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Latinos, Africans and, Asians in the North Star State: Immigrant Communities in Minnesota

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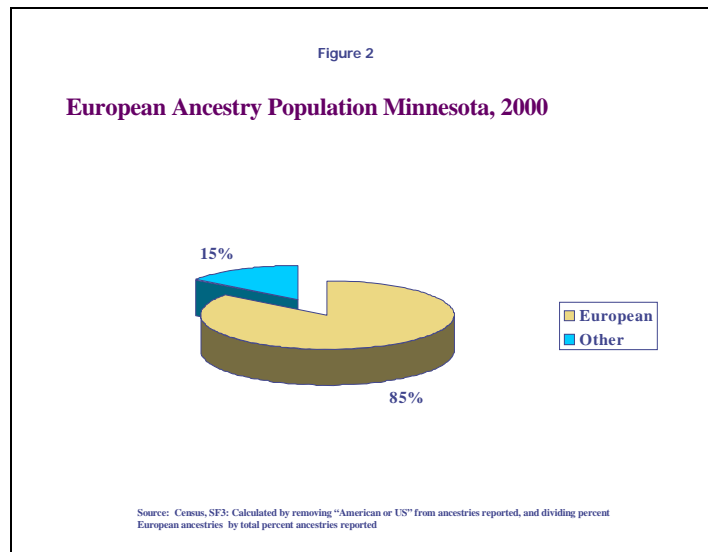
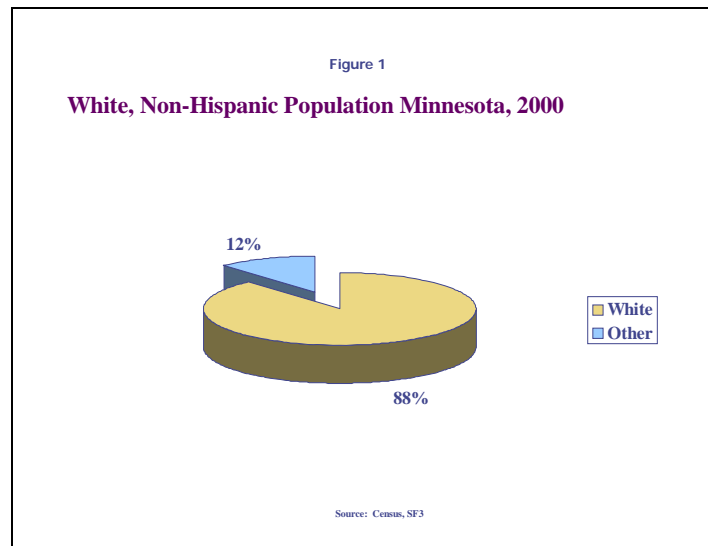
Introduction

There is an enormous amount of local interest in immigration to Minnesota. In the past year alone the two major Twin Cities daily papers ¹ have published almost a thousand stories on the topic, and immigration has been the subject of countless hearings, debates and discussions in the legislature, on local radio and television programs, in community forums, and meetings of non-profit agencies and policy groups. Topics range from the ‘remarkable diversity’ of the state and announcements of heritage festivals and celebrations, to human interest stories about health practices, lifestyles and the need for a range of educational, health and social services. In some instances, letters to the editor decry the rapid increase in immigrants and the perceived drain on services.

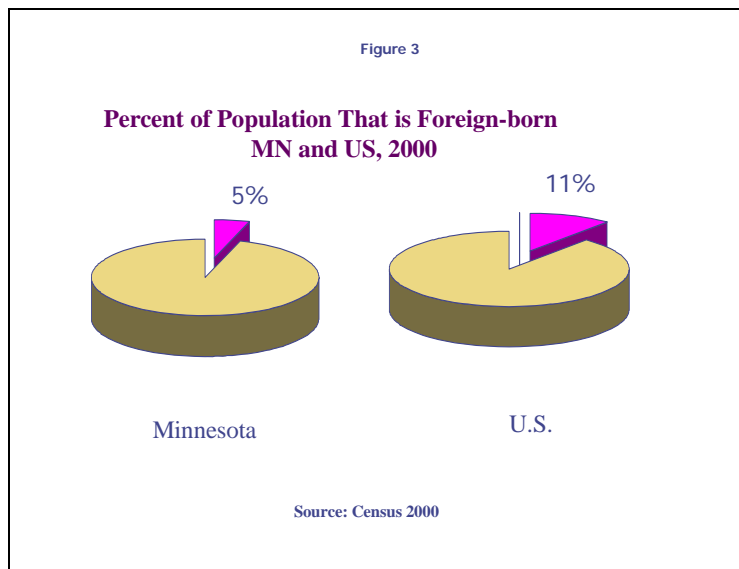
Judging from all the attention, one might expect Minnesota to have a significant number of immigrants, yet this is not the case. The size of Minnesota’s foreign-born population (260,463 in 2000) ² pales in comparison with the numbers in the border and

coastal states. Twenty other states have larger immigrant populations, and California alone has almost 34 times the number of foreign-born residents.³

Minnesota is a cold, northern state, remote from the major U.S. ports of entry, with a history of settlement by Scandinavian and German immigrants in the early 1900s. Other than the historical Ojibwe and Dakota Indian tribes and waves of European immigration in the early 20th century, the state has had relatively little ethnic or racial diversity by any measure. Eighty-eight percent of the population is non-Hispanic whites (Figure 1)⁴, and eighty-five percent are persons of European ancestry (Figure 2)⁴. In 2000



only five percent of Minnesotans were foreign-born—half the national average (see Figure 3)⁴, and well below the high percentages in California (26 percent), New York (20 percent), New Jersey (18 percent), and Hawaii (18 percent)⁵.



What then accounts for the high degree of interest in immigration to Minnesota?

The answer lies in three distinguishing demographic characteristics of the state:

- 1) the rapidity of the increase in foreign-born residents during the past decade;
- 2) the high proportion of immigrants who are refugees; and
- 3) heavy concentrations of foreign-born residents in certain parts of the state.

We describe each of these characteristics in the following pages. In the second half of the chapter we discuss the challenges of social and economic integration of immigrants into a predominantly white, European-origin population. These challenges are particularly acute in rural communities. To illustrate this we present a case study of Faribault, Minnesota, a town of 20,000 inhabitants, sixty miles south of the Twin Cities. Like many similar towns with meat processing plants, Faribault has experienced dramatic demographic change

during the past decade. Minority school enrollment in the town increased by 273% between 1991 and 2002—almost all immigrants or the children of immigrants⁶. In the case study we examine motives for coming to Faribault in the words of Asian, African and Latino residents, and reactions to their presence on the part of white, European-origin community members.

