Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Race Relations and Des Moines' New Immigrants

May 2001

A report of the Iowa Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. Statements in this report should not be attributed to the Commission, but only to participants at the community forum or to the Advisory Committee.

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Race Relations and Des Moines' New Immigrants

Letter of Transmittal

Iowa Advisory Committee to
the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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The Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights submits this summary report, *Race Relations and Des Moines' New Immigrants,* as part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on civil rights issues within the state.

The Advisory Committee invited a cross-section of community workers and government personnel involved in services for new immigrants to make presentations at a community forum held on April 21, 1999, in Des Moines. While many community leaders respect newcomers and recognize their roles in the local community, other residents are uncomfortable with them. Community feelings are mixed about the new workers because they do not simply arrive to work; they also bring their languages and distinct cultures with them.

A state official provided beneficial information on the right to a court interpreter for any party who does not understand English and is involved in a legal proceeding in Iowa. The Advisory Committee, however, notes that even after the Iowa State Legislature passed a law providing for the adoption of rules governing qualifications of interpreters, there are complaints that the law is not being implemented.

The Des Moines refugee population was described as substantial and as a group that is sometimes treated differently from the mainstream population by police and service providers. Refugees have been reluctant to make formal discrimination complaints because they fear retribution.

Community advocates in Des Moines are helping new immigrants adapt to American society. However, complex immigration laws and restrictive social services policies sometimes do not allow immigrants access to services. Conversely, refugees in Iowa enjoy a better status than economic immigrants. Because refugees are fleeing political or religious persecution, they are allowed entry to the United States if their application is sponsored by a U.S. citizen. Federal funds are available for refugee resettlement needs.

One reason given for the increased migration to Iowa is the low level of work skills and language skills required by employers. These new immigrants do difficult, necessary work for corporations but live in fear of apprehension by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). An Iowa anthropologist has called these workers a "shadow work force." Further, the civil rights of these workers and families cannot be assured as long as negative stereotypes and their legal status deny them a full range of civil rights protection. Law enforcement and immigration officials told the Advisory Committee they are doing the best they can to enforce the laws with the resources available. The INS executes the mandate of the U.S. Congress, which accordingly favors enforcement of laws over the processing of applications for U.S. citizenship or residency.

The Iowa Advisory Committee hopes that the information in this report will be beneficial to Iowa residents who work with new immigrants and that it adds to the body of knowledge collected by the Commission at the national level.

Respectfully,

Lenola Allen-Sommerville, *Chairperson*
Iowa Advisory Committee

Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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Introduction

In February 1998, the *Des Moines Register* commissioned a poll to determine whether Iowans approved of a state policy encouraging immigration to Iowa.[1] The poll found that attitudes about state immigration policy vary according to several factors, including income, educational attainment, and whether a person knows an immigrant. This poll came on the heels of a speech by Governor Terry Branstad encouraging "people of other nations to immigrate to Iowa." He specifically mentioned Latinos, Asians, Bosnians, and Kurds.[2] Of adults surveyed, 52 percent disapproved of a state policy that would encourage immigration to Iowa.[3] The *Des Moines Register* reported:

> According to the poll, just 35 percent of Iowa adults say immigrants are taking work away from citizens who already live here. Fifty percent say immigrants are generally doing jobs that would otherwise go unfilled, and 15 percent are unsure.[4]

As a result of Governor Branstad's speech and the poll, the Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in April 1999 decided to conduct a forum on "Race Relations and Des Moines' New Immigrants." The Advisory Committee chose this focus because of the mixed results of the poll and the perception that racial issues facing new immigrants were not being addressed by various state institutions.

At the forum, the Advisory Committee received information on race relations and new immigrants from state officials, community advocates, university professors, local public school district personnel, the Des Moines chief of police, a representative from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and others. The following sections of this report summarize the information provided to the Advisory Committee.

