. We had hypothesized that the marked differences in attitudes toward Hispanics on the part of metro and non-metro residents would be largely explained by differences in educational attainment. That is, we anticipated that higher levels of schooling among metropolitan residents (and therefore greater aptitude for cognitive complexity and an understanding of the circumstances of immigrants) would account for their more positive perceptions of Hispanics. However, this was not the case; controlling for education did not diminish the significance of the metro/non-metro residence variable.

Table 5: Binomial Logistics Regression of Whether Hispanics in the State are Perceived as a Burden (n=593)

Predictor Variables*	Coef.	s.e.	z-score
Non-metro residence**	.798	.198	4.02
College graduate**	-.899	.216	4.17
Log likelihood**	630.65		
df	2		

* Variables removed from the equation based upon the condition that the final regression model only retain variables that changed the parameter estimates by more than .001: age, gender, weekly contact with Hispanics and interaction term for weekly contact with Hispanics and metro/non-metro residence.

**significant at p<.001

To better understand the nature of the threats perceived by individuals in Greater Minnesota we turned to in-depth conversations with older white residents in the town of Devereux — a rural Minnesota community that had experienced a rapid increase in the numbers of immigrants over the past ten years. We selected older residents because the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas of Minnesota has led to an exodus of younger Euro-American residents to urban areas, leaving concentrations of older adults and younger, working age immigrants and their families.

Focus Group Data from Devereux

Members of the Devereux community leader focus group were selected on the basis of their *social and positional status* in the community; Middle Class mem-

bers were recruited through civic clubs and the Chamber of Commerce, while working class members were selected on the basis of their blue collar and meat processing plant work histories. The groups differed little, however, in terms of other background variables (see Table 2). Although the Community Leader group had a larger proportion of individuals with some college and with incomes over \$50,000, these differences were not statistically significant. The mean age of participants in each group was over 50.

Before presenting qualitative data from each of the three focus groups, we summarize the number of positive and negative statements made by group members about immigrants, and the number of positive and negative 'interjections' (instances in which participants voiced the first positive or negative comment about immigrants in response to a neutral question, or presented a view that contradicted the previous speaker's comments about immigrants: i.e. a positive interjection after a negative comment, or vice versa; see Table 6). The three focus groups varied greatly in regard to the ratio of positive to negative statements about immigrants made by group members, ranging from 22:19 comments in the Community Leader (CL) group to 58:70 in the Middle Class (MC) Group, and 75:113 in the Working Class (WC) Group.

Several things can be concluded from Table 5. First, only the Community Leaders made more positive than negative statements about immigrants, although they also made the fewest statements of either kind, compared to the other focus groups. Conversations about changes in Devereux provoked a lengthy conversation about economic development on the part of the CL group, in contrast to the other two groups in which the question immediately elicited comments about immigrants. While the Working Class group clearly voiced the most negative opinions about immigrants, they also made the highest number of positive statements. It may be that their greater proximity to immigrants in the workplace and in low income neighborhoods resulted in more variety and greater intensity of opinions. The three focus groups also varied in numbers of positive and negative 'interjections'. The rank order of the ratio of positive to negative interjections for the three groups was the same as for the general comments described above, i.e. the Community Leaders had fewer interjections than either of the other groups, but voiced more positive than negative ones: 4:2, compared with 16:19 for the MC group and 5:15 for the WC group.

Community Leaders

Conversation in each focus group was initiated with a question about how long each member had lived in Devereux, followed by a general question: "What are some of the changes that you all have observed in life and in work in Devereux over the past five to ten years?" Members of the Community Leader (CL) group

Table 6: Evaluative Comments Made About Immigrants in Each of the Euro-American Focus Groups

Groups and Individuals	# Positive Statements	#Positive Interjections	# Empathetic Statements	# Negative Statements	#Negative Interjection*
Community Leaders(CL)					
Joe	5	1	3	2	1
Elizabeth	6	0	0	3	0
Gary	1	0	0	3	0
Cheryl	1	1	3	3	0
Phyllis	3	1	2	1	0
Ron	0	0	0	1	0
Matthew	6	1	10	6	1
Total	22	4	18	19	2
Middle Class (MC)					
Ed	9	5	16	6	0
Heidi	5	0	3	4	1
Sue	4	1	4	10	3
Dale	6	1	5	28	6
Herb	9	2	3	7	4
Jeff	6	2	3	4	1
Sally	3	0	0	8	4
Sharon	7	2	4	0	0
Total	58	16	39	70	19
Working Class (WC)					
Lilly	17	0	3	26	4
Andrea	10	3	3	35	6
Deborah	10	1	0	27	0
Leanne	19	0	3	25	3
Daniel	19	1	3	39	2
Total	75	5	12	113	15
Grand Totals	155	25	69	202	36

* Positive and negative interjections are instances in which participants offered the first positive or negative comment about immigrants in response to a neutral question, or presented a view that contradicted the previous speaker's comment (i.e. positive interjection after a negative comment or vice versa).

were older, long-term residents of the town. They included a former mayor, a bank president and the owners of a number of small businesses. Not surprisingly, their perspectives about immigration reflected their roles as entrepreneurs

concerned with the economic vitality of the community. The discussion began with comments about the growth of the community, expansion of the interstate highway, competition for small business owners from Wal-Mart and other corporate chains, and the importance of business diversification in the town. Members of the CL group were most likely to view diversity as a generally positive ‘side-product’ of economic growth. The first mentions of the topic came in the form of comments about the segmented labor market in which immigrants take jobs that US-born residents eschew:

Phyllis: They fill a definite niche. There are some industries that Caucasians and young preppy college students aren’t going to work in, and we need the economic base to be diversified.

Joe: I don’t know how else to put this, but this white face is probably not going to work at the meat plant, and we have people willing to come to Devereux and to do the work; I’m willing to buy the meat and eat it but I have a lot of feeling for the people willing to take these jobs.