A Note on Data and Definitions

Before continuing the discussion we should note that Minnesota has two distinctly different immigration streams: the first is composed of individuals who enter the U.S. as immigrants (either directly to Minnesota, or after settling in another state), and the second is made up of those who enter as refugees. The distinction is important because the two groups vary greatly in nationality, ethnic origin, and pre-and post-migration experiences.

Many immigrants enter as economic migrants. The largest number in the United States, and in Minnesota, are of Mexican origin. Canadian immigrants constitute another large (though less visible) immigrant group in Minnesota. An unknown percentage of Mexicans and Canadians (and a lesser number of some other groups) also enter the U.S. without immigration visas, or over-stay visitor or work visas.

By contrast, refugees are granted entry because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to their political beliefs or group membership. In recent years there have been few refugees from North America, but many from Asia, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, and Africa. Minnesota is home to some of the largest groups in

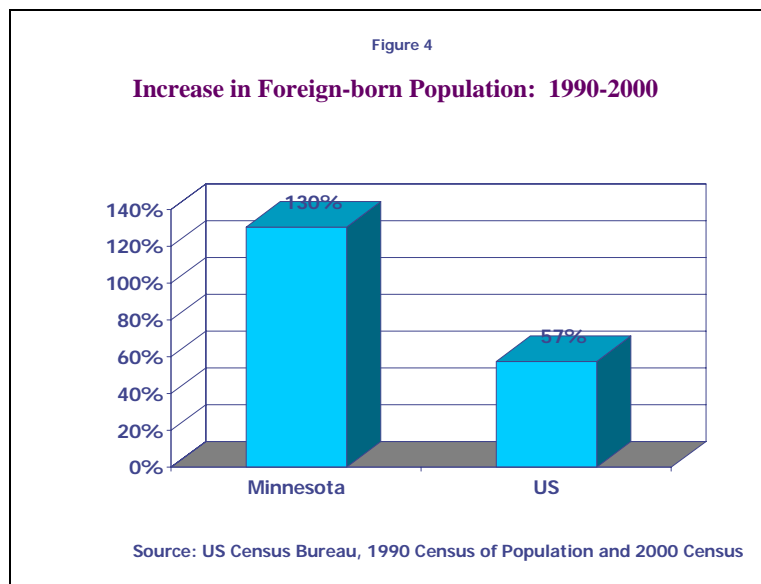
the U.S. of Hmong refugees, and refugees from Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Tibet, to name a few.

Despite the contrasts, the distinction between immigrant and refugee communities becomes blurred because family members of refugees enter the U.S. as *immigrants* under family reunification programs. In addition, when refugee or immigrant adults have U.S.-born children, they become ‘mixed status’ families. In fact, it is common for families to include a combination of refugees, immigrants and U.S. citizens. To further complicate the issue, many programs and publications employ definitions of ‘immigrants’ that have nothing to do with immigration status, or that obscure individuals’ statuses. Examples are the designation of African-born children as “African Americans” in school data, or measures of primary language spoken in the home, or counts of individuals who self-designate as ‘Latinos’. We are also severely limited by the lack of data on primary versus secondary migrants, i.e. individuals who come directly to Minnesota from another country, versus those who settle first in other states. Even when published data are available on immigrants by country of birth, there are problems of inaccuracies of official data, as demonstrated by a recent Census Bureau follow-up survey that suggests that Minnesota has the largest margin of error in census enumeration of any state.⁷

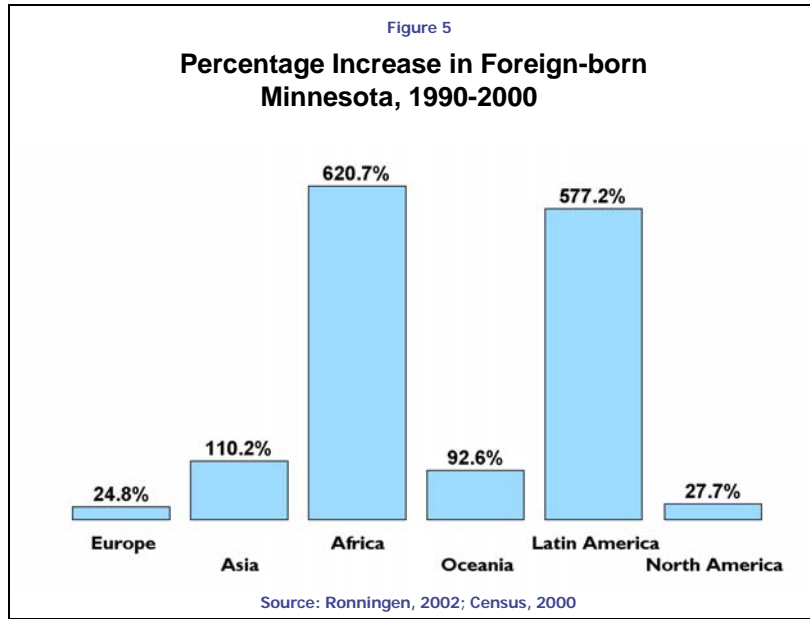
In the discussion that follows we describe the entry patterns of immigrants and refugees separately, but also include more general discussions of characteristics and policies of all foreign-born residents, whether they are immigrants or refugees. In those cases the term ‘immigrant’ is used generically to cover either status.

Rapid Rate of Increase in the Foreign-Born Population

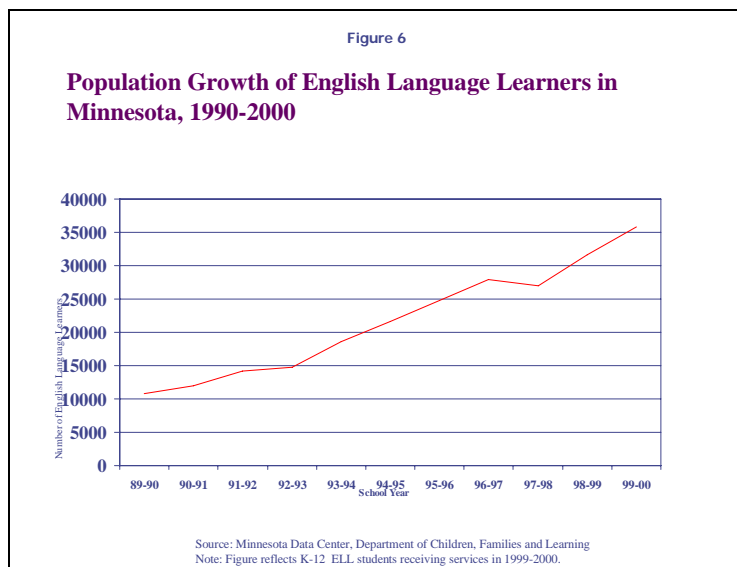
Although the absolute number of immigrants and the percent of foreign-born in Minnesota (5 percent) is quite low relative to many other states, the rate of increase in the foreign-born population from 1990 to 2000 was among the highest in the country, leading one anti-immigration organization to call Minnesota a ‘new Ellis Island’.⁸ Over half of the foreign-born population entered the state between 1990 and 2000, and between the last two censuses the foreign-born population increased by 138 percent, compared to 57 percent nation-wide (Figure 4).⁹