Iowa Census Overview

Sandy Charvat Burke, a sociologist at Iowa State University in Ames, presented the Advisory Committee with information on Iowa's population. She noted that in 1997, 96.5 percent of Iowa's population was white. Blacks, the largest racial minority in the state, had a population of 55,634. Black Hawk, Polk, and Scott were the only counties with at least 5,000 blacks; these counties contained nearly two-thirds of the state's total black population. About one-third of Iowa's counties were estimated to have fewer than 10 black residents. Blacks constituted an estimated 2 percent of the state's population.[5]

Asians and Pacific Islanders were the third largest racial minority in 1997, with a population of 35,778. More than half (52.2 percent) of this population lived in Johnson, Polk, or Story counties, and all but Adams and Audubon counties had at least 15 Asian residents. This group was 1.3 percent of Iowa's population.[6]

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[1] "Immigrants in Iowa? Poll Reveals a Pattern," *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 26, 1998, p. 4A.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Sandra Charvat Burke, "Estimates of Residents by Race and Hispanic Origin in Iowa's Counties: 1990 and 1997," paper presented for the record to the Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Des Moines, IA, Apr. 21, 1999, p. 122.

[6] Ibid.

American Indians were the smallest racial minority in Iowa, with a population of 8,511, nearly half (46.5 percent) of whom lived in Polk, Tama, and Woodbury counties. Only 0.3 percent of Iowa's residents were American Indian.[7]

Residents of Hispanic origin numbered 50,092 in 1997. Nearly half (49.8 percent) of Hispanic residents lived in Muscatine, Polk, Scott, or Woodbury counties. Hispanics were 1.9 percent of the state's population.[8]

According to Ms. Burke, Des Moines had a population of 193,187, which included 172,417 whites; 13,761 blacks; 699 American Indians; 4,602 Asians or Pacific Islanders; and 4,629 people of Hispanic origin.[9]

Immigration in Iowa: An Overview

Iowa has been one of the world's most prolific food producers and will continue to be during the 21st century. Iowa farmers will produce such materials as corn, grain, and soybeans. Communities across Iowa will convert corn to feed, beans to oil, and livestock into meat. Mark A. Grey, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Northern Iowa, wrote in a handbook for the Iowa State University Extension Service that to sustain food production in Iowa, the communities that convert raw materials into food must become sustainable themselves and key for both communities and food processing facilities is a stable work force.[10] In describing the food industry, Dr. Grey identified three themes: concentration and globalization, ethnic diversity, and mobility.[11] In rural Iowa, food processing industries have come to rely heavily on immigrant and refugee workers. Jobs in food processing plants have become less attractive to established Iowans as wages and benefits for these jobs have steadily diminished.[12]

People moving from rural areas, combined with low unemployment rates, created an insufficient local labor force in Iowa. Many food processing plants began to recruit immigrants and refugees for low-paying jobs that did not require English skills.[13] Plants were located close to raw materials such as feed and livestock in rural areas, but the work force—increasingly people of color—was imported.[14] In recent years, many rural Iowa towns have experienced an influx of minorities. These towns have a mix of newcomers who choose to settle down for the long haul and other immigrant workers who move from plant to plant searching for better working conditions. Some immigrants move from rural communities to urban areas; others come to Iowa from other states.[15] As the immigrant community grows, race relations issues are reported in the local press.[16] Often members of the clergy reach out to new immigrants and in some cases provide sanctuary.[17]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Mark A. Grey, "Handbook for Creating Sustainable Multiethnic Food-Producing Communities," Iowa State University Extension Service, Ames, IA, January 1998, p. 3.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 7.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Thomas R. O'Donnell, "Reaching Out to Iowa's Immigrants," *Des Moines Register*, Jan. 19, 1998, p. 4B.

[17] Ibid.

Dr. Grey said that the farm crisis of the 1980s affected many segments of the Iowa economy. Jobs disappeared and rural populations declined. Dr. Grey said there were numerous structural changes in the state's economy. Principal among these were changes in the structure and labor practices of agribusiness.[18]

While traditional small family-owned farms have been the norm, recently there has been a growing part of agricultural production in the hands of a few corporations, many of which are large, sometimes multinational, entities.[19] This change has brought rural Iowa communities into a competitive global economy, in which geographic and political borders are irrelevant.[20] This new movement has created the majority of Iowa's immigrant and refugee migration in the last 10 years. A review of this global economic picture shows:

> Meatpacking is an industry that receives the most media and research attention for a reliance on immigrants and refugee workers, but other agribusinesses also rely on these workers, including poultry processing, vegetable harvesting, egg production, dairy, and livestock raising . . . Minority immigrants and refugees make up the majority of the production work force.[21]