Immigrants were not perceived to pose direct economic threats to most CL group members, but a few expressed concerns about the impact of immigration on retail businesses. Gary, for example, worried that the presence of Mexicans and Somali immigrants downtown was scaring older, Euro-American customers away from his store, and Phyllis added that concentrations of immigrants were ghettoizing sections of the commercial area:

Phyllis: There is a housing problem because they don’t have money to move to residential neighborhoods... The retail neighborhoods and trailer courts are becoming ghettos and this is not good.

Another participant expressed concern over more indirect economic threats in the form of negative impacts on school budgets, property values and business.

Matthew: I worry about the impact on school system. The state has a formula per student; the impact of providing ESL⁸ is huge on our community.

Overall, members of the Community Leader group made few statements that revealed symbolic threats. However, close interactions between immigrants and members of the community leader group were infrequent. Cheryl observed that, although she rented apartments to Sudanese and Somali residents, she has had little contact with them, and Matthew commented on the superficiality of the relationships between the US- and foreign-born:

I’m going to use a difficult word; you just *get along*. I think the community gets along, but I don’t think the community understands the various backgrounds. We’ve started a Diversity Center but the communication is painfully slow.

Middle Class Focus Group

Participants in the Middle Class (MC) Focus group were all long-term residents of Devereux. The group included several older white-collar workers and retirees who did not have college diplomas, as well as four members between the ages of 44 and 51 who were college graduates.

In the Middle Class focus group the introductory question on changes that participants had observed over the last five to ten years immediately elicited examples of symbolic threats. Fear of the unknown and nostalgia for a more homogeneous town population combined to foster negative attitudes toward immigrants among these middle class residents.

Sharon: We used to feel like we knew everybody. I mean, you used to walk around town and you could walk down [Main Street], and you knew everybody, you knew all of the faces. And now, you don’t know all the faces and so, I think sometimes you feel a little isolated, or maybe vulnerable, just because you’re not familiar with that person’s background.

Some of the MC group alternated positive statements about the changes in town with acknowledgement of fear. Sue had taught English to immigrants in Devereux. She initially commented that the town had become “more exciting” now that there were new Hispanic and African businesses. However, she also admitted feeling afraid:

One time we did walk up this way... we walked really fast down [the main street] just simply because of the different nationalities, the Hispanics... we just didn’t feel safe.

Another participant interjected that there were no yards by the downtown apartments, and that this led many Hispanics and Africans to congregate in the street in the summer. Others continued to dwell on perceived physical threats, sometimes drawing upon hearsay. Herb mentioned the high crime rate in a Texas town where his sister had lived as a reason for his concerns about Hispanics in general. His description of “*what look like very moral*” Texas Hispanics hiding weapons reveals a deep distrust that he transfers to Hispanics in Devereux.

Herb: And so you see this, what look like very moral people, just like I see ‘em here

in town, and yet everybody's carrying a knife? Or something like that...well in the last five-ten years, it's very common that somebody gets stabbed or maybe two or three of 'em in one fight. So these are some of the things that are changing in that regard.

Rates of serious crimes in Devereux actually decreased over the five years prior to the focus group study, but innuendo and selective recall of crime and traffic accident reports mentioning immigrants contribute to the perception of increased crime:

Dale: There's more trouble in town too... Well, you look in the paper, you can see it in the paper. A lot of driving violations. A lot of fights and stuff like that. In other words, you kind of wonder about walking downtown Devereux at night.

One of the most prominent themes from the middle class Euro focus group was the symbolic importance of language as a means of defining membership in the community. English language proficiency was perceived, not as a skill, but as the reflection of core American *values* by the middle class Euro-Americans. The implication is that immigrants voluntarily chose whether or not to speak English, and that this choice indicates acceptance of American morals and the desire to be integrated into U.S. society. Immigrants who do not master English are portrayed as unwilling to be 'assimilated', as in this comment:

Jeff: the Mexicans — because there's quite a few of 'em — it's too easy for them to speak their own language. They are not gonna make the attempt. I think there's gotta be more pressure, from somewhere, to uh, learn.

Negative comments about immigrants who do not speak good English were most often directed toward Spanish-speakers. This may be because they represent the largest group of immigrants in Devereux. The use of Spanish was cited more than once as an example of deviousness, i.e. that Hispanics who knew how to speak English were intentionally pretending not to understand or to be able to communicate in that language:

Herb: I think they've gotta put the right foot forward more than they do... a lot of 'em talk just as good a English as good as the rest of us. But you'd never know it... so, hey, come clean. If you talk English, talk English to me. If you don't, then learn.

These quotes are clear examples of internal attribution of responsibility for disadvantaged status. As Sue and Ed described it, immigrants who speak in their native languages are '*creating their own isolation*':

If somebody's speaking Spanish or Somalian or whatever, and we don't know it, we can't, you know, if they're sitting down to coffee and conversing in Spanish -

Ed : And you're bein' mutually excluded, yup.

Sue: - you're not gonna join in. So they're kind of creating their own isolation once again there.

After Sue's comment above the moderator asked, "So is it all about just learning English? What else, besides?" and Dale replied:

Culture, our culture. Blending with us, I think. You know, *getting' away from their culture* more or less, what they've had.

Jeff: I still think the quick assimilation of these people is, the sooner, the quicker the better. They'll get along much better. They'll feel more comfortable.

Some speakers implied that immigrants were being given unfair preferential treatment that would not be accorded to the white Euros if their situations were reversed.

Vicky: Well I think they should learn English as fast as possible. If we went to Mexico or some place we'd have to learn Spanish right away or we wouldn't get very far.

Middle class group members also made an implicit connection between communication skills and American values. In a fascinating response to the moderator question "What does it mean to be American?" Dale responded "Don't be clique-ish", and went on to elaborate:

You talk to people. Say hello. I notice it, I'm up in the morning early and they're walking down to the meat plant. I say good morning to 'em, some of 'em say hi and nod. The rest just keep on walkin'.

There seemed to be no awareness of the significant time and effort that many of the immigrants were investing in English language learning. Furthermore, English proficiency was viewed as the sole desired goal, with little support for bilingualism or retention of one's native language. To the Euro-Americans in this group English language acquisition is seen as an essential step toward 'assimilation' of immigrants. In the words of one respondent, "instead of English as a Second Language it should be English as the First Language".