The rate of increase was particularly dramatic for immigrants from Africa (621 percent), and for Latinos (577%).¹⁰ Other measures of the rapidity of the increase



in the foreign-born population can be found in the birth rates, and in changes in the population of English Language Learners (ELL) students in the schools. In 2000, 14 percent of all births in Minnesota were to mothers born outside of the US (up from six percent in 1990), and in some counties the percentages were as high as 29 percent in 2000.¹¹ Between 1990 and 2000 there was a 350 percent increase in the number of school children for whom English is a second language (Figure 6).⁶



Strong Economy Draws Immigrants to Minnesota

The reason for the rapid growth in both the foreign-born and the native-born populations of Minnesota during the 1990s was the strong economy, and expansion of jobs in computers, communications, information technology and manufacturing. In May of 1999, The Economist published a story entitled “Minnesota’s Job Market: Land of 1,000 Opportunities”.¹² Prior to the current recession the state experienced 18 consecutive years of economic expansion due to higher employment and a significant increase in the gross domestic product.¹³ Seventeen companies on the Fortune 500 list are headquartered in the Twin Cities. Major employers include the Federal District banks and related financial services and insurance companies (eg. Prudential), Northwest Airlines and its subsidiaries, grain mills (General Mills and Pillsbury), and high technology firms (Honeywell, Ecolab, 3-M, Cray Research and Alliant Techsystems.)¹⁴ manufacturing super computers, electronics and medical instruments. A booming economy and strong social services have attracted new residents; between 1990 and 2000 the total population of Minnesota increased by 12.4 percent, and experienced the largest inter-censal numerical increase in the history of the state.¹⁵ Eighty percent of the growth occurred in the Twin Cities Metro Area.

The result of the economic boom of the 1990s was unprecedented labor force growth for men and women of all backgrounds. Minnesota has the highest female labor force participation rate in the country (66 percent) and the fourth highest rate for men (77 percent)¹⁶ Rates declined by about a percentage point for men over the past decade, but the decline has been less than that for males in the U.S. as a whole (4 percent). Labor

force participation rates in the state for Minnesota minorities are also the highest in the nation. As an example, 70 percent of Latinos in the state were in the labor force in 1999, compared with 61 percent nationally.¹⁶ Jobs in manufacturing, the hospitality industry, construction, food processing and agriculture have been a particular lure for immigrants.

Latinos in Minnesota

The expansion of jobs in food processing has been an important draw for Latino immigrants— particularly for Mexicans, since they have a long history of migration to the Midwest as seasonal agricultural workers. The majority emigrate to the United States from rural states of the Mexican Central Plateau, such as Guanajuato. In recent years the strong economy and the availability of jobs in food processing and manufacturing has led to a surge in the number of Mexican immigrants, and they are now the largest foreign-born group in the state (16 percent).

There were about 42,000 Mexicans in the state in 2000 and over 132,000 Spanish speakers. Many Latinos come to Minnesota from California, Texas or Midwestern states in search of jobs.¹⁰ As farm jobs have given way to manufacturing and food processing jobs in Minnesota, seasonal workers have settled in small towns or moved to metropolitan areas.

Latinos are much more likely to hold low-wage jobs than other Minnesotans, and as a result they are at significant disadvantage in terms of the poverty rate, the percent owning their own homes, the percent without a telephone, and other, similar measures. The low rate of high school graduation among Latinos is particularly troubling. Just 71%

of Latino adults age 25 and older hold a high school diploma, compared with 82% of the general adult population.¹⁷

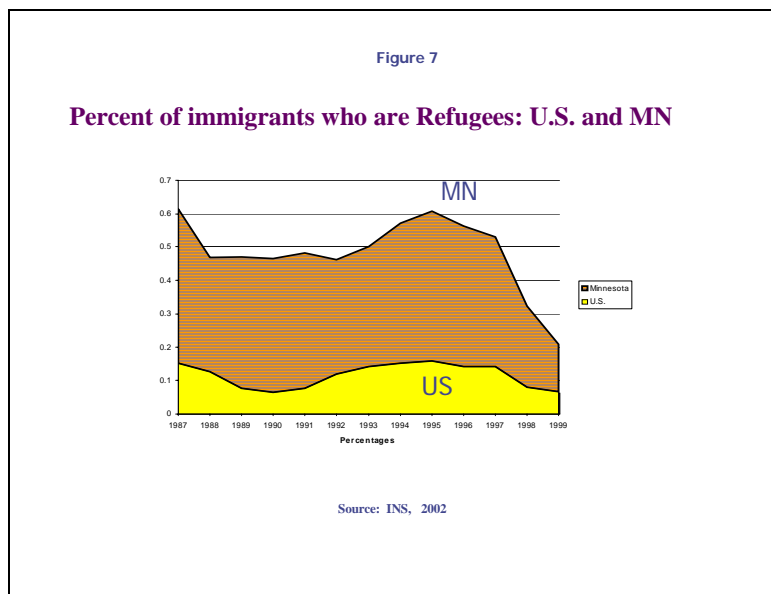
Thus far we have referred to Latinos as an undifferentiated group, but they represent individuals with a variety of backgrounds and legal statuses. Since the end of the wars in Guatemala and Salvador few Latinos have entered the United States as refugees. Most enter as economic migrants, with or without legal documentation. Because of the stigma and legal penalties associated with being an ‘illegal alien’, it is impossible to know with certainty what percentage of Latinos are documented. It is also virtually impossible to distinguish documented or undocumented immigrants from Chicanos or other U.S.-born Latinos. In fact, many Latino families include individuals of mixed status—for example, undocumented adults with children who are U.S. citizens, or families in which one spouse is documented and the other is not. What is clear is that many Latinos come to Minnesota after having worked in other states in the west, or in other Midwestern states. It is also clear that Latinos of all origins are becoming more numerous in Minnesota. Only four percent of the total population of Minnesota is Hispanic/Latino, but their rate of growth in the state (166%) was the ninth fastest in the United States between 1990 and 2000; during that same period the number of Latinos in the labor force in Minnesota almost tripled.¹⁶

High Proportion of Immigrants Who Are Refugees

Another distinguishing feature of immigration to Minnesota is the fact that, compared to other localities, the state has traditionally had a relatively high proportion of refugees.¹⁸ After the end of the Second World War, Minnesota was one of the first states

to respond to the newly established federal refugee policy under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948¹⁹ by establishing a similarly named Citizen's Committee. This began a tradition of accepting refugees, and today there are seven voluntary agencies resettling refugees in the state: Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, Minnesota Council of Churches, International Institute, World Relief Minnesota, Jewish Family Service, and the Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis. In the aftermath of the wars in Southeast Asia Minnesota received large numbers of refugees from Laos and Vietnam, and Hmong people from several countries in the region. In recent years there has been an influx of refugees from Africa, and the former Soviet states.