Dr. Grey said wages and benefits for many food industry jobs have been reduced, making them less attractive to longtime Iowans. Further, in some plants, benefits do not become available until an employee has been on the job for six months.[22] Accordingly, agribusiness had to recruit workers from outside the state, even the country. Immigrants and refugees were targeted because most production jobs do not require English proficiency.[23] Newcomers who had little or no English skills and lacked a formal education were unqualified for most jobs in the American economy but eligible for food production jobs.[24]

Immigrants and refugees are routinely recruited by food processors because they will work for low wages out of necessity. Immigrants demonstrate an ability to survive difficult living conditions through a system of social networks.[25]

Dr. Grey suggested that as:

> more minority and immigrants can survive in these [rural] communities, they experience rapid ethnic and linguistic diversification. This phenomenon challenges the ordinary social order of the community, transforming them into multilingual and multiethnic communities that have become painstakingly integrated into a much larger regional or even global social and economic world.[26]

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[18] Mark A. Grey, statement before the Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum. Des Moines, IA, Apr. 21, 1999, transcript, vol. II, p. 4 (hereafter cited as *Transcript*).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 5.

[21] Ibid., p. 7.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p. 8.

[24] Ibid., p. 9.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 10.

While many community leaders respect newcomers and recognize their roles in the local economy, other community residents are uncomfortable with them. Community feelings are mixed about new workers because they do not simply arrive to take jobs; they also bring along their languages and distinct cultures. Dr. Grey said his research found various reactions to newcomers, from explicit welcomes to outright unapologetic racism.[27]

In Iowa, host communities for industries and immigrant workers have formed diversity committees to help newcomers join the mainstream and help institutions adjust to the newcomers' lifestyles. Most importantly, these committees work to protect immigrants' civil rights.[28]

Dr. Grey also described the media's portrayal of refugees. Refugees enjoy a different status than most immigrants. The media describe refugees as victims of war and show how Iowans provide them the opportunity to start a new life.[29] Iowa can point to a proud history of welcoming the Thai Dam refugees in the 1970s, up through its most recent arrival of Bosnian and Sudanese refugees. The state of Iowa boasts of a well-funded, dynamic refugee support service. Dr. Grey is convinced that this hospitality is driven by the media coverage of these newcomers' plights.[30]

Dr. Grey also spoke about economic migrants:

> [Economic migrants] are immigrants and refugees who arrived in Iowa explicitly to take jobs. They have a different status. Indeed, in many cases these newcomers become scapegoats for community problems. Case in point is recent concern about the state's growing problem with methamphetamine. National and local media have linked methamphetamine traffic with new Latino populations. They are not always careful to point out the majority of Latino newcomers are hard workers who come to Iowa to earn money for their families and their home communities. Instead, the media point out that new populations of Latinos provide ample opportunity for drug smugglers to blend in as they ply their wares. Doing so, the media provide ample fodder for those seeking justification of hostility towards all newcomers. Although they are usually careful not to point fingers explicitly at Latinos, law enforcement officials and some political leaders use the presence of newcomers to explain rising crime rates.[31]

Dr. Grey concluded his remarks to the Advisory Committee by stating:

> Most importantly, the civil rights of these workers and their families cannot be assured as long as negative stereotypes and their legal status deny them a full range of civil rights protection. I believe that the challenge ahead is to legitimize this shadow work force and bring it into the daylight. Only then can we ensure that all immigrants and refugees and newcomers to this state will have equal access to their civil rights.[32]

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[27] Ibid., p. 12.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p. 14.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., p. 15.

[32] Ibid.

Criminal Justice

Rose Vasquez, director for the Iowa Department of Human Rights, told the Iowa Advisory Committee about a research project she was involved with that related to the judicial interpreter's system. The Iowa Department of Human Rights has a Division of Latino Affairs, which in a limited way deals with language issues in the court system.[33]

According to Ms. Vasquez, a 1970 Iowa law provides that every person who cannot speak or understand English and who is a party to any legal proceeding, including serving as a witness, is entitled to an interpreter to assist him or her throughout the proceeding.[34] She said the law:

> identifies costs, and an interpreter shall be appointed without expense to the person requiring assistance in the following cases. And that would include a civil legal proceeding and if the person is indigent and financially unable to secure an interpreter in a civil case, every court shall tax the cost of the interpreter, as they do in other court cases, which means possibly to the prevailing party, if not to the party bringing the action.
>
> In criminal cases where the defendant is indigent, the interpreter shall be considered as a defendant's witness for the purposes of receiving fees. In that instance, the court would have to schedule a structure set up for that.
>
> The person who is providing interpretive services would be required to take an oath, and they are—the court can inquire as to their qualifications. This left it a little wide open as to what the qualifications of the interpreter would be, and quite frankly, because of the availability issues, you could end up with people who their only qualifications might be that they just know another language.[35]

Ms. Vasquez noted that even after the Iowa State Legislature passed a law providing for the adoption of rules governing qualifications of interpreters, there are complaints that the law is not being implemented.[36] In addition, Ms. Vasquez noted several problems with the lack of certified interpreters. She said that sometimes when a police officer writes down the phonetic name of the person arrested, the computer printout name is not the person's name and an alias is inadvertently placed in the record, adding judgment of a criminal history.[37]

Ms. Vasquez also related an anecdote to the Committee of an arrest of an individual. She said:

> I believe one of the defendants in a case was told, "You're under arrest. You have the right to remain silent," and then it came out—and it should be, "You have the right to an attorney," but in the translation, it came out, "You have the right to an engineer." So play out this question: If you are read that right and you don't exercise that right because you don't want an engineer, did you waive the right? The fortunate part of

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[33] Rose Vasquez, *Transcript*, vol. I, pp. 11–12.

[34] Ibid., pp. 13–15.

[35] Ibid., pp. 13–14.

[36] Ibid., p. 14.

[37] Ibid., pp. 18–19.

> that was somebody had the foresight to tape the Miranda warning so they were able to catch that.
>
> If a person raises the issue of not having adequate interpretation services or a qualified interpreter, do they have a right to post an appeal on a case where they could negotiate their sentence, or they were convicted?[38]

Ed A. Munoz, an assistant professor of sociology at Iowa State University, spoke to the Advisory Committee about Latino stereotypes, criminology, and criminal sentencing. He started by saying that Latino migration is not a recent phenomenon. Latinos have migrated to Iowa and the Midwest over the years to compensate for labor shortages.[39] The dramatic increase in the Latino population has also brought many complex issues that need attention by a multitude of people. He said with a multitude of concerned voices, it is possible to make sound public policy changes for the good of the community.[40]

Dr. Munoz said substance abuse, elicit drug manufacturing, and drug trafficking are pressing problems among all sectors of the Iowa community. He uses the theoretical foundation of Alfredo Mirande's found in *Gringo Justice*, a book on Anglo American justice from a historical perspective. Dr. Munoz said that Mirande posits that preconceived notions of Mexican criminology began in the 19th century on the northern Mexican frontier. Mexicans that remained in the forfeited Mexican territory (southwestern United States) were guaranteed land ownership rights, political rights, and cultural rights. Through unethical, illegal, and violent means, Mexicans were stripped of these rights. These treaty violations prompted confrontations between Mexicans and Anglos. A social banditry was developed in the territory, and the image of the "cutthroat Mexican bandit" was created by Anglo law enforcement officials, journalists, and politicians. This process was instigated by the Anglo to justify the bias and differential treatment that Mexicans encounter in the American criminal justice system.[41]

Today, the Mexican immigrant seeking work at rural meat-packing plants has been tagged again but not as a family-oriented, industrious person making a contribution to the Iowa economy. Instead, the Mexican immigrant has been ascribed a new stereotype by the local and national news media.[42]

Dr. Munoz said his research suggests that the criminalization of Latinos affects the enforcement and adjudication of drug laws and is responsible for the disproportion of Latino representation in criminal statistics.[43] He also said that there has never been equal justice for Latinos since the beginning of their first contact with the Anglo.[44]

William Moulder, chief of police for the city of Des Moines Police Department, was invited to speak about the department's operations and new immigrants in the city. The chief, in collaboration with the city manager, gave the Committee much information on how the different city departments serve immigrants, and little on how the police department interacts with immigrants. The city of Des Moines acknowledged that immigrants are a valuable asset to the city, not only

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[38] Ibid., p. 23.