Like the Community Leaders group the Middle Class group members descri-

bed a pervasive segregation of immigrants into enclaves with little interaction with Euro-Americans.

Sharon: I feel like we have maybe three communities existing right here, and you know, we overlap at the grocery store or the gas station or whatever, but basically they kind of go to their little areas, and we kinda go to our little areas, and...

Moderator: What are the three communities?

Sharon: Well, actually there are probably more, but I mean you know, the European — the white Europeans — the Hispanic, and I would say the African. Because, like I said, I think that the Asians have really become almost part of the European...

Gary, who is married to a Latina, was one of the only members of the group who mentioned close friendships and interactions with immigrants — in this case Hispanics. Other examples cited as friendships were generally neighborhood acquaintances or casual working relationships, such as the paternalistic relationship with a co-worker described by Sally:

Well, for instance, uh, she didn't know how to dress really. The colors. She didn't know how to put colors to what. She'd put, you know plaid with flowers. [laughter from someone in group] I was, well, 'I think you should, you know, put plain colors with the flowered skirt', or something. And she really liked what I'd ask — tell her — you know, what to do and that... She'd never wash her hair, and so I says, 'I think you have to wash your hair at least every other day.' [Chuckles from group] It was huge, it was long, and she would wind it all... hygiene was a main factor for two of my friends that I worked with.

Although the public schools in Devereux are integrated, within the schools immigrants are often segregated or shunned by white students.

Sue: Um, my daughter had a Somalian in her class who was a boy — so I don't know if it's because the boys have their own little clique too, but, um, he really thanked her for welcoming him and saying hi to him in the hallway, like the only person that would. Everybody else would just walk by him... he wrote her a card for graduation and it was really neat. I mean it just kind of brought tears to your eyes because this poor — not poor, but you know — here this child is, all year long and nobody conversing with him or doing anything.

Unlike the CL group where only a few members mentioned few economic threats or concern over immigrant use of public resources, several MC residents attributed lower school achievement and declining property values to immigrants. Jeff and Dale's comments were typical.

Jeff: I was curious, back on some of the um immigrants that we have if they, the parents, support the kids in school. That's gotta be a problem, 'cuz you know schools get criticized because, well, their SAT scores and everything's down... uh we get criticized by the Governor and whatever, how the schools are not doing as well, and I think the immigration is bringing that down.

Dale: My opinion is the rentals, the houses, the real estate will go down. 'Cuz they have cars all over, and junk; they don't take care of the yards and stuff.

Jeff: A friend in town had a house for sale for I think over \$300,000. And unfortunately next door was a rental property with a, uh, Spanish Mexican family, and they had about three cars in the yard... it just looks bad. Three, two, cars with all covered in junk.

Dale: I hear a lot of people talk about the tax dollar, too. They don't wanna see the tax dollars spent teaching people how to read... I think that's definitely wrong, you know, but I do hear it. And I hear it downtown.

Assessments of immigrant initiative varied among MC group members. In these conversations Hispanics or Mexicans were often singled out, and there were fewer references to Cambodian, Vietnamese, Somali or Sudanese immigrants. In the views of some participants, Hispanics were hard workers, but with limited expectations and drive compared to Euro-Americans or Asians.

Herb: The good part of the Spanish working for the minimum wage area is they can live on it. They have less wants and so on, and so they're probably happier as workers than the locals.

Heidi (referring to Hispanics): They have a very different attitude towards education too... I think it has a lot to do with their economic status. I mean, to them, education is not as important as earning a living.

But Hispanics are not always described as conforming to the American work ethic. Jeff, for example, broadly characterized Mexicans as less reliable than Somalis.

Some of 'em [Mexicans] don't even realize that, hey, you have to be on work on time and this kind of thing. You can come to work any time you want... Other, uh, other of the nationalities like the Somalians, I hear they're good workers.

Doing well in school is a variation of the work ethic, and on this measure Asians were perceived as a 'model minority', almost on a par with Euro-Americans.

Sharon: I think that the Asians have really become almost part of the European... I mean, they have sort of the same kind of work and education ethics.

Herb: The Asians seem to have a very good work ethic in terms of... you see a lot of 'em do really well in school. And after they leave Devereux as well.

Of all the Euros in the Middle Class group, only Ed appeared to recognize the diversity that exists within the various immigrant groups, as well as selection process that attracts low income Mexicans to the U.S. In the following statement he described the role of poverty driving many low income Mexicans to immigrate to the United States:

You obviously are not getting the elite of Mexico up here, from a standpoint particularly from finances - and education. So uh... you're getting a community here either that is very very hard-working or sees an opportunity to work - or maybe not to work. Maybe they come up here and take advantage of another situation. And uh I've found both, ya know. I've had experience with people that I'd just soon not associate with, and people that I wouldn't mind livin' next door to.

Other examples of empathetic statements came from Euros with family members who were born in Europe. Although Herb was quoted earlier, demanding that immigrants speak English, he later recalled his own parents' struggles learning the new language:

I think it's important to remember, uh, we're in a big hurry here I think to integrate them into our society. My folks both came from Holland years ago, and they came through the same thing we're talking about here. When my older brothers and sisters started getting close to going to school, they were still talking Dutch at home.

At another point Jeff made a similar admission:

I can compare... like, even my mother came over from Denmark. Couldn't speak a word of English when she came over, but she'd do housework and so forth. And uh, it was a struggle.

In addition to these empathetic expressions, there was open acknowledgement of Euro-American prejudice at several points in the conversation. At one point Dale directly acknowledged the existence of racism. After Sue's story of the isolation of her daughter's Somali classmate he stated:

I think it's us... If you're white, you're prejudiced against the colored automatically, 'cuz you're born and raised [muffled], you can deny it... Now there's two

Irish people in town, immigrants that I got to know pretty well. No problem at all. They're white. But now, if they were black, or yellow or something else... I think there'd be a reservation there.

Working Class Group

The working class focus group participants in our study had the closest contact with immigrants because they had worked in the meat processing plant with Mexican, Vietnamese and Cambodian employees, and lived in a trailer court with many immigrant neighbors. In spite of this high level of "exposure" to immigrants in Faribault, their reactions convey deep prejudice and stereotyped attitudes.