In the 1990s the proportion of immigrants who are refugees ranged from 24-46 in Minnesota, compared to 6-16 percent nation-wide (see Figure 7).¹⁸ Once again, it is the proportion that distinguishes Minnesota, rather than the magnitude of the numbers.



Numbers of refugees accepted by the U.S. (and resettled in Minnesota) have been dramatically reduced in recent years, and almost brought to a halt since September 11, 2001 (not shown). Nonetheless, refugee arrivals have contributed to an increase in the

overall number of immigrants to Minnesota since 1999.¹¹ Secondary migration of refugees to the state may be a greater factor than primary migration. The large number of Hmong and Somali residents in Minnesota has served as a draw for other members of these communities. Generous social benefits, training opportunities, and the availability of jobs have also been a strong incentive for refugees to come to the state. In 1998 the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement reported that Minnesota had the largest net refugee migration gain—principally from California, Virginia and Texas. Refugees in Minnesota also had the highest rates of utilization of AFDC/TANF welfare benefits in that year (39 percent).

Refugees from Africa, Asia, and the former Soviet Union

Refugees come from countries where there has been conflict and persecution of particular groups, and in which the U.S. has political or humanitarian interests. Because of its refugees, Minnesota has a larger proportion of residents from Africa and Asia than the rest of the U.S. Thirteen percent of foreign-born Minnesotans are from Africa (compared to 3 percent nation-wide), and 41 percent are from Asia (compared to 26 percent).⁵

The history of large-scale immigration of non-Europeans to Minnesota began in the late 1970s. At the end of the Vietnam War Minnesota non-profit agencies and religious groups responded to a request by President Carter for states to accept Southeast Asian refugees.²⁰ In 2000, the Minnesota Department of Health estimated that 21,561 Laotian refugees (both Hmong and lowland Lao) had been resettled here since 1979.

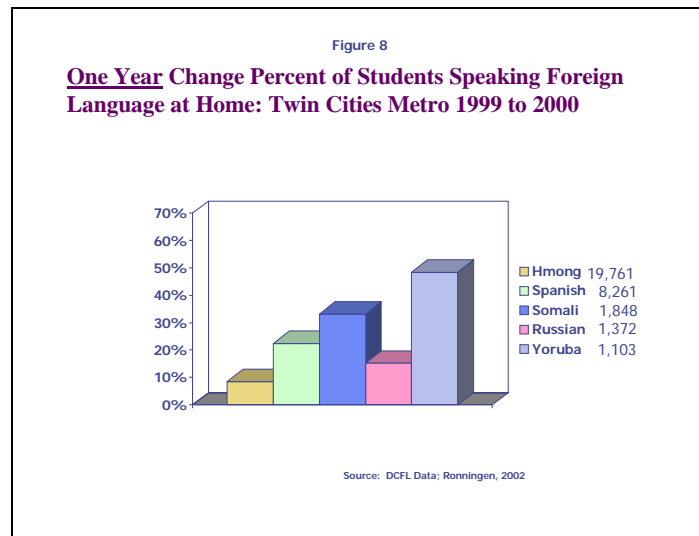
These numbers reflect primary refugee resettlement, but many more secondary migrants have moved to Minnesota from other parts of the United States. In the late 1990s the Hmong population of Minnesota increased substantially with the influx of a large number of family and clan members from Fresno, California. Lee Pao Xiong, President of the Minnesota Urban Coalition suggests that many Hmong left California to come to St. Paul because of the lower cost of living, and the availability of good education and jobs.²¹ By 2000 there were 42,863 Hmong residents in Minnesota—a 255 percent increase since 1990, and one of the largest concentrations of Hmong in the United States.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s came a wave of Russian-speaking refugees—Jews, Baptist and Pentecostal Christians seeking safe haven from religious persecution. In 1980 no Russian refugee arrivals were recorded in Minnesota, but since 1987 over 3,000 Russian-speaking Jews alone have settled in Minneapolis. Many are quite elderly— nearly half are over the age of 55, and some are in their nineties.

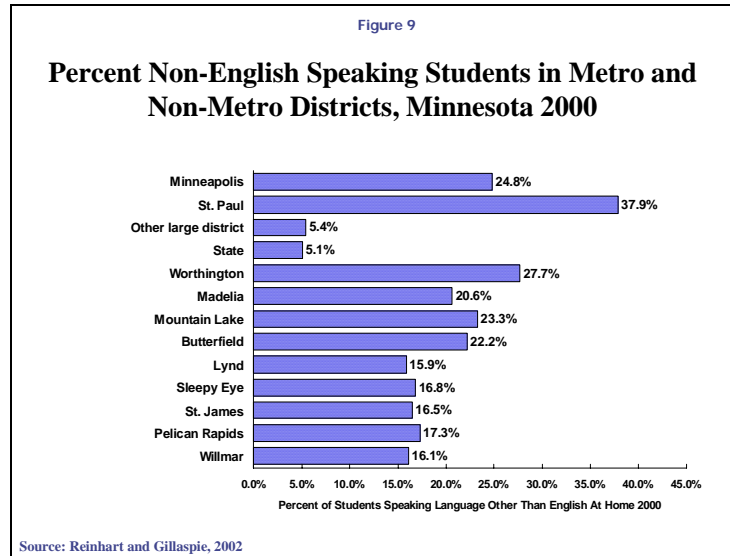
In 2000 three quarters of the primary refugee arrivals to Minnesota were from sub-Saharan Africa (Somalia 55 percent; Ethiopia 10 percent; Liberia 8 percent; Sierra Leone 3 percent). On-going civil war and famine in that region has led to continued applications for refuge and asylum. There were an estimated 34,469 foreign-born Minnesotans from Africa in 2000, a 621 percent increase since 1990. The state is home to the largest concentration of Somalis in the U.S.^{5; 10}. Differences in dress, skin color and religion of some of the newest refugees from Africa heighten attention to immigration in the state, and may lead to the perception that there are larger numbers of foreign-born residents than is actually the case.