[39] Ed A. Munoz, *Transcript*, vol. II, p. 29.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., pp. 33–34.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

because of diversity but also because they provide a labor source.[45] When asked to explain the department's relationship with immigrants, Chief Moulder said:

> We look at how we treat people, not just immigrants, not just minorities, but the people who we do business with on a constant basis. How do we handle this particular event; could we have handled it better. Each year all of the officers of the department and many of the nonsworn people—and you understand police departments have people who are not badge-carrying police officers. They are involved in other forms of delivery of service, meter checkers, cadets that are basically used for less severe things—traffic management, parking management, abandoned cars. Dispatchers who take the telephone calls when anyone calls 911, front desk people who deal with people who have had their car stolen or disappear and want to get accident reports, all these are not police officers. All of them undergo training annually. Sometimes it's a couple of hours; sometimes it's longer.[46]

The Des Moines Police Department does community outreach in its recruiting efforts for police officers. According to Chief Moulder, the department currently employs 12 Hispanic and three Asian police officers.[47] Chief Moulder was asked to comment on a *Des Moines Register* article which said that 40 years ago the department employed 10 African American officers and today the number is 11. The chief responded:

> The department is very concerned about the representation. We want the department to look like the population. We want it to resemble it both in racial makeup and in sex. We have not and probably never will find 50 percent of our department to be female officers. However, we strive very diligently in increasing the number of minority officers on the department. But most of this process is not within the control of the police department. The process is in the control of the Civil Service Commission and the human resources department. We have been very aggressively taking issue with some of the things that exclude people that we think ought to progress through the selection process. In the past we had a greater ability to control that, and the time you're talking about, Des Moines established a model program in the 1970s of getting minorities into the police department. We lost control of that program. We are wrestling to get control of it back. I have every confidence that we can be more attractive to minorities, but I have to tell you, I am operating in handcuffs.[48]

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[45] William Moulder, *Transcript*, vol. II, p. 82.

[46] Ibid., pp. 103–04.

[47] Ibid., p. 90.

[48] Ibid., pp. 101–02.

The chief was asked to discuss the use of racial profiling in making police stops:

> We stop people based on their conduct. We do not stop people based on the car they drive, the way they cut their hair, the color of their skin, the way they dress. If the officer cannot articulate conduct that is unlawful or suspicious, the evidence they get from that arrest is not admissible. It is pointless to stop someone unless you have a lawful reason to execute that stop.[49]

Gerald Heinauer is the district director for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), U.S. Department of Justice, which enforces immigration laws and provides immigration services. He gave the Advisory Committee basic information on INS functions and described a couple of agency initiatives, including Operation Vanguard and the Quick Response Team. He said there are only four ways through which people can become lawful, permanent residents: a family-sponsored petition, an employment-based petition, an adversity visa, or gaining refugee status or asylum.[50] The application process to become a permanent resident takes nearly two years. There is a backlog in processing applications and Mr. Heinauer could not justify the delay beyond saying processing takes a long time. On top of the delay, the fees to process the application increased from $95 to $225.[51]

Mr. Heinauer described Operation Vanguard as an alternative to the INS traditional method of enforcing immigration laws; that is, visit a place of business, ask for documentation of citizenship, and arrest those immigrants found to be in the United States without proper papers. He estimated that 25 percent of the immigrant work force is illegal.[52] Operation Vanguard uses work site employees' employment data that is cross-referenced against several federal agencies' database records, and if the employer information is not consistent with the federal data, the INS is likely to identify the people who are in the United States without proper documents.[53] A personal interview is arranged by the INS to review employment records with the worker. Generally, the undocumented worker will quit the job voluntarily rather than interview with the INS official. Hence, the employer has a way to develop a stable, legal work force in the food processing industry.[54]

The Quick Response Team initiative, according to Mr. Heinauer, is merely the use of additional enforcement personnel to respond to traffic stops by state and local authorities. During three weeks in April 1999, the Nebraska State Patrol stopped 200 undocumented persons for traffic infractions and handed them over to the INS. Three 1999 vans were also seized.[55] In 1996, fewer than 100 arrests were made in Iowa; in 1998 that figure jumped to more than 800.[56]

Mr. Heinauer also said INS headquarters had not received any interest from state or local law enforcement to perform limited INS work, in exchange for additional authority. Participating agencies would have to take 16 weeks of specific, rigorous INS training.[57] When this initiative

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[49] Ibid., p. 111.

[50] Gerald Heinauer, *Transcript*, vol. II, p. 120.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., pp. 123–24.