WC group participants and many of their family members had worked at the Devereux meat plant in the early 1990s when workers were represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW). In 1992 management asked the union to make wage concessions, and the UFCW refused. In December of the following year the company closed the Devereux plant and many employees left to find other jobs. The plant was re-opened the following month, but when the union contract expired, neither party moved to re-open negotiations. In January, 1995 existing employees voted to decertify the union, and many of the white workers were laid off. In subsequent months production expanded and large numbers of immigrants were hired to work on the disassembly line.

The subject of the plant closure came up during the WC focus group. It is interesting to note that Somali immigrants were mentioned in the same conversation although they represented a small and more recent wave of immigrants in Devereux:

Andrea: [The company] is not there to support the town; they're there to support their own pockets.

Daniel: Right.

Leanne: And the town let 'em do it. I think that hurt a lot of people.

Daniel: They gave 'em a bond to build a bigger [plant]. Well then they went downhill real quick. They busted the — they laid everybody off to bust the union. Now they gotta... *they're the ones that brought the Somalians in... Not a lot of people wanted to go back to work there after that.*

A question about how Devereux had changed over the years immediately elicited nostalgic comments from the WC group members. They described an idealized past and the ways that demographic changes had altered that.

Andrea: You don't know your neighbors anymore.

Leanne: We had softball.

Daniel: Oh, you went outside? You played softball there in the summer?

Leanne: We played 'til dark. And you knew who lived in what house and when they were home... and you'd go and walk in and talk to them.

Daniel: Oh, God, now you wouldn't wanna do it. You know.

Leanne: Even when [my son] wants to go play with a friend up at what we call the trailer court up there, I don't want him there, *and the friend's white*, I just don't trust him going up there. Again, it's a trailer court...

Andrea: When we were growing up, *everybody was the same. This is something different coming in, so we don't know how to talk to 'em.*

The line between the image of a pristine countryside and its 'pollution' by an influx of non-European immigrants becomes blurred in the focus group discussions:

Andrea: *I don't mind the minority*, just so, we're getting so overpopulated. There's nowhere to drive and see trees and stuff...

Lilly: You used to drive around the countryside -

Andrea: Yeah.

Lilly: - look at nice beautiful

Andrea: Leaves.

Lilly: Now there isn't.

Daniel: I mean, yeah, you'd go a mile and you'd see a farmhouse. Now you can go ten miles without seeing a farmhouse.

Andrea: Without seeing the trees too. [chuckles]

Daniel: Really changing.

Loss of jobs, over-population and the demise of a rural agricultural economy are fused with descriptions of immigrants. As Andrea stated clearly, *'this is something different coming in'*.

Among members of the Working Class group immigrants were generally described in stereotypic terms as an undifferentiated "Other", receiving what were perceived as unwarranted advantages. Several of the members of the group had direct experience with welfare cuts themselves, but they had exaggerated

notions of the benefits for which immigrants are eligible. In their minds all immigrants get long-term government help.

Andrea: They do get a tax break.

Daniel: That's another thing. They don't pay taxes for, what? Five to seven years?

Leanne: I think they changed it now. Three to five.

Daniel: Well, I think the government's going overboard with 'em. I mean, they should treat 'em all the same, whether they're Mexican or whatever, wherever they come from. They should all be treated the same. You know, whether they get kicked out of their own country, whether they wanna come over here. You know, but they shouldn't be treated better than we are. We're the ones that are payin' for what they're gittin. If they're gonna run around act like they're better than we are, we ain't gonna, we ain't gonna appreciate that at all.

Daniel's comments are a clear statement of what some researchers have called the 'modern prejudice belief system' (Levy 1999). As overt statements about the lesser abilities or characteristics of minorities are increasingly viewed as politically incorrect in the United States, such views have been replaced assertions that discrimination no longer exists, and that minority group demands for economic and political power are unwarranted. In studies of white attitudes toward blacks, this prejudice is reflected in high levels of agreement with statements such as "over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect for blacks than they deserve' or 'Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights'" (Eberhardt and Fiske 1996: 375).

On the one hand immigrants are stereotyped as a 'burden' on society — individuals who may not subscribe to the prevailing work ethic, and who receive welfare and other 'undeserved' state benefits; on the other hand their potential economic and political success is also seen as threatening. This is made explicit in the following conversation where economic and political power are both viewed as 'zero sum games' in which gains by immigrants threaten the majority status of white Americans.

Moderator: Can you imagine the different groups we're talking about becoming full-fledged members of the community?

Deborah: But I mean like as far as like, I don't know if that's what you meant, like becoming more in our community, but you think of School Board, and you think of City Council and you think of Chamber, and...

Deborah: Well, yeah, it would be kind of scary, but I mean I just can't imagine it would even happen like in the next 10 or 15 years. I would hope.

Leanne: It would be almost scary, yeah, I guess, that scary feeling they may change it.

Deborah: Well, I mean, maybe if enough of 'em all get here they could all vote them in...

Leanne: I still think we'd be kind of afraid that *they wouldn't have our best interests at heart. That they'd have their group.*

A concern over the potential loss of majority power is implicit in this fragment of the discussion; the fear becomes explicit in the next statements:

Lilly: Yeah, but if they keep on bringing, bringin' 'em over here, as many as they are for the last five years, man where is everybody else gonna be? There's no homes for 'em now.

Deborah: I think that is, was one of the concerns that was brought up about how many more people are gonna be here before we –

Andrea: Get overpopulated.

Deborah: — like I said, yeah, *feel like the minority.*

What is particularly interesting about several of the WC group participants is that they not only express fears and stereotypes of immigrants, but also recognize their prejudices. In the following conversation Andrea, Leanne and Daniel compare contemporary stereotypes of immigrants with the racism directed toward African Americans that they learned growing up. They openly acknowledge that immigrants are the 'new blacks'.

Andrea: But you always heard growing up — blacks are bad, they don't work, they work but they, you know, steal from ya, they steal ya blind.

Leanne: And you gotta be afraid of 'em cuz they will hurt ya.