Geographic Concentrations of Foreign-born Residents

A third reason for the high degree of attention to immigration in Minnesota is the fact that high concentrations of immigrants in particular parts of the state amplify their local visibility. Sixty percent of the total state population lives in the Twin Cities Metro Area, and 77 percent of immigrants in the state reside there. After the Twin Cities, the city of Rochester has the largest foreign-born population²³ with settlements of immigrants and refugees from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet states.²² The Twin Cities Metropolitan Area has always been the site of the largest concentrations of immigrants in the state, but in recent years the rate of increase has accelerated. Figure 8 shows a one-year increase in the percentage of children speaking a foreign language at home from the 1999 to 2000 school years.¹⁰



A number of rural communities in Minnesota have also experienced dramatic increases in numbers of immigrants and non-native English speakers (Figure 9)²⁴, although this is a relatively recent phenomenon. With the exception of Indian



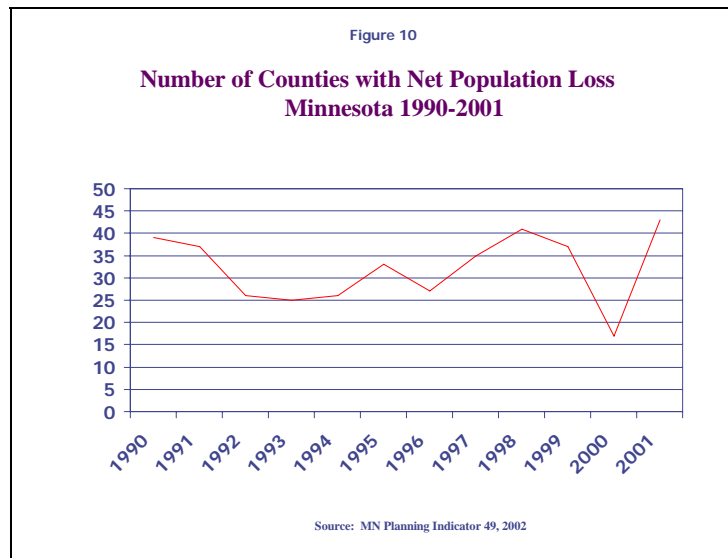
reservations there has traditionally been little ethnic diversity in rural Minnesota. Recent increases in rural minority populations reflect an upsurge in Asian, African, and Latino immigrants and their children in rural counties in the state between 1990 and 2000.²⁵ The food processing industry that that is responsible for much of this change is described in the next section.

Food Processing and Immigration

The diversification of rural Midwestern communities by Latino, Asian and African residents is almost entirely due to the establishment or expansion of large food processing plants.²⁶

The demise of large farms across the Midwest has led to population losses, a reduction in retail services and a shrinking tax base in many agricultural communities.²⁷ Fonkert²⁸ calculates that between 1983 and 2000 there was a 50 percent decline in rural grocery stores, 44 percent decline in hardware stores, a 36 percent decline in grain elevators and 27 hospital closings in rural Minnesota communities. Fig.10 shows the

number of Minnesota's 87 counties that lost population during the 1990s. Twenty-four of these counties were in the southern and

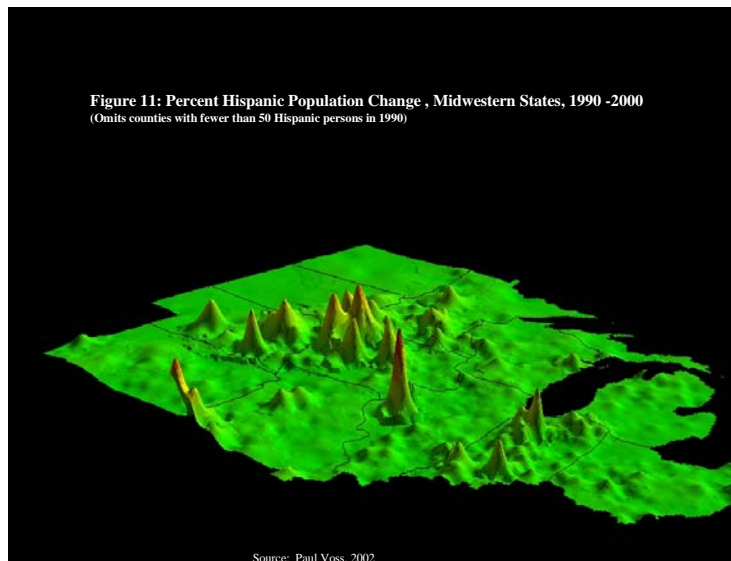


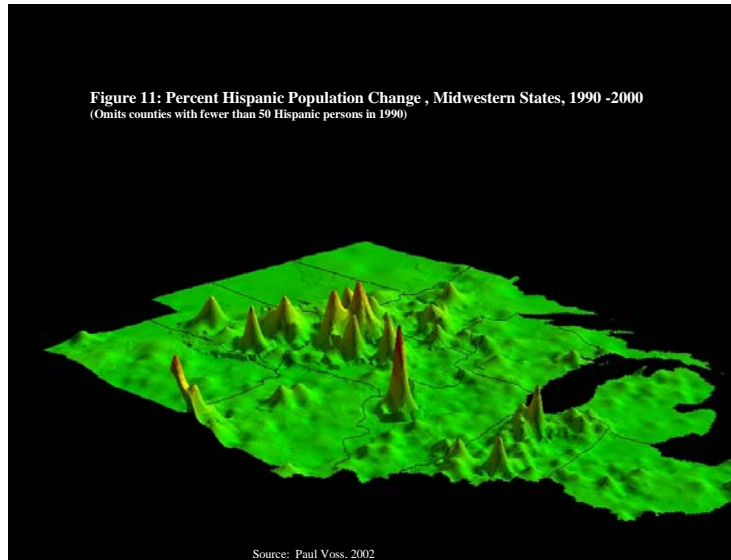
western areas of the states.²⁹ At the same time, the aging of the working-age population and low unemployment rates have resulted in acute labor shortages.³⁰ In 2001 the state unemployment rate was 3.7 percent, compared to 4.8 percent nation-wide.