[55] Ibid., p. 124.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., p. 125.

was discussed in an Iowa community it raised red flags about discriminatory stops by local law enforcement officials, a practice commonly known as racial profiling.[58]

An Advisory Committee member raised the question of enforcing sanctions among employers, recalling that the INS knows there are many undocumented persons working for meatpacking corporations. Mr. Heinauer responded that employers must accept the documents presented by prospective employees as valid and legal or be subjected to complaints alleging discrimination.[59]

Mr. Heinauer stated the INS is mandated by Congress to spend the bulk of its budget on enforcement. Ultimately new positions in Iowa will be directed toward enforcing immigration laws, not on processing applications for residency or U.S. citizenship.[60]

Refugees

Wayne Johnson is the chief of the Bureau of Refugees Services, a unit of the Iowa Department of Human Services. He began his statement to the Advisory Committee by defining refugees as people who are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their own government because of reasonable fear of persecution based on race, religion, ethnicity, political belief, or membership in a certain strata of society.[61] Individuals who come to America with refugee status are given this status outside the United States after an interview and determination is made by a U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service official.[62]

The Bureau of Refugee Services, along with four other social service agencies in Iowa, is responsible for providing for refugees' basic needs during their first 90 days in the United States in an effort to help them settle into their new communities. Iowa for the past three years has received approximately 1,420 people annually from overseas refugee camps. The current refugee population in Iowa is estimated to be 23,000 persons. Of this number, about 14,000 people are Indo-Chinese, 7,000 are Bosnians, and an additional 2,000 are from Africa, the Middle East, and Russia.[63]

Mr. Johnson noted that Des Moines has a cross-section of all nationalities in the refugee count. Sudanese refugees have described discrimination in employment, housing, and among law enforcement in Des Moines. African refugees, Mr. Johnson said, are afraid to formally complain because they fear retribution.[64] Some Sudanese have expressed concerns about the lack of interpreters at state agencies and medical clinics.[65] The Indo-Chinese, who generally are not critical of authority, have also voiced complaints of unequal law enforcement practices by the city of Des Moines police, of inequities in medical clinic services, and of employer-employee relations in the city. Congress designates who is and who is not going to be considered a refugee.[66] He also stated that there are a number of different immigration categories that a person can use to enter the United States legally; however, these are not in the refugee designation.[67]

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[58] Ibid., p. 126.

[59] Ibid., pp. 134–35.

[60] Ibid., p. 136.

[61] Wayne Johnson, *Transcript*, vol. I, p. 29.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., p. 32.

[64] Ibid., p. 34.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

General Community Concerns

Mary Campos, a community volunteer and court interpreter, suggested that the plight of the new Latino immigrant revolves around language and economics. In Iowa the judicial system has to ensure equal justice when a non-English-speaking person is arrested and goes to court. When the use of an interpreter is needed, it is provided by the court. She said that for immigrants, achieving a high level of education is hindered by the need to work and contribute toward family expenses. The family's economic survival, not education, comes first.[68]

Ila Placensia, a community volunteer and Head Start employee, spoke about the growing Latino population in Des Moines and the new immigrants' needs. Her work through the Des Moines League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) has concentrated on the educational needs of Latinos. LULAC has focused on providing interpretation services for the monolingual Spanish-speaking population. Translation services are most often provided in traffic courts, hospitals, and schools.[69] Additionally, since 1980 LULAC has conducted citizenship and English classes for new immigrants to ease their transition into American society.[70]

Ann Naffier, director of the Catholic Peace Ministry, is a consultant for the American Friends Service Committee, Immigrant Rights Project. The project's goal is to help create an atmosphere in Iowa in which Latino immigrants can participate in the decision-making process in their workplace and in the community. In trying to educate newcomers in Des Moines it became obvious to Ms. Naffier that before immigrants can be motivated to participate in community activities, their basic living needs must be met. Providing direct services to new immigrants becomes nearly impossible because of the huge demand for assistance and the lack of service providers and bilingual staff persons in state agencies.[71]

Probably the most frequent discrimination issues among immigrants deal with employment, including wage and hour complaints and the withholding of paychecks due to invalid social security cards. Immigrants also have complained to Ms. Naffier of unnecessary police stops that amount to harassment.[72]

Summary

The Iowa Advisory Committee heard presentations from 13 invited speakers. They spoke about the services for and needs of new immigrants and refugees. While many community leaders respect newcomers and recognize their roles in the local economy, other community residents are uncomfortable with them. Community feelings are mixed about the new workers because they do not simply arrive to work; they also bring along their languages and district cultures. A state official provided beneficial information on the right to a court interpreter for any party involved in a legal proceeding in Iowa who does not understand English. Another speaker explained who can receive refugee status and resettlement services in Iowa. The Des Moines refugee population was described as substantial and as a group that is sometimes treated differently from the mainstream population by police and service providers. Refugees in general are reluctant to make formal discrimination complaints because they fear retribution.