Andrea: And now you're more afraid of the immigrants that are coming in instead of the blacks that we've had here. I don't know, it just seems like no one talks about black people anymore. They must be okay and accepted now because there's somebody else not to like.

Daniel: [laughs] That's about it.

Andrea: You know? I spose it was the Indians before the blacks, I don't know.

Remarkably, these same individuals who openly articulate nativist attitudes and fears also acknowledge their own racism and — as can be seen by the end

of the following conversation — even express the hope that their children will grow up without prejudice.

Daniel: Yeah, it is. Really. (Diversity) is good for the kids.

Leanne: You know, they're growing up not prejudiced.

Daniel: Well, it's gonna hurt and help both. I don't think they're gonna love 'em all. I mean they're gonna find out they're just like the white people, there's good, there's bad, ugly, there's cute.

This admission is one of several contradictions demonstrated by different Euro-Americans in our study, and even within the same individual. On the one hand Daniel expresses anger and resentment toward immigrants who “shouldn't be treated better than we are”; on the other hand, he mentions going out for drinks with Vietnamese and Mexican co-workers and acknowledges that not all immigrants are the same, and that “*just like white people, there's good, there's bad, ugly, there's cute.*”

These sentiments are echoed by other Working Class group members at the end of their conversation when the moderator asked ‘What do you think is the most important thing that we've talked about today?’

Daniel: It takes all kinds to make a state, or a city.

Andrea: Yeah, we believe there's good and bad... different nationalities within themselves.

Leanne: I think it's important too that, we, you know there's changes and our kids are accepting the changes.

Daniel: Gotta give 'em a chance.

Although tolerance and the importance of cross-cultural understanding were clearly *not* themes of the WC conversation, this is the summary statement that Daniel, Andrea and Leanne wish to make. It is interesting to question why positive statements about diversity are proffered in a group that has had no compunctions about revealing deep-seated stereotypes and negative attitudes toward immigrants.

Focus Groups with Immigrants⁹

In the third phase of our study we conducted focus groups with Mexican, Central American, Vietnamese, Camodian, Sudanese and Somali residents of Devereux. Because the focus group participants were not randomly selected, they are

not representative of all adults of their respective nationalities in Devereux.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the sentiments expressed in the groups and summarized below are consistent with our observations and interactions with Africans, Asians and Hispanics over the past four years of work in Devereux.

The six immigrant groups included in our study varied greatly in their circumstances and histories of emigration, and in length of time in the community, ranging from Vietnamese refugees who first settled in the community in the 1970s, to much more recent refugees from Southern Sudan and Somalia (see Table 3). Larger numbers of Mexicans and Central Americans continued to arrive throughout this period. The groups also differed markedly in native language, religion and customs. However, what is remarkable is the equalizing effect of being non-English speaking immigrants working in low wage jobs in a predominantly white, rural community, far from urban immigrant enclaves. As foreigners seeking employment, affordable housing and services these very diverse groups of immigrants told similar stories of isolation and of the barriers to integration posed by language and social status.

Examples of anti-immigrant racism were infrequently cited by the participants in our study, and they tended to be qualified by the speakers as not indicative of the overall climate in the town. One gets the impression from both the Euro focus groups and those of the Vietnamese and Cambodian groups that overt discrimination against Asians, in particular, is a thing of the past, although they still face barriers to social and economic integration. Given that many of the Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees in our focus groups were resettled directly to Minnesota fifteen to thirty years ago, they had surprisingly low levels of English proficiency and education.

Each of the immigrant groups had stories of racist treatment when they first arrived. The Cambodians described malicious vandalism and ethnic slurs when they moved to Devereux in the 1980s, as in the following examples:

Arun: They threw eggs at our cars. They tore the license plates off... all they did was swear at us, "Gook go home! Gook go home!" I didn't know the meaning of that.

Thoeun: The white Americans — they swore. When they saw us walking on the street, the drunks would say, 'Gooks go home! You are boat people!' I didn't come by boat — the Vietnamese, yes, but we came on a plane.

A Vietnamese woman recounted an incident when she first came to Devereux in 1985 in which she tried to take an empty seat in a bus and other riders stretched out their legs so that she couldn't sit down.

Moderator: Although there were seats available, they wouldn't let you sit down?

Nhung: Yeah, they wouldn't let me sit. I hated that, so I never took the bus again. I walked every day.

In more recent times a Mexican woman described being terrified when she was surrounded by angry white Americans in her trailer park after one of the children's bikes had been taken by a Mexican child.

Diana: The kid was upset because it was his. Then all of them came and surrounded us. Those are sad things — things that we will never forget.

A Sudanese participant revealed that his car had been dented and the windows smashed by people he did not know, and in the Somali focus group, one woman described what she believed was a racially motivated attack on a Somali teenager.

Sahra: Yes, not long ago, there were two Somali youth walking home on the street from a grocery store who got beaten up by four white men. They managed to escape with no serious injuries. They called us names (like 'shit') when we walked down the street.

Another hastened to add that the attack was atypical:

Khalid: That was one incident, and I don't think it can be generalized. Conflict always arises between people at different places like work, schools and so on. I don't think there is general hate or animosity toward us. Had it been so, we would not have lived here so long.

Later in the conversation this same speaker mentioned a subtler form of discrimination in the form of white residents' reactions to Somali women's dress, and the refusal of some companies to hire women wearing a 'hejab'. After some individuals complained that their jobs were stressful and that the pay was low, the moderator asked if it was not possible to find other work.

Khalid: Other companies don't hire Somalis, especially women with traditional clothing. They always expect people who are operating their machines to wear pants.

Shamso: With some people you can tell from their faces that they either hate (Somali) people or are confused by us, by our color or the way that we dress.

Among the Africans a number of the contemporary charges of racism referred to exploitation by unscrupulous, absentee landlords, particularly. The following comment by a Somali woman was indicative.

Hodan: The people who rent housing do not rent to people who don't speak the language or who come from other countries, who weren't born here. They try to take advantage of them. They just take the money, but they don't fix anything when it breaks, and they speak (to us) in an inappropriate manner... The Somalis are afraid; they pay the rent and they think that if they yell at the man or do something wrong, they will get in trouble and won't ever get housing.