Similar demographic changes across the Midwest have coincided with a restructuring of the meat and poultry processing industries, and the relocation of large packing plants from urban to rural communities, seeking lower taxes and lower transportation and labor costs. Mechanization of meat processing has fundamentally changed the social and economic structure of the industry. Greater automation and the advent of a disassembly line has led to single tasking in the preparation of carcasses, thereby reducing the need for highly skilled and well-paid butchers.^{31; 20} The decline of wages and working conditions in meat processing, coupled with population losses in rural areas has resulted in labor shortages for rural based meat and poultry processing plants. Recruitment of low wage workers was a logical response, and meat packing companies

took advantage of the fact that newly arrived immigrants represented a relatively pliable workforce, willing to work for low wages, and under poor working conditions.³¹ As a result, meat processing has become the single most important manufacturing activity in rural American communities.³²

A common tactic in keeping meat processing labor costs low has been the closing of plants, elimination of union jobs, and lowering of waged workforces. As plants have reopened, immigrants with limited English skills have taken many of the non-union jobs. Voss has created a graphic illustration of this change. Figure 11 depicts counties in Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois where the Hispanic population increased dramatically between 1990 and 2000 (growth ranging from 565 percent to 1,975 percent)³³; and figure 12 shows the logos of the meat processing companies that account for much (though not necessarily all) of the growth.³³





In Minnesota the principal meat processing industries are pork and turkey. Although the largest numbers of poultry processing plants are concentrated in the southern United States, Minnesota leads the nation in turkey production. Meat and poultry processing has become a multi-billion dollar business in the state, employing thousands of people in rural plants scattered across the state, with concentrations in the south-central region.²⁶ In 1996 the meat processing industry in Minnesota employed 14,746 workers. Employment in that sector rose 32.3 percent in the state between 1988 and 1996, compared to only 21 percent in the U.S. during the same period. Figure 13 shows the changes in minority student enrollment in kindergarten classes in districts near food processing plants³⁴. Other industries that have attracted foreign-born workers include vegetable processing and ethanol plants. As Hart³⁵ describes it, many towns have become “small cogs in the national manufacturing system of locally produced crops and livestock.”

**Percent Minority Kindergarten Enrollment in
MN Districts Near Food Processing Plants, 2001-2**

District	% Minority	Major Employer
Albert Lea	16	Farmland Foods
Owatonna	17	Midwest Foods
Austin	25	Hormel, Quality Pork
Marshall	25	Jennie-O/Heartland, Schwan
Faribault	29	Jennie-O, Faribault Foods
Willmar	36	Jennie-O, Willmar Poultry
Worthington	52	Swift, Monfort Pork, Campbell Soup

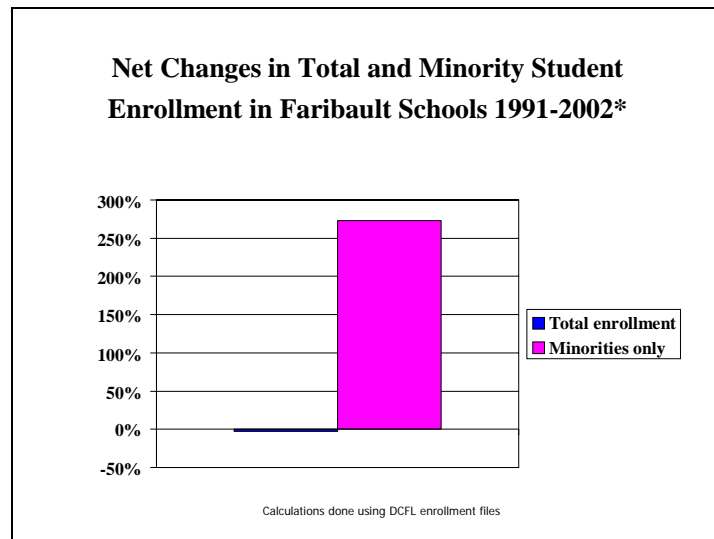
In Their Own Words: Motives of Immigrants for Moving to a Rural, Midwestern Town, and the Reactions of Native-born Residents

Perhaps the most difficult challenges to the social and economic integration of immigrants occur in rural areas where there has been little ethnic or racial diversity. The acceptance of newcomers of any background is notoriously difficult in many such Midwestern communities, and all the more so for immigrants and refugees. In order to better understand foreign-born residents' motives for moving to rural communities and the reactions of European-origin natives, Fennelly and Leitner³⁶ conducted separate, bilingual focus groups with 79 Cambodian, Vietnamese, Mexican, Central American, Sudanese, and Somali residents from a rural Minnesota community 60 miles south of Minneapolis. This was followed by three focus groups with 22 white, native-born residents of the community.

Faribault, Minnesota is a town of 20,000 residents, with a large poultry processing plant, called 'The Turkey Store'. The processing plant was originally established by a co-

op of local turkey growers in the 1940s. It was purchased by Jerome Foods in 1979, and workers were represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Local 6 in Albert Lea, Minnesota.³⁷ In 1993 the Jerome Foods management announced plans to close the plant, and asked the 300 workers to voluntarily reduce wages. In December of 1993 the company closed the plant; it was reopened one month later as the ‘Turkey Store’, with 100 employees. A year later, when the union contract expired the new and remaining members of the much-reduced workforce voted to forego union representation.

In January of 2001, the ‘Turkey Store’ plant was purchased by Jennie-O, a subdivision of Hormel Foods. A second shift was added, and the plant expanded to six hundred employees who process about 12,000 tons a day. In addition to Latinos, the plant employs Cambodian, Vietnamese, Somali and Sudanese workers. Many have settled in Faribault with their families, as demonstrated by the increase in minority student enrollments at a time when overall enrollments were declining (Figure 14).³⁸



Although foreign-born participants in the focus groups varied in English language ability, education and years in the U.S., about 90 percent were employed in blue-collar jobs, with salaries ranging from \$5.50 to \$9.30 per hour. Sixty-two percent of

the women and 79% of the men were working, and the vast majority (85%) of those who were employed worked forty hours or more per week. Average hourly wages for the men were \$10.36 (s.d.=2.7) and \$9.52 for the women (s.d.=1.2)

What brought these disparate groups to rural Minnesota was the promise of jobs; the availability of steady employment was mentioned repeatedly by all groups as the attraction of life in Faribault³¹, followed by the tranquility of life in a small town.

The majority of the African, Asian and Latino focus group participants were employed at the poultry plant. Company human resource records show that, in the year of our study, foreign-born workers held 96 percent of the lowest paying disassembly line jobs, and only 15 percent of the supervisory positions. In spite of the difficult nature of these jobs, and similar work at local canning factories and manufacturing plants, the immigrant workers expressed a high degree of satisfaction with life in Faribault. What pleased them was the *availability of steady work* at hourly pay above minimum wage—a stark contrast to conditions in refugee camps, their home countries, or other parts of the U.S.

Maia (Guatemalan) – the beautiful thing here...is that you can start working and you see that you are earning money... in my country it takes me a month to earn a hundred dollars; so you tell yourself, I'm going to get ahead. If I want to buy something, I can buy it. If you want to buy a car you say, I can afford it. That's what this country gives us – the opportunity to get ahead. If you work hard, you can get what you desire.