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[68] Mary Campos, *Transcript*, vol. I, pp. 69–74.

[69] Ila Placensia, *Transcript*, vol. I, pp. 83–85.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ann Naffier, *Transcript*, vol. I, pp. 105–06.

[72] Ibid., p. 112.

Community volunteers and not-for-profit organizations have sponsored language and citizenship classes, advocacy, translation services, social service programs, and counseling when discrimination incidents occur among new immigrants in Des Moines.

One reason given for the increased migration to Iowa by new immigrants is the low level of work skills and language skills required by employers. An Iowa anthropologist has called this group a "shadow work force," which needs full civil rights protection. Further, refugees in Iowa enjoy a better status than immigrants. Because refugees are fleeing political or religious persecution, they are allowed entry to the United States if their application is sponsored by a U.S. citizen. Federal funds are also available for refugee resettlement needs.

The Iowa Advisory Committee notes that there were concerns about the lack of language-certified interpreters in the court system and police department. Further, the police department should expand its recruitment of minorities so that the police department can reflect the city's population.

The Iowa Advisory Committee hopes the information provided in this report will be beneficial to Iowa residents who work with new immigrants in their communities.

Appendix

Iowa Advisory Committee
to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

"Race Relations and Des Moines' New Immigrants"

United Way of Central Iowa
Des Moines Office - Room F
1111 9th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50314

April 21, 1999

AGENDA

9:00 a.m. **INTRODUCTONS AND OPENING STATEMENTS**
•Dr. Lenola Allen-Sommerville, Chairperson
Iowa Advisory Committee, USCCR

•Melvin L. Jenkins, Esq., Director
Central Regional Office, USCCR

STATE GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

9:20 a.m. •Rose Vasquez, Esq., Executive Director
Iowa Department of Human Rights, Des Moines

9:40 a.m. •Wayne Johnson, Bureau Chief
Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services, Des Moines

10:00 a.m. **BREAK**

10:20 a.m. •Diann Wilder-Tomlinson, Esq., Executive Director
Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Des Moines

	URBAN PERSPECTIVE
10:40 a.m.	•Mary Campos Community Volunteer, Des Moines
11:00 a.m.	•Ila Plasencia, Past National VP for the Midwest League of United Latin American Citizens, Des Moines
11:20 a.m.	•Ann Naffier, Executive Director Catholic Peace Ministry, Des Moines
11:40 a.m.	•Sonia Parras, Multicultural Outreach Coordinator Coalition Against Domestic Abuse, Des Moines
12:00 p.m.	•Sandy Charvat Burke, Assistant Scientist Census Services, Iowa State University, Ames
12:20 p.m.	**LUNCH**
	RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE
1:00 p.m.	•Rev. Kevin Cameron, Director Hispanic Ministry, Des Moines
1:20 p.m.	•Sister Karen Thein Hispanic Ministry, Marshalltown
	EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
1:40 p.m.	•Dr. Mark A. Grey, Ph.D., Professor University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls
2:00 p.m.	•Mary Lynn Jones, Director Intercultural Programs Des Moines Public Schools
2:20 p.m.	•Dick Murphy, School Improvement Consultant Heartland AEA II, Johnston
	LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVE
2:40 p.m.	•Dr. Ed A. Munoz, Ph.D. Department of Sociology and Latino/A Studies Iowa State University, Ames
3:00 p.m.	•Don Nickerson, Esq., U.S. Attorney U.S. Department of Justice, Des Moines

3:20 p.m.	•William H. Moulder, Chief of Police Des Moines Police Department
3:40 p.m.	•Gerald Heinauer, District Director U.S. Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Services, Omaha, NE
4:00 p.m.	**OPEN SESSION**
4:20 p.m.	**ADJOURNMENT**

U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS
Central Regional Office
Gateway Tower II
400 State Ave., Suite 908
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406