Among the Mexicans, Central Americans and Sudanese there were several complaints about discrimination on the part of some members of the police force:

Esteve: It's not all the police, but there are those who, when they see Hispanics driving, simply because they are Hispanic, they stop them, thinking that the car does not have insurance, or that the person doesn't have a license.

Lorenzo: Once I went with someone in a car. They stopped us, and the police said an ugly word to him — a word that I will not repeat here. And he said 'go back to California or to Texas; you are in Minnesota now... here we speak English'.

Peter: The police are very tough on the Sudanese — when they see that they are black, they give them a ticket.

Perceptions of preferential treatment for white workers was another common theme when focus group moderators asked about interactions between immigrants and native-born residents. The following comment was typical of many:

I remember a time at my workplace when I was mad at these white Americans. Their people were taking it easy and not working, while I worked myself to death. I got blamed (for not doing enough) even though they were taking it easy, but they didn't say anything. When I think about that, it makes me mad. They favor their own people.

Most of the workplace interactions described by immigrants reflect not only cultural barriers, but also power differentials. In these interactions immigrants are relegated to lower status in their roles as the recipients of services or as employees with white supervisors. Vicente, a Guatemalan worker noted:

My supervisor, let me know that because I am not a citizen — I am a resident — that I'm not part of "the family". If I become a citizen, I will 'belong to the American family', if not, I won't belong. So, even if I work really hard, it isn't enough for

them. Like someone was saying, just because you have an accent, you are pushed aside. I think it's like a type of jealousy, or something like that, in that well, you are here but you are not from here, so therefore you are less.

This power discrepancy is strongest for some of the Hispanics in Devereux since they are ineligible for many state benefits. Maia is a Guatemalan woman with a temporary job at a local manufacturing plant. She describes a vicious cycle that prevents full-time employment and job advancement because she, and many of her compatriots lack permanent legal status and knowledge of English.

I am a temporary worker at a plant here. They only give you full-time work if you speak English... if you are a temp they take advantage of you — Americans discriminate against you. If someone has to do (dirty work) like sweeping or using a broom and dustpan, it's not the American.

In some of these examples it is their vulnerable work status that makes immigrant workers particularly wary, as described in one of the Mexican focus groups. Inez mentioned her husband's frustration at a local glass factory where all of the temporary workers were laid off. The fear of losing his job kept him from complaining about mistreatment from his supervisor. Another participant nodded in agreement, adding that at her job her work hours had been cut with no explanation.

The lack of a common language poses the most formidable barrier to close relations between immigrants and Euros and reinforces differences in social status, as described two Cambodian participants:

Sothea: When I go to work I meet with white Americans. I don't know my job duties and I don't speak much English, except for a few words, so I have to ask by using hand gestures. They help me somewhat, explaining to do this or that so that I can understand and follow.

When asked about friendships with Euros Boupaha, a Cambodian, answered:

I meet with white Americans; we work together. They help... they bring us to the hospital when we become ill.

Moderator: Besides work, do you ever see them? Have you ever been over to visit their houses?

Boupaha: Never.

Language barriers clearly impede friendships between immigrants and Euros,

and also among different groups of immigrants.

Hodan (Somali): You'll see people speaking their own languages in the workplace, and some even communicating through body-language... The people who understand one another, become friends because of this, since they share the same language. It is difficult for those who do not speak the same language to become friends, because they don't understand one another.

In several of the focus groups Asian, African and Hispanic participants mentioned that male immigrants have an easier time crossing ethnic boundaries because of sports and their less circumscribed social roles. The following comments are from two Somalis:

Shamso: Especially the students who go to school with us... There are Somali boys who understand the language and attend high school with white boys or Sudanese boys or any sort of boys. They study together at the library and learn, and have developed relationships — even friendly ones. But it is rare for a woman such as myself to have such a relationship.

Gutaale: There are a few young men of different ethnicities that I am friends with, but that is generally because it is easier for us, as young men, to interact with other ethnicities in comparison to the elderly and the women. The reason is that we men may play soccer or go to the cinema or lounge around.

Religion and religious services provide a meeting ground for some cross-cultural relations, and Christian churches are frequently mentioned by Hispanics, Sudanese and some of the Asians as settings for interaction with white residents of Devereux. On the other hand, among the Somalis a strong sense of difference and pride in Islamic traditions restricts interaction:

Shamso: What is stopping us is, from a certain perspective, the culture of these American women and that of Muslim women... we do not understand one another... We may say 'hi, hi', but we do not understand each other, nor are we similar, so there is nothing (to foster) friendship, due to a lack of understanding with respect to religion.

Aasha: They have the same religion, and they are the same because they wear the same clothes and go to church together... they are all Christians... We are Muslims though, and we don't go to Christian churches.

In spite of the incidents and perceptions of discrimination described above, and the language barriers that generally prevent close relations, each of the focus

groups had participants who described friendly overtures from some of the residents of Devereux. The following example comes from one of the Cambodian focus groups.

Arun: In Devereux the white Americans have a lot of contact with Khmer people. When you walk on the street they greet us with 'hi' and 'hello'. I am grateful for that, and I reply with hello and greet them with a handshake 'Bonjour'. I feel very satisfied by this contact.

As was noted earlier, assistance with work or support were foremost in the minds of many immigrants when they described positive relations with native-born residents, as shown in this example from a Honduran participant:

Felix: When I came here I didn't have enough money to rent an apartment, and they helped me at the (Social Service) Program...I came legally, but even so, I came without money. I came from Florida, and when I most needed it, they helped me and that made me feel good.

Consuela described coming from Mexico and living with her brother in a trailer. She found a job at the junior high school and her co-workers helped her get settled.

My co-workers at the school, they lent me some money... and they gave me things for my trailer... and they came to my trailer to welcome me.

It seems that for many immigrants, the economic opportunities in Devereux overcome other difficulties associated with life in a rural Minnesota town. Interestingly, in response to questions about incidents that made them feel welcomed, some participants responded with comments that it was the availability of jobs. Maia noted that in Guatemala it would take her a month to earn a hundred dollars, a sum that she earns here in much less time:

Maia: the beautiful thing here, of course, the welcome... is that you start working and you see what you are earning. In my country it would take me a month to earn a hundred dollars.