Abdullah (Somali): Personally I like working in Faribault for number of reasons. I am new to the country and this job does not require English language skills. No transportation is needed. I can walk. It's less expensive to live in small towns than bigger cities. It's safe to live here. It's easy to get a job and it's permanent. Not like the short-term jobs in some bigger cities.

In contrast to the immigrants, few native-born residents in the focus groups had a positive view of work in meat processing.

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

Joe's comment reflects his perception of the difficult nature of work in meat processing plants. Unlike native-born residents, immigrant workers are unlikely to openly complain about low wages, poor working conditions or substandard living conditions. This point was noted by two African workers in the Faribault study:

Joseph (Sudan): Many of us have come over from Africa with lots of job experience. In our culture, it's hard to complain about not getting raises. I don't think many Sudanese complain about this. Sometimes you don't get a raise because you are discriminated against, but we don't think about it this way.

Khalid (Somalia): People complain about management, and their benefits are always different than the way they were first explained. I have seen others complaining about the time sheets. They said 'we work overtime and we only get paid straight time instead of overtime.' Again when asked, the answer is "that's how it is".

The majority of foreign-born respondents in the Faribault study spoke little or no English, and recognized that they had limited alternatives. One Cambodian man commented:

Boupha: (I don't know) where else to find a job; I am so ignorant. I don't know the language and I don't know where to go. So what else is there, but to stay there?

In contrast to the satisfaction of foreign-born residents, some working class residents in the community are resentful of the immigrants who have come to Faribault to work in the plant.³⁹

Daniel: 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.

Other researchers describe similar white, anti-immigrant backlash in towns with large food processing plants.⁴⁰ In Faribault there is little interaction between white,

European-origin residents and the African and Latino workers. The segregation is less pronounced for the Vietnamese residents who have been in the community for generations, although it is still a factor for groups of isolated, non-English-speaking Cambodians. Socio-economic differences between low-wage workers of color in the meat plants and white, middle class native-born residents exacerbate tensions.

Social and Economic Integration

Bean and Bell-Rose⁴¹ suggest that the U.S. is experiencing a new and complex system of stratification in which “immigrants, because of their limited proficiency in English and other characteristics are channeled into certain sectors of employment, labor market segmentation along nativity lines, as well as along racial and ethnic lines.”⁴¹.

Stratification in housing is another major barrier to social integration. As one white resident in the Faribault study stated:

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...

These divisions not only preclude close social interactions, they foster negative stereotypes that lead to fear and xenophobia:

Andrea: A lot of people on the streets. Lot of blacks, lot of Mexicans hanging out on the street corners in front of storefronts.

Lilly: There's a lot of [people] that they don't even care to go downtown anymore.

Moderator: How come?

Leanne: I think they're afraid of 'em too. You know. They don't really know them, so...

Some white residents of Faribault also fear the economic impacts of an increase in foreign-born residents that would accompany plant expansion.

Dale: One of our largest industries... is planning on expanding and about doubling their size, and most of their employees are uh immigrants. And um, we see some concerns on that in the fact it's going to put pressure on the school system because they're having to teach a language and whatever. And getting' worried --is it temporary?-- if the plant cuts back and then you got a whole slug of 'em on unemployment, or welfare. It makes you think. It's unfortunate, but that's what happens.

The preceding quote reflects a significant barrier to the integration of immigrants into both urban and rural communities—the notion that African, Asian, and Latino

immigrants are not full-fledged members of the community, but rather, temporary residents who are expendable when there is no longer a need for their labor. In Minnesota this sentiment has been brought to the foreground with the election of fiscally and socially conservative state legislators. Cuts in benefits to poor families that began with welfare reform have had a strong negative impact on documented and undocumented immigrants in Minnesota. A recent study found that immigrant families who are no longer eligible for public assistance have a particularly difficult time finding jobs because of language barriers, and the fact that the welfare system is not equipped to handle their complex needs. What many legislators may not realize is that the primary victims of such cuts are U.S. citizens, i.e. children in mixed status families. Nevertheless, at the federal level, in the Minnesota legislature, and across the United States, programs for undocumented immigrants and even legal immigrants have been the ‘first on the chopping block’.

The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent recession have led to an anti-immigrant backlash and have put pro-immigrant groups on the defensive. Some virulently anti-immigrant groups have used the new political landscape to their advantage, disseminating strong exclusionary messages that resonate strongly in rural communities already stressed by rapid demographic change. The Center for New Community in Chicago⁴² describes the movement of several white nationalist groups to the political ‘mainstream’ on the crest of anti-immigrant sentiment. Their rhetoric is frequently found in letters to the local newspaper editors in towns with large numbers of immigrants.

Owatonna is a meat-packing town in Minnesota with a large population of Latinos and Somalis. The following letter was published recently in the *Owatonna People's Press and Shopper*. It was written by the founder of an anti-immigrant group called *Project USA*, and includes verbatim text found in letters to the editor signed by other individuals:

With unemployment at 5-8 percent in America, it is stupid to bring in nearly 1 million legal immigrants per year plus 200,000 anchor babies, about 500,000 illegal aliens and 55,000 refugees per year. I have researched the immigration issue for more than eight years. Whenever I give a speech, people always ask 'why is our government doing this to us?'. .

When the Minnesota Department of Finance established a state web site for public in-put on ways to address the state budget deficit, several responses had a similar anti-immigrant tone. Excerpts from two such letters are quoted below.⁴³

We have thousands of illegal immigrants who have children. They come and request assistance for their children and lie, stating that they do not have any income. These are the same people that are working illegally.

We have a shortage of housing. We have an excess of people driving without drivers license and insurance each day. We have a huge demand on the schools because they have to provide services to undocumented

children. Our infrastructure (police, highways, roads, sewer) is getting overwhelmed.

Even more disturbing is the implication by state and federal officials that immigrants are a security threat. When Governor Pawlenty was inaugurated in Minnesota in 2003, he immediately proposed a bill to record visa expiration dates on immigrant drivers' licenses as an "anti-terrorism" measure. In Owatonna, in response to a newspaper column advocating tolerance toward foreign-born residents, a woman wrote:

...As for education on crime she should read Michelle Malkin's *Invasion*. There she will find thousands of documented cases where illegal aliens have harmed, and yes, killed, American citizens, plus those killed during the Sept. 11 attacks...

Conclusions

As of this writing two countervailing influences may reduce the trend toward increased numbers of refugees in Minnesota. The first is the xenophobia induced by the attack on the World Trade Center. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 particular media attention has been focused on Minnesota's Somali population, and on the high profile arrests of a few individuals involved in Moslem charities and international money exchange outlets. Since that date the U.S. has severely reduced the number of refugees admitted to the country. For fiscal year 2002 the administrative ceiling for refugee admissions to the U.S. was 70,000, but fewer than half that number were admitted.⁴⁴

Minnesota has felt the impact of this reduction in both numbers of refugees and funding for refugee-serving agencies.