Discussion and Conclusions

We began this inquiry with an examination of state-wide data on the attitudes of native-born residents toward Hispanics in metro- and non-metro communities. The analysis suggested that many Minnesota residents perceive Hispanics to be an economic threat, and that the threat is especially strong among rural

residents. In metro areas a quarter of Minnesotans believe that Hispanics are a burden, compared to over a third of non-metro residents. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between the percentages of metro and non-metro respondents (83 and 78% respectively) who agreed that the contributions of Hispanics to the Minnesota economy were ‘very important’ or ‘somewhat important’¹¹. This seeming contradiction may reflect mixed perceptions. As we saw from the Middle Class focus group in rural Devereux, a number of individuals both recognize the importance of the work that immigrants are doing — work that white residents eschew — but also perceive that immigrants represent an economic burden because of their need for special services, or because of their negative impact on property values.

Taken together, a clear picture emerges from the state-wide survey of Minnesotans and the focus groups with immigrants and natives in Devereux. As rural Midwestern communities lose population they offer incentives for the relocation and expansion of meat processing and manufacturing plants. The nature of the work and the demise of labor unions make the work unattractive for native-born residents, but the opportunities for steady, full-time work at wages well above the federal minimum wage are a lure for documented and undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America, and for refugees and their families from Africa and Asia. As Amato and Amato (1999) have noted, these ‘newcomers’ arrive as strangers, and their primary motivation is to work. This all-consuming focus and their low levels of English language ability and education pose formidable barriers to community integration. Together language and socioeconomic class differences relegate many immigrants into the permanent category of outsiders. In Devereux, for example, some of the so-called ‘newcomers’ have lived in the community for over a quarter of a century.

Socio-economic and language barriers serve to reinforce existing status differences between US- and foreign-born residents. As Lamphere et al. (1994) have noted, integration and change occur in the context of specific institutions where newcomers and established residents interact and have differential access to power. Interactions between Euros and immigrants take place in formal settings where relationships are defined and circumscribed through the well-defined roles of management-worker, owner-tenant, or teacher-student. It is usually established European-origin individuals who hold the power within these organizations, and immigrants who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In contrast, the Euros held jobs in management and administration, as supervisors, or as mechanics and human resource specialists. It is noteworthy that, when asked about cross-cultural relations and events that may have made them feel unwelcome, many immigrants mentioned the stresses and power inequalities that come from contingent work. These power differentials are, of course,

exacerbated by the undocumented status of many Hispanic workers, and by the fear and uncertainty regarding rights and expectations that are faced by all immigrants, regardless of legal status.

Given the social and economic disadvantages facing immigrants, it is ironic that middle and working class Euros perceive them to be strong economic and symbolic threats. This misperception comes from ignorance about the day-to-day struggles of foreign-born workers. The extent of interaction with immigrants varied greatly across the three focus groups and permitted us to reflect on the research theory that was first put forth by Gordon Allport (1954) over half a century ago, when he hypothesized that proximity to out-groups would diminish the perceived differences that lead to prejudice. However, the combined implications of contact research and studies of the association between social class and prejudice are ambiguous regarding expected relations between working class native-born and foreign-born residents. On the one hand, it is working class whites who live and work in closest proximity to immigrants in rural communities; on the other hand, whites of low socio-economic status are also likely to perceive the greatest economic and social threat from immigrant workers. Working Class members had worked side by side in the meat processing plant before being laid off and they lived together in the trailer courts. Because they were closest to immigrants in economic and social status they felt most threatened by their presence. This finding underscores the complex effects of ‘contact’ on race relations .

In towns with large meat processing plants the role of contact in promoting empathy may be reduced if white workers feel that they have been displaced by immigrants. Although a number of studies have shown that immigrants generally do not take jobs away from native-born American workers (Leitner 2000) meat processing firms have implemented a strategy that entails relocating to rural areas, closing unionized plants, re-opening non-union plants and lowering wages to a level that attracts only immigrant workers. Competition is particularly evident when U.S.-born unionized workers are discouraged, or prevented from reapplying for jobs in the newly re-opened facility. We conclude that in these settings contact or proximity to immigrants is likely to produce conflicting attitudes in the low income white residents because it makes the economic threat of foreign-born workers appear more immediate and more serious. The result is that many Euros may have friendly relations with some individual immigrants, while simultaneously harboring resentment and supporting broad negative stereotypes of groups.

The anger of working class whites toward immigrant workers seems to have less to do with racial or cultural differences than with their own status issues of class and the displacement of low wage workers in restructuring rural econo-

mies. This corroborates findings in other studies that it is members of the lowest socioeconomic groups who feel most threatened by economic competition from immigrants or other minority groups (Burns and Gimpel 2000). Perceptions of economic loss and gain also clearly influenced attitudes toward immigrants on the part of the Community Leaders and Middle Class residents in our focus groups. For the former immigrant workers and new businesses were seen as welcome signs of the economic vitality of the community, while Middle Class residents described their fear of demographic change and the perceived negative impact of low-income, foreign-born residents on property values and school performance.

Both the WC and MC groups made comments reflecting nostalgia over changes in rural communities and a misperception that there is a causal relationship between the arrival of immigrants and the demise of an imagined rural past. The policy implications of this finding are that discussion of the many-faceted factors that have led to profound changes in rural communities might diffuse some anger toward immigrants.

Level of education (and particularly college completion) is a key variable in the explanation of differing attitudes toward immigrants. State-wide there are statistically and substantively significant differences in completed schooling levels of urban and rural residents; 60% of rural non-metro residents have had some post-high school education, compared to 76% of metro residents, and the comparison of percentages with college diplomas is 31% and 46% respectively (not shown). In the multivariate analysis of the Minnesota Survey data individuals with the lowest levels of schooling were significantly more likely than those with more education to view Hispanics as a burden to the state. Residence in a non-metro area was an even stronger predictor of these attitudes, net of the effects of education, income, age and gender.

There are a number of ways in which education mitigates prejudice. On the one hand schooling may increase individuals' 'cognitive complexity' and the ability to understand complex ideas, such as the notion that ethnic groups are not homogeneous, or that economic and social changes that coincide with an increase in immigrants may have multiple determinants. On the other hand, individuals with low levels of education may be concentrated in areas in which prejudices against non-whites are prevalent and self-reinforcing (Oliver and Mendelberg 2000). In such areas targeted programs that debunk myths about immigrants may be beneficial.

In the Devereux focus groups it was social status that seemed to influence attitudes toward immigrants, rather than formal education. Members of the Community Leaders group were elites whose principal concerns were economic development and diversification. They generally perceived immigrants as eco-

nomics assets, by virtue of their role as laborers in expanding industries. From their segregated and privileged vantage points, few CL group members viewed immigrants as economic or symbolic threats. The Middle Class group, in contrast, included a majority of white collar workers who openly expressed fear toward immigrants who were perceived as both a physical menace and as a threat to the cultural and linguistic cohesion of the white majority. Working Class group members were blue collar workers and former employees of the town's meat processing plant. Working class members did not express the same fear of immigrants as the MC group, but they were vehement in their descriptions of a threat to white majority power and in their conviction that immigrants were receiving unwarranted advantages.

One obvious policy implication of the differences described above is to enlist community elites to help middle and working class residents better understand the importance and positive fiscal benefits of immigrant labor, and to refute 'zero sum logic' that suggests that improvement in the status of immigrants can only come at the expense of American citizens. Educational programs are also needed to help Americans understand the forces that keep immigrants in low-end jobs, out of school and without social safety nets — forces such as an immigration system that is out of synch with the demand for labor, and corporate policies that promote low wages and contingent work, and oppose collective bargaining. This is no easy challenge in a post 9/11 United States where terrorism has been added to the list of threats attributed to immigrants.

One finding from the focus groups that leads us to be optimistic is the pervasiveness of socially desirable statements about the benefits of a multicultural society and the dangers of bigotry. Although the Working Class group members made openly negative comments about immigrants, they also made many empathetic statements. In fact, a principal finding of our study was that it is inaccurate to simply classify individuals' attitudes toward immigrants on a linear scale that ranges from low to high prejudice because all of the Euro group members tended to be make positive statements in some contexts and negative ones in others. Such variable attitudes cannot be accurately assessed by the administration of psychological scales of nativist sentiments. However we hypothesize that the *same individual may sincerely feel both empathy and antagonism toward immigrants or minority group members at different points in time and in different contexts*. These dual sentiments, first described by Myrdal (1944) more than half a century ago, are the result of struggles between racism and internalised notions of socially desirable behavior. They are also the logical result of socialization in a society that sanctions and promotes negative stereotypes of immigrants while simultaneously lauding equal opportunity and the 'American Dream'.

NOTES

- 1 This research was supported by grants from the Russell Sage Foundation, the Office of the Vice President for Research and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota. The original proposal and fieldwork were done in collaboration with Professor Helga Leitner of the Department of Geography.
- 2 A total of 800 telephone interviews were completed for Part II of Minnesota State Survey (MSS 2000). An additional 447 individuals refused to participate, and 140 telephone numbers were still active when interviewing was terminated. The remainder of the sample was categorized as follows: 126 potential respondents were unreachable during six or more attempted contacts and 65 individuals were not able to complete the survey because of physical or language problems. In addition, 1,208 telephone numbers were eliminated: 434 because they were not home telephone numbers, 501 because they were not working numbers, and 273 because they were disconnected numbers identified by the Survey Sampling screening service. The overall response rate for the survey was 51% and the cooperation rate was 58%, based on formulas specified by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. Declining response rates are a national concern for survey research organizations, and are due at least in part to increases in the total number of survey projects conducted by all organizations” (Minnesota State Survey Technical Report, 2001). The sample consisted of households selected randomly from all Minnesota telephone exchanges, excluding known business telephone numbers. In addition, the selected random digit telephone numbers were screened for disconnects, using a computerized dialing protocol that detects the unique dial tone emitted by some disconnected numbers. Selection of respondents occurred in two stages: first a household was randomly selected, and then a person was randomly selected for interviewing from within the household. The selection of a person within the household was done using the ‘Most Recent Birthday Selection Method’. These selection procedures guaranteed that every telephone household in the state had an equal chance to be included in the survey, and that once the household was sampled, every adult had an equal chance to be included.
- 3 Metro counties include Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott and Washington.
- 4 In the early 1990s the plant employees belonged to the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW). In 1992 management asked the union to make wage concessions, but the UFCW refused. In December of 1993 the company closed the Devereux plant and many employees left to find other jobs. The plant was re-opened the following month, but when the union contract expired at the end of that year, neither party opened negotiations. Large numbers of immigrant employees were hired to work on the disassembly line. In January, 1995 existing employees voted to decertify the union. Production expanded in the following years, and by 2001 (the year of our study), the plant had added a second shift and employed about 600 workers. 96% of the disassembly line workers were immigrants.
- 5 The animal carcass is cut up for packaging in the disassembly or evisceration line.
- 6 Estimates are based on a combination of census data and reports from agencies and churches serving immigrant groups.
- 7 The exception was one resident who had lived in Devereux for six years.
- 8 English as a Second Language classes.
- 9 We have included only a small portion of the extensive data from the immigrant focus groups in this paper in order to comment on their accounts of the reception accorded them by the European-origin residents of Devereux. (For other descriptions see Shandy and Fennelly 2004; Fennelly 2005; Fennelly and Ford 2005.)
- 10 Furthermore, it should be noted that immigrants who move to rural communities for employment tend to have lower levels of English ability and education than their compatriots in urban areas (Fennelly and Palasz 2002).
- 11 We examined a cross-tabulation of the two variables to see if this indicated a reliability problem; only 1.8% of respondents who said that Hispanics were a burden also said that they make a ‘very important contribution to the state’, and only 0.7% said both that Hispanic contributions to the state were ‘not at all important’ but also that ‘Hispanic people in Minnesota make a positive contribution to the state’.

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