The onset of an economic recession in the country as a whole, and Minnesota in particular has also affected international immigration to the state. As noted earlier, many immigrants and refugees came to Minnesota because of the availability of jobs and generous social programs. Economists set the date of onset of the recession in Minnesota at March, 2002, and since that time the state has lost over 54,000 jobs—two thirds in manufacturing.⁴⁵ In addition to possibly slowing immigration to the state, a tighter labor market, combined with heightened xenophobia has led to political efforts to reduce benefits for both documented and undocumented immigrants. It is difficult to forecast the length or extent of this erosion of liberal social policies or its future impact on levels of foreign-born residents coming to the state.

In spite of uncertainty over the number of refugees and their family members who will remain in Minnesota or come in the future, current demographic trends suggest that Latino immigration will continue to be important to the state's future. Minnesota is the fastest growing state in the Midwest, and several key industries are dependent upon foreign-born workers. As the general population ages, school enrollments decline and labor shortages continue, this dependence has increased. Many industries actively recruit Mexican and other foreign-born workers who respond with alacrity, eager to come to Minnesota to forge a future and to find work. Latinos accounted for 24% of the growth in the labor force between 1990 and 2000.¹⁶ While the labor force increased by 16% overall in the state during that period, it increased by 335% for Latinos.

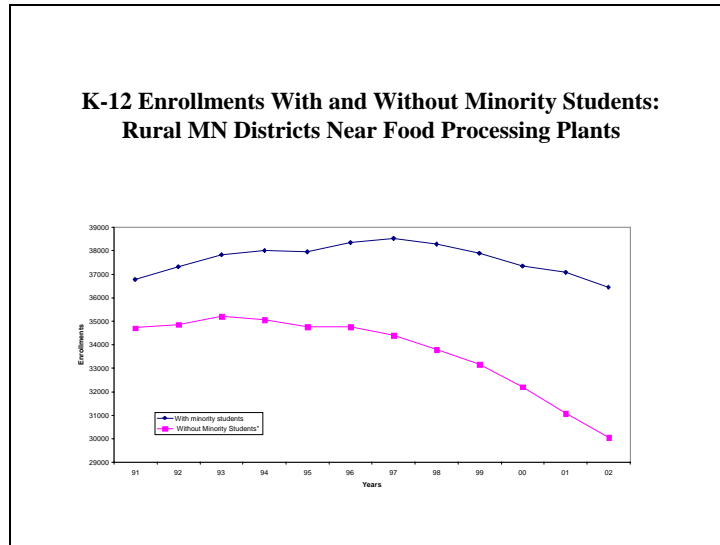
The increasing use of technology in agriculture has reduced the demand for seasonal and migrant workers, but this change has been offset by the demand for year-round workers in growth industries such as food processing, construction, hospitality and healthcare.²² The demand for low wage labor in these industries is likely to be slowed, but not halted, by the current economic recession. Further dependence on an immigrant labor force is likely under Governor Pawlenty's proposal for tax free "enterprise zones" that are designed to stimulate businesses to relocate in Minnesota by offering property, corporate income and sales tax exemptions in ten rural zones.⁴⁶ These empowerment zones create an incentive for the establishment of additional manufacturing and food processing businesses that rely on low wage, immigrant workers.

The largest number of foreign-born residents in Minnesota are Latinos, and their numbers are projected to increase significantly in the next ten years. Minnesota Department of Planning projections for 2000-2010 show an increase of 67% in the Hispanic population, compared to 3% among White, non-Hispanics.⁴⁷

The challenges facing Latinos working in low-wage jobs are particularly daunting, yet integration of this important and rapidly growing segment of Minnesota society requires guaranteed opportunities for upward mobility. In his research on Latino migrant workers, Chavez identifies several essential "links of incorporation" that are prerequisites of upward mobility; they include opportunities for secure employment, family formation, the establishment of credit, competency in English, legal status and capital accumulation. These links are unlikely to come about as the result of majority society largesse unless immigrants themselves begin to organize and demand fair treatment. 'Centro Campesino' in southern Minnesota sponsors an innovative program

that is based upon this principle. In response to employer discrimination and some public opposition to benefits for immigrants, Centro has established a program to advise Latino agricultural workers of their legal rights and to empower them to advocate for better working conditions, immigration reform, workplace safety, affordable housing and childcare.

Another essential precursor to successful integration is to go beyond an emphasis on ‘the needs of immigrants’ to programs that help white, U.S.-born residents to accept immigrants as ‘legitimate’ members of society and to acknowledge their economic and social contributions. These contributions are dramatic, but rarely documented. Foreign workers pay income, property and sales taxes; they open new businesses and send their children to local schools, revitalizing shrinking communities. The Director of the Center for Rural Policy at Minnesota State University has noted that while South Central Minnesota grew by 7,000 people during the 1990s, only 470 of these new residents were white, non-Hispanics.⁴⁸ In that region minority children account for all of the growth (or reversal of declines) in school enrollments (Figure 15).³⁴ Nevertheless discussions of the challenges of immigrant integration are rarely balanced by discussions of positive impacts.



At the national level the federal treasury reaps fiscal benefits from immigrant labor that are not shared with the states and local communities that bear the costs. In their careful analysis of the fiscal impacts of immigration in the United States, a National Research Council panel concluded that many of the fiscal advantages of immigrant labor accrue at the federal level (with the accumulation of income taxes), while costs are greatest in local areas. In the report summary, Smith and Edmonston note that under most scenarios the long-run fiscal impact is strongly positive at the federal level, but substantially negative at the state and local levels. The federal impact is shared evenly across the nation, but the negative state and local impacts are concentrated in the few states and localities that receive most of the new immigrants. Consequently, native residents of some states, such as California, may incur net fiscal burdens from immigrants, while residents of most states reap fiscal benefits.³⁵

Smith and Edmonston also point out that most fiscal analyses tend to overstate costs because they include US-born children of immigrants while they are in school, but do not estimate their future positive contributions to the economy.

The future health of Minnesota depends upon acknowledgement of the economic contributions of foreign-born residents, as well as the establishment of equitable policies that promote their full economic and social potential. Achievement of this vision will require major shifts in public opinion. It will also require recognition by policy-makers that the full integration of immigrants in general, and Latinos in particular is essential for the future of the state as a whole. Barriers to this integration will impose limitations on the economic and social success of a rapidly growing portion of the Minnesota population and a majority of the state's future labor force.